

The Intersectionality of Blackness and Disability in Hip-Hop: The Societal Impact of Changing Cultural Norms in Music

June 12, 2001— Idriss Stelley, a young Black man who “was in a mental health crisis,” was mercilessly shot and killed by police officers.¹ May 5th, 2004— Cameron Boyd, a young Black man with prosthetics, was reaching for his legs in the passenger’s seat while armed policemen screamed at him to exit his vehicle.² As he yelled back, “I’m disabled!,” he was shot and killed.³ The rampant practice of racial profiling and killing Black males in America has been institutionalized by many police forces. Horrifyingly, police pulled the trigger without any consideration for Stelley and Boyd’s disabilities.⁴ The stereotypical conflation of Blackness with able-bodiedness resulted in death. It was simply because Stelley and Boyd’s Black bodies did not fit the norm; tragically, racism and ableism fuels atrocities. Beyond institutions of policing alone, society oppresses individuals on the basis of both racism and ableism, which results in disabled individuals of color diminishing their own identities, facing exclusion, and even being murdered.

An intersectional model in which to view Blackness and disability can help prevent these oppressive forces from taking more lives. Intersectional scholars Moya Bailey and Izetta Autumn Mobley advocate for society to adopt an “emergent and intersectional Black feminist disability framework,” which provides a unique lens that encompasses the “generally siloed theories” of “race, gender, and disability” and confronts the “realities for those multiply marginalized within society.”⁵ With the right political activists, the implementation of an intersectional framework in society has the potential to effectively acknowledge and remove societal barriers for multiply marginalized groups. Two such activists are Keith Jones and Leroy Moore, who use music to challenge the current perceptions of Blackness and disability— more specifically, through hip-hop. Like many, Jones and Moore were struck by the killings of Stelley and Boyd. They became

powerful advocates against police brutality and pioneered a movement called Krip-Hop, a music collective of artists of color with disabilities. Today, their creation is one of the most progressive underground movements in the music industry.

Strikingly, Moore chose to use hip-hop as a medium for his political activism in the Black and disabled communities; mainstream hip-hop is a well-known problematic landscape. Physical disabilities are often considered “antithetical” to the common hypermasculine culture of hip-hop.⁶ Disabilities are associated with “vulnerability, inter/dependence, bodily fragility, and weakness,” whereas rappers are often “criticized, and most often rightfully so, for [their] materialism, misogyny, and violence.”⁷ In recent years, however, mental illness has slowly shifted into a more acceptable topic for hip-hop artists to discuss in their music. Disability, race, and gender scholar Anna Hinton, studies “how artists evoke, then erase disability... particularly in gangsta culture,” and argues that “vulnerability and disability go undetected in black men and in black people more generally, and racist and ableist stereotypes bolster and reproduce this erasure.”⁸ To promote a cultural shift toward embracing mental illness, Hinton invokes Joe Budden, a well-renowned hip-hop artist and talk show host, who has recently revealed his depression: “I would love to see more people speak out on mental health issues... Enough of us have died from mental health issues for us to look into it. Most of our favorite artists suffer from mental illness.”⁹ One such example is Earl Sweatshirt, or Thebe Kgositsile, whose entire career and music changed dramatically ever since his encounters with depression and anxiety.¹⁰ Hip hop’s emerging progressive acknowledgement of mental illness gives hope that, with the right artists and music, physical disabilities can also become more widely recognized and discussed in the genre and in society. Despite these advancements, “hip hop artists alike [still] ignore or erase disability.”¹¹ During a phone interview with Leroy Moore, he claimed that “mental illness is all

that hip-hop can swallow right now.”¹² If anything, the outright denial of disability in mainstream hip-hop affirms our need for an intersectional framework; it is exactly what Krip-Hop provides.

