



**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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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 Claire Sherman (2010 Forthcoming), "Status within a Consumption-Oriented Counterculture," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 37: Association of Consumer Research (See Appendix A, p.258).

Chalmers, Tandy and Damien Arthur (2008), "Hard-Core Members' of Consumption-Oriented Subcultures Enactment of Identity: The Sacred Consumption of Two Subcultures," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 35, ed. Angela Y. Lee and Dilip Soman, Duluth, 570-575: Association of Consumer Research (See Appendix B, p.281).

Arthur, Damien (2006), "Authenticity and Consumption in the Australian Hip Hop Culture," *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 9 (2), 140-156: Emerald (See Appendix C, p.287).

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## THESIS CONTENTS

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Statement of Original Authorship.....	iii
Thesis Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Refereed Publications Resulting from this Thesis.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background of the Research.....	1
1.3 Significance of the Research.....	2
1.4 Methodology.....	4
1.5 Definitions.....	6
1.6 Outline of the Thesis.....	7
Chapter 2: Theoretical Underpinnings.....	11
2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Representing the Self via Consumption.....	12
2.2.1 The Symbolic Nature of Consumption.....	12
2.2.2 Self-Concept/Product-Image Congruence Theory.....	14
2.2.3 Situational Self-Concept and Consumption.....	19
2.2.4 Consumer Identity Projects and the Extended Self.....	22
2.3 Representing Culture via Consumption.....	25
2.3.1 Culture and Consumption.....	25
2.3.2 Counterculture and Consumption.....	28

2.3.3	Subcultures of Consumption.....	35
2.3.4	The Structure of a Subculture of Consumption .....	38
2.3.5	Subcultural Capital.....	43
2.4	Summary .....	48
Chapter 3: Methodology .....		50
3.1	Introduction.....	50
3.2	The Australian Hip Hop Culture as a Case Study.....	50
3.3	The Ethnographic Method .....	53
3.4	The Grounded Approach and Reflexivity.....	55
3.5	Triangulation of Ethnographic Evidence .....	60
3.6	Prolonged Participant Observation .....	61
3.7	Researcher Introspection.....	66
3.8	Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews .....	68
3.9	Non-Participant Netnography .....	72
3.10	Progressive Reading of the Literature.....	74
3.11	Data Analysis and Interpretation .....	75
3.12	Ethical Considerations .....	77
3.13	Summary .....	79
Chapter 4: The Australian Hip Hop Culture .....		82
4.1	Introduction.....	82
4.2	Hip Hop’s Origins and Arrival in Australia.....	82
4.3	Australian Hip Hop as a Glocal Subculture .....	89
4.4	Australian Hip Hop as a Counterculture .....	99
4.5	Race in the Australian Hip Hop Culture .....	109
4.6	Australian Hip Hop as a Male Enclave.....	116

4.7	Summary .....	128
Chapter 5: Symbolic Consumption within the Australian Hip Hop Culture .....		130
5.1	Introduction.....	130
5.2	Status within the Australian Hip Hop Culture .....	130
5.3	The Symbolic Consumption of Interested Non-Members .....	140
5.4	The Symbolic Consumption of Peripheral Members.....	148
5.5	The Symbolic Consumption of Soft-Core Members .....	162
5.6	The Symbolic Consumption of Hard-Core Members .....	182
5.7	Summary .....	196
Chapter 6: Contributions to the Body of Knowledge .....		199
6.1	Introduction.....	199
6.2	Theoretical Contributions .....	199
6.3	Practical Implications.....	217
6.4	Limitations .....	228
6.5	Future Directions .....	235
6.6	Conclusion .....	238
References.....		240
Appendix A – Advances in Consumer Research Article (2010) .....		258
Appendix B – Advances in Consumer Research Article (2008) .....		281
Appendix C – Qualitative Market Research Article (2006) .....		287
Appendix D – Field Notes Example .....		304
Appendix E – Profile of Interview Subjects .....		306
Appendix F – Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview Guide.....		315
Appendix G – Core Categories and Codes .....		318

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Structure of a Subculture of Consumption.....	39
Figure 2: Status within a Subculture of Consumption .....	42
Figure 3: Status within the Australian Hip Hop Culture.....	131
Figure 4: Summary of Findings .....	200



## LIST OF REFEREED PUBLICATIONS RESULTING FROM THIS THESIS

### Refereed Journal Articles

Arthur, Damien and Claire Sherman (2010 Forthcoming), "Status within a Consumption-Oriented Counterculture," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 37. (Manuscript accepted for publication presented in Appendix A, p.258)

(*The Australian Research Council's 2010 ERA Journal Ranking – A*)

Chalmers, Tandy and Damien Arthur (2008), "Hard-Core Members' of Consumption-Oriented Subcultures Enactment of Identity: The Sacred Consumption of Two Subcultures," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 35, ed. Angela Y. Lee and Dilip Soman, Duluth, 570-575.

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Arthur, Damien (2006), "Authenticity and Consumption in the Australian Hip Hop Culture," *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 9 (2), 140-156.

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(*The Australian Research Council's 2010 ERA Journal Ranking – C*)

### Refereed Conference Proceedings

Arthur, Damien (2006), "Hip Hop Consumption and Masculinity," in the proceedings for the ACR conference on *Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 8, ed. Lorna Stevens and Janet Borgerson, Edinburgh, Scotland, 105-116.

Arthur, Damien (2006), "Glocalisation, Authenticity, and Consumption: A Qualitative Investigation of the Australian Hip Hop Culture," extended abstract in *European Advances in Consumer Research Conference*, Vol. 7, ed. Karin M. Ekstrom and Helene Brembeck, Goteborg, 34-35.

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.