This paper will argue that viewing the experience of race and disability through a Black feminist disability framework provides a platform to clearly render the “intersectional nature of oppression,” as well as “address the multiplicity of our lives.”¹³ Specifically, it will analyze the socially constructed oppression that Black and disabled Americans face through hip-hop music and culture. To do so, it will delve into four case studies. The first will be of Houston Summers, a famous emcee who, in an interview, “[used] his urban background and apparent homophobia to avoid discussing” his disability.¹⁴ The second case study will analyze the themes of nihilism, violence, and mental illness in Biggie Smalls’ music. The third case study will contrast Earl Sweatshirt’s early highly offensive, edgy, and hypermasculine music against his two most recent albums, which cover and examine various complicated and contradictory relationships between hip-hop, Blackness, and disability. Lastly, this paper will focus on Krip-Hop’s history of music, philosophy, and political activism, and examine how their work illustrates the recommended framework. Although recent hip-hop displays promise in its widening discourse of mental health issues, it remains largely problematic due to the hypermasculine and ableist norms that it promotes. Society must destigmatize disability in hip-hop and the Black community in order to affirm intersectional identities and move as a collective unit to eliminate social oppression. If the Black feminist disability framework becomes salient in society, particularly through musical avenues and activism like Krip-Hop, then the deaths of marginalized Black and disabled people like Stelley and Boyd could be entirely avoided.

Understanding The Black Feminist Disability Framework

Before examining the theory of this framework, what it seeks to accomplish must be defined. One of the primary goals for advocates of the Black feminist disability framework is to forge a connection between Black studies and disability studies in order to “[integrate]... questions of race, gender, disability, and other vectors of power” into public discourse.¹⁵ Bailey asserts that our theory “requires intersectionality to explicitly attend to disability,” in order to unearth the alarming “eugenic [impulses]” with which society treats people with marginalized identities.¹⁶

First, an examination of Black feminist disability framework allows for a full understanding of the historical divide between the Black and disabled experience in the United States. Utilizing a wide historic lens, the majority of the Black experience in America is “shaped by an understanding of Black bodies as a productive labor force.”¹⁷ This dehumanizing characterization of Black Americans has caused them to be viewed as “subjects... barred from weakness—and disability.”¹⁸ Since “non-normative bodies” were conflated with “unsuitability,” “Black people [couldn’t] afford to be disabled.”¹⁹ Overall, Black Americans never had the luxury of being perceived as weak; those with disabilities were tossed aside. This stigma remains horrifyingly salient in today’s society, and it acts as a significant barrier to Black Americans attempting to acknowledge their disability. It places their “already precarious self at further risk of marginalization and vulnerability to state and medical violence, incarceration, and economic exploitation.”²⁰ These considerations must be kept in mind and readers ought to be wary of how they approach “Black people’s reluctance to identify as disabled,” for their reluctance is rooted in an anxiety of racial oppression and a hyper-awareness of precarity.²¹

Our society remains Eurocentric, and with a disability rights movement “white in leadership and in stated objectives and outcomes.”²² As a result, Black Americans with disabilities rightfully remain skeptical of aligning themselves with a movement that does not advocate for them. To solve this issue, the Black feminist disability framework aims to “[dislodge] the white male body as the central normative body in disability Studies” and “[establish] the need to examine how bodies are raced and the ways in which this intersects with disability, disease, and bodily sovereignty.”²³ This would form a de facto bridge between Black Studies and Disability studies. Taking this further, a colored “central normative body” in Disability Studies would widen the conversation of disability to include, and eventually dispel, the stigma in Black communities that has been historically carried for hundreds of years.²⁴

Additionally, the disability community could more thoroughly explore how the medical model may be necessary for bringing unity to disability in the Black community. While Bailey and Mobley concede that “the medical model is a problematic trope, it may signal differently to communities that have tried for many decades to receive the most elementary care only to be refused.”²⁵ The medical model is based on a problematic philosophy that enabled the government to sterilize and completely ignore disabled Americans. Certainly, any rendering of it must be applied with extreme caution. However, “some communities are actually yearning for not only care, but treatment and cure,” and they must be allowed to determine “what is best for their bodies: treatment, cure, or a resistance to medical intervention altogether.”²⁶ Consequently, the Black feminist disability framework has serious potential for creating intersectional approaches, defogging the stigma of disability in the Black community, and forming a unified political movement that can be a powerful voice for multiply marginalized identities.

The Problems With How Physical Disabilities are Portrayed in Mainstream Hip-Hop

For hip-hop to be a vehicle for activist framework, its issues in its mainstream must be addressed. The popular narrative of disability within hip-hop tends to reiterate “the gangster or thug [overcoming] his disability with performances of hypermasculinity.”²⁷ This phenomenon can be seen with Houston Summers, a famous hip-hop artist, and his various encounters with the media. His story begins in 2005; “rumours circulated that [Houston]... attempted suicide by gouging out his eye,” and that “the singer had been under psychiatric care.... for manic depression” and drug addiction.²⁸ However, when the media reached out to Summers or his family, any reference to his disability was fervently rebuffed.²⁹ On one occasion, “an interviewer for Hood News” inquired about Houston’s eye, and Houston replied with the following: “I got an eye injury... I’m from the hood, so where I come from it’s a whole ‘nother element... I stay in the background... ‘cause it’s too many fruitloops loose.”³⁰ His dismissive response effectively trivializes his disability. Furthermore, his reference to his urban background attempts to redirect the audience’s focus away from his physical and mental impairments and towards his masculinity.³¹ Ironically, he uses his physical impairment, which was self-inflicted as a result from his mental impairment, as a badge of honor. Even more problematically, Houston uses a homosexual slur, “fruitloop,” to bolster his image of masculinity.³² Houston’s response is a result of his preconceived notion that his disability takes something away from his Blackness, and these two identities are mutually exclusive.

Why does hip-hop perpetuate the theory of “compulsory able-bodiedness”—the idea that “disability and queerness... [are] evoked only to be trumped”?³³ Hinton contends that the “gangster’s monstrous façade of invincibility” harkens to a “supercrip narrative” that espouses “compulsory able-bodiedness.”³⁴ According to the social justice essayist and activist Eli Clare,

“these supercrip stories rely upon the perception that disability and achievement contradict each other and that any disabled person who overcomes this contradiction is heroic.”³⁵ In this context, Houston Summers’s outlandish response can be interpreted as overcompensation for a desire to protect his achievements and image. Overall, Summers’s retort to the media exemplifies just how salient the stigma of disability in the hip-hop community really is.

A similar inner conflict can be seen in Christopher Wallace, or Biggie Smalls, who is one of hip-hop’s most lauded artists, credited with popularizing the genre in the 90s.³⁶ Wallace is well-known for being the embodiment of hip-hop’s archetypal gangster. However, many do not realize that he lived with multiple disabilities, which he was surprisingly vocal about.³⁷ First, Wallace was obese, “which is medicalized and stigmatized like many disabilities in this society.”³⁸ Moreover, a car accident permanently altered his gait, which resulted in Wallace requiring a cane to aid his limited mobility. In his feature on Tupac Shakur’s song “Runnin’ (Dyin’ to Live),” Biggie raps, “Run from the cops? Picture that/[n-] I’m too fat. I’ll f*** around and have an asthma attack/And so I bust back, it don’t faze me.”³⁹ These lyrics suggest that limitations of his disability prevent him from outrunning the police, which would undermine his masculine image. However, in standard supercrip-fashion, he decides to stand his ground and shoot at his pursuers, stubbornly refusing to “concede to disability/vulnerability.”⁴⁰ Many music scholars argue that Wallace’s nihilistic sentiments towards violence stem from his childhood, where “inner city poverty and violence,” as well as his Blackness, played a defining role.⁴¹ Although Wallace’s masculine image is still dominated by the supercrip narrative— with violence as the means of overcoming disability— he defies hip-hop’s “compulsory able-bodiedness.”⁴² Remarkably, Wallace never denied his physical limitations, and later in his career,

he openly referred to his mental vulnerabilities. Biggie Smalls was an open book— a great role model for the Black feminist disability framework— but many did not take the time to read him.

Depictions of Mental Illness in Mainstream Hip-Hop

Similarly to the way an individual of color has a different experience of physical disablement compared to a White counterpart, “disadvantage experienced by people with mental illness may differ depending on membership in multiple stigmatized social groups.”⁴³ Mental illness is a vulnerability; therefore, like physical disabilities, it carries a very salient stigma in the Black community. For example, “rates of mental illnesses in African Americans are similar with those of the general population”; however, many Black Americans refuse to seek help for their mental illness because it is invisible.⁴⁴ Broadly, mental illness remained hidden in the Black community, and in many cases it still is. The main distinguishing factor between physical and mental disabilities is that more highly respected Black leaders are voices for mental health issues; remarkably, many of them are hip-hop artists. Their work in the music spotlight has been instrumental for the developing a base awareness of mental health issues in the Black community. Through music, they were able to make their intersectional identities known and understood.

One of Wallace’s most introspective and confessional tracks is from his 1994 album *Ready to Die*: “Suicidal Thoughts.”⁴⁵ The song starts off with a bold declaration. Wallace rhymes, “When I die, f*** it, I wanna go to h***/’Cause I’m a piece of s***, it ain’t hard to f*****’ tell.”⁴⁶ Wallace’s self-degradation and display of vulnerability resoundingly defies “the gangster’s facade of invincibility”— the same “facade” that that Summers was so keen on safeguarding.⁴⁷ Later in the song, he continues with the following couplet: “Crime after crime, from drugs to extortion/I know my mother wish she got a f*****’ abortion.”⁴⁸ Not only does

Wallace showcase moral self-awareness, as he contemplates how his mother might perceive his sins, but he also offers listeners a fresh and imperfect view of a person who many thought embodied Black masculinity. Biggie's unfiltered presentation of his depressive symptoms culminates in the lyrics, "Suicide's on my f***** mind, I wanna leave."⁴⁹

On numerous occasions in "Suicidal Thoughts," Wallace references indulging in sex, drugs, and alcohol in order to cope with his depressive symptoms. These nihilistic and self-destructive behaviors are given a new dimension through a holistic view at Wallace's multiply marginalized identities. His upbringing taught him that he should be willing to throw himself into a foray of bullets. Coupled with his substance abuse, Wallace displays a wanton disregard for his own body, perhaps in an attempt to mask his disability. Tragically, Christopher Wallace died as a result of a drive-by shooting, and his violent death cemented him as a gangster legend. People remember him for his masculine narrative—his vulnerability and opposition of "compulsory able-bodiedness" is largely forgotten in the mainstream.⁵⁰ His lyrics impart that he was sharply conscious of his intersectional identity; Wallace's confessions represent early signs of mainstream hip-hop engaging with the topic of mental illness. Unfortunately, Biggie Smalls' death resulted in that engagement being more or less lost. It was not until recently that mental health resurfaced in mainstream hip-hop. Through the analysis of Thebe Kgositsile's, or Earl Sweatshirt's discography from 2010 to 2018, one can capture the genre's shift in attitude towards mental illness.

Who is Earl Sweatshirt? In 2010, his listeners looked up to him as a "symbol of youth in revolt."⁵¹ Kgositsile was "crowned a lyrical genius" for his mixtape 2010 mixtape *Earl*.⁵² With grotesque, edgy music videos to complement a sixteen-year-old rapping about "gorgeous scenes of mutilation," Earl Sweatshirt had all the ingredients for a perfect viral debut.⁵³ Like many

before him, Earl broke onto the mainstream scene with a strong hypermasculine and nihilistic persona. He indulged in substance abuse and painted fantasies of violence from an extremely young age, as evidenced in the lyrics of his controversial 2010 song “Earl”: “Twisted, sicker than mad cattle, in fact I’m off/Six different liquors... [Earl] puts the pieces of decomposing bodies in plastic/puts them in a pan and mixes it up with scat/then gobbles it like fat black b**** and catfish.”⁵⁴ With such overtly offensive lyrics, people called him a “sociopath.”⁵⁵ His hypermasculine posturing and lyrics managed to offend multiple marginalized groups in only one line, revealing just how problematic and damaging his music really was for the Black, feminist, and disabled community. Earl grew up under the controlling hand of his mother Cheryl Harris, a prominent UCLA law professor; Keorapetse Kgositstil, a South African poet laureate, was Earl’s absentee father.⁵⁶ Growing up, “he had to shoulder the weight of his parents’ prominence,” and many attribute Kgotsitsile’s tensions with his parents as the beginning of a long rebellion against authority figures in society.⁵⁷ I interpret his artistic persona as a rejection of his Black lineage and an outlet for the tumultuous adolescent emotions buried deeply within himself. Thus, 2010 Earl Sweatshirt serves as an accurate symbol for hip-hop in his era— stigmatizing vulnerability, lashing out to hide imperfection.

Earl Sweatshirt in 2018 is a profoundly different man. In 2018, Kgotsitsile released his seminal album called *Some Rap Songs*; on “Veins,” the twelfth track, he announces “I’m a man, I’m just sayin’ I stayed imperfect/Earl is not my name, the world is my domain, kid.”⁵⁸ In this track, he refutes his past self, affirming his vulnerabilities. More notably, he puts distance between Thebe Kgotsitsile, the man and Earl Sweatshirt, the incendiary viral star. “Everything he does now is a push not to be a prisoner to decisions he made as an immature savant.”⁵⁹ His music catalogues his experience and development as an adult living with mental illness, anemia,

anorexia, and substance abuse. Earl addresses his younger self on the first song of the album, “Shattered Dreams,” who he describes as “...stand-offish and anemic.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, on “Nowhere2go,” Earl raps about his depression: “I think I spent most of my life depressed/Only thing on my mind was death,” which puts the music he released as a teenager in a new perspective.⁶¹ It is not outlandish to suggest that Kgositsile’s aggressive and edgy persona was a mask for his mental illness. He reinforces this point in an interview with *Pitchfork*, when he admits, “I can’t ignore my body anymore.”⁶² Lastly, in a display of astonishing growth in his song “Veins,” he declares, “I ain’t touch a xan, when it-/When it’s time to put my burnt body in a case/Tell my momma I said thank you.”⁶³

His reference to Xanax addiction is telling. For some context, in his 2015 song “Grief,” he rapped, “Feeling like I’m stranded in a mob, scrambling for xanax out the canister to pop.”⁶⁴ Much like in the case of Christopher Wallace’s music, drug abuse is often used to mask vulnerabilities and disability. As a result, Earl Sweatshirt’s triumph over addiction is an enormous step forward; not only does it fortify Kgositsile’s claim that he is finally paying attention to his body, but it also signals an acceptance of vulnerability. Earl does not need drugs. He does not need the hypermasculine image. He has accepted his body and his feelings.

The next line pays a magnificent tribute to his mother. When he dies, Kgositsile wants his mom to know that he appreciates her and the time he spent alive. He was finally able to make peace with her. Earl does not only confront his mother in this album; he also addresses his late father. Kgositsile’s song “Peanut,” is “a transient eulogy written and recorded alone and drunk in the Mid-City home studio.”⁶⁵ The song sounds more like written word poetry than rap, which is a clear nod to his poet father. According to Earl, the production emulates the “[feeling of when]

depression hugs you,” an “unfinished mourning process.”⁶⁶ Earl’s broken vocals on “Peanut” divulge his love and grief for his absent father, suggesting that he has also made peace with him.

In *Some Rap Songs*, “[Earl] embraces the connection to his past and its role in his identity.”⁶⁷ Music critics claim that Earl “honors [his] lineage, serving as a bridge between the jazz of two nations, treating rap as a medium, and serving as a tie-in to his South African heritage.”⁶⁸ Kgositstile emblemizes hip-hop’s growth. Earl Sweatshirt is a shining example of an artist that pays respects to and fully acknowledges the intersectionality between his Black heritage and disability. Earl Sweatshirt reaches an enormous audience, and his music is certainly working to defog the stigma of mental health in Black communities. However, it would be a stretch to call him an activist. To effectively educate society on the urgency of adopting the Black feminist disability framework, activists are needed. As previously mentioned, some of the most effective advocates for an intersectional framework are hip-hop artists. They are called Krip-Hop.

Krip-Hop

Krip-Hop is intersectional advocacy in the form of music. It challenges society’s racist and ableist views, criticizing police brutality, racial profiling, and the barriers that disabled Americans face on a daily basis. Some of Krip-Hop’s most prominent emcees are Leroy Moore, a disability scholar that authored one of this paper’s main sources, and Keith Jones, a disability activist and consultant for minority communities. Hip-hop historian and Radio Show Host Davey D. refers to “the emergence of Krip-Hop as a niche that both gives voice to the needs of a particular community and also educates outsiders about that community is a familiar theme within the history of hip-hop.”⁶⁹

Recalling his upbringing as a young disabled Black American, Keith Jones underscores the rampant profiling and stereotyping that he was subjected to from an ableist and racist society. He asserts, “when you're black and in a wheelchair, you have to combat the assumption that you are a victim of gang violence.”⁷⁰ As society profiles his Black skin and disability, it reaches a completely off-base conclusion rooted in the hypermasculine caricaturization of Black men.⁷¹ Since Keith Jones does not “conform to [the] standard” Black masculine narrative, the assumption that he was involved in gang violence attempts to explain his disability. Overall, it reflects incredibly racist, ableist, and problematic stereotypes that lead to significant social barriers against multiply marginalized individuals like Jones.⁷²

Moore and Jones have confronted society's hypermasculine view of Black men and emasculating view of disability through a song called *Disabled Profiled*.⁷³ While the intersectional anthem is promising for Krip-Hop, with its fresh perspectives and introspective lyrics, it was never heard by the mainstream.⁷⁴ The song is rooted in Krip-Hop's tenets; Moore and Jones “[aim] to “use... music to advocate and teach not only about ourselves, but also about the system we live under... [to] challenge mainstream & all media on the ways they frame disability... [and] increase the inclusion of voices that are missing from within the popular culture.”⁷⁵

Although Krip-Hop has faced obstacles in reaching a mainstream audience, which Moore attributes to “industry figures dismissing the movement,” its activists have made substantial advancements in local communities.⁷⁶ In an effort to find justice for Idriss Stelley and mitigate the chance police brutality taking another Black disabled man's life, Krip-Hop united with friends of Idriss, *Poor Magazine*, the Ella Baker Center, The Coalition on Homeless, and other grassroots activists.⁷⁷ Together, they were able to “[advocate] for special training for police

officers on mental health and other disabilities” and have it passed by the city council.⁷⁸

According to Moore, “it was a fight to get it implemented.”⁷⁹ After their success with the program, they continued their activism through participating in “radio [programs] about police brutality against people with disabilities.”⁸⁰

Recommendations

This paper recommends utilizing the Black feminist disability framework to “actualize theoretical interventions that challenge mainstream news narratives that erase race and gender and forestall the ableism used to explain away white violence.”⁸¹ However, a prerequisite to that goal is “[shifting] previous paradigms of understanding” in order to join the Black community and disability community in solidarity. Society needs leaders of intersectional identity, which is precisely why this paper delved into hip-hop. Ultimately, it maintains that if hip-hop, with its hypermasculine ableist traditions, can culturally advance and adopt Krip-Hop’s model for intersectional activism, then the day we implement the Black feminist disability framework into society will not be far away. To do this, more mainstream and cognizant rappers like Earl Sweatshirt need to lead the movement. Music can harness unprecedented cultural power, especially when these words are spoken by popular figures. Furthermore, “hip-hop [surpassed] rock” as the most popular music genre in 2017 and continues to dominate the charts today.⁸² With hip-hop artists under the public eye more than ever, their actions and attitudes can have significant influence over the modern zeitgeist. Thus, this paper established the urgency of implementing the Black feminist disability framework in society; as hip-hop continues to proliferate, organizations like Krip-Hop become more suitable mediums for activism. This is

further strengthened by how the Black feminist disability framework aligns itself with Krip-Hop's tenets:

1. Use politically correct lyrics.
2. Do not put down other minorities.
3. Use our music to advocate and teach not only about ourselves, but also about the system we live under.
4. Challenge mainstream & all media on the ways they frame disability.
5. Increase the inclusion of voices that are missing from within the popular culture.
6. Recognize our disabled ancestors, knowing that we are built on what they left us, and nothing is new, just borrowed.
7. Know that sometimes we fail to meet the above standards but we are trying.⁸³

From our analysis of mainstream hip-hop's culture, applying Krip-Hop's standards to hip-hop would drastically alter its current hypermasculine paragon. Making politically correct lyrics the norm would have the benefits of discrediting the narrative of "compulsory able-bodiedness."⁸⁴ More broadly, politically lyrics acknowledge and include all multiply marginalized identities into music; in other words, it is barrier removal for hip-hop. This is just one tenet. Rules two through four advocate for a collective movement of unique disabled individuals in order to combat hegemonies of power. Applying this idea to intersectionality and the Black feminist disability framework, hip-hop can be the call for the establishment of an intersectional body of activists. It is key for this intersectional movement to recognize and acknowledge differences between individuals, while still maintaining solidarity in their oppression. Black bodies would no longer feel like they have to erase disability. Vulnerability needs to be accepted in Black communities. First, society needs to foster the awareness that Black fears of accepting disability are rooted in fears of White racism. This Black feminist disability coalition is imperative for finding justice and creating understanding for individuals with multiply marginalized identities. It is the time to move now, more than ever, since hip-hop holds so much cultural power.

Clearly, Krip-Hop's model for activism serves as a robust basis for our framework. After all, "Krip-Hop is more than music"—that it "is about social justice."⁸⁵ However, Leroy Moore has been "struggling against overwhelming odds of [creating] networks of solidarity," and his efforts have often resulted in "people... [dividing] themselves from... [Krip-Hop's] history and network."⁸⁶ Effecting change is much easier said than done. Grassroots activism is a true battle to be heard. However, if intersectional considerations are adopted by popular hip-hop artists-turned-activists, then "there are an infinite number of revolutions that a Black feminist disability framework can help bring about."⁸⁷ Grassroots activism needs to be heard. If successful, then Black and disabled individuals would finally be able to "imagine a Black life that is more than just survival and more than able-bodied utopia."⁸⁸

Conclusion

This paper elaborated on the urgency for our society to adopt the Black feminist disability framework. Additionally, it outlined the conflicts between the "generally siloed theories" of Black and disability studies, and why "Black people's [are reluctant to] to identify as disabled."⁸⁹ Through the case studies of Houston Summers and Biggie Smalls, it explored the tendency for mainstream hip-hop artists to "evoke... then erase disability" in order to evoke the ideal masculine image of a gangster.⁹⁰ From this analysis, it was determined that the glorification of violence and nihilism were rooted in the inner city experience of many poor Black Americans, and that the hypermasculinity in hip-hop acted as a mask for vulnerability. Although Biggie exhibited signs of self-awareness and self-loathing for the image he perpetuated, as a whole, mainstream hip-hop remains highly problematic and inclusive. Cataloguing Earl Sweatshirt's rise and growth in contemporary hip-hop has displayed a massive potential for music to unite the Black and disabled community. Thebe Kgositsile's discography transitioned from gruesome

depictions of “putting decomposing bodies into plastic” to tributes for his parents and winding songs detailing his experiences living with multiple disabilities.⁹¹ Critics say, “he’s a link between generations” of Black music; Earl Sweatshirt emblemizes a mutual acceptance of Blackness and disability.

This paper recommended for artists like Kgositsile to adopt Krip-Hop’s activism and create more organizations that question ableist and racist mainstream norms. If this was successful, then there would be a vehicle to sustain an intersectional model through which to view multiply marginalized identities. With an intersectional union, society could challenge systems of White power and dismantle them. This movement would not end at justice for stigmatized individuals; overall, it would lead to a more inclusive world. In our world, “the cause of people with disabilities is the next frontier of civil rights.”⁹² As disability activist Keith Jones emphasizes, “it is the last greatest struggle.”⁹³ Let’s create a world where individuals like Idriss Stelley and Cameron Boyd do not have to worry about their safety.

ENDNOTES

¹ Leroy F. Moore, et al., “Black & Blue: Policing Disability & Poverty Beyond Occupy.” *Occupying Disability: Critical Approaches to Community, Justice, and Decolonizing Disability*, (2016): 309.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Moya Bailey & Izetta Autumn Mobley, et al, “Work in the Intersections: A Black Feminist Disability Framework.” *Gender & Society* 33, no. 1 (2019): 20.

⁶ Anna Hinton, “And So I Bust Back’: Violence, Race, and Disability in Hip Hop.” *CLA Journal* 60, no. 3 (2017): 294

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 290.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Julian Kimble. “Earl Sweatshirt Isn’t Letting Fame Hold Him down Anymore.” *The Washington Post*. January 24, 2019.

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- ¹¹ Hinton, 295.
- ¹² Leroy Moore (Disability Activist and Musician) in discussion with Matthew Gavieta, December 2, 2017.
- ¹³ Bailey, Mobley, 20.
- ¹⁴ Hinton, 295.
- ¹⁵ Bailey, Mobley, 21.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 26.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 21.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 22.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 26.
- ²¹ Ibid., 22.
- ²² Ibid., 32.
- ²³ Ibid., 27.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 28.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Hinton, 291.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid. While “fruit loop” is frequently used as slander to insinuate someone is crazy, in this context it was a negative comment on a person’s sexual preferences.
- ³³ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. NYU Press, 2006: 2 quoted in Anna Hinton, “And So I Bust Back,” 298-299.
- ³⁴ McRuer, 298.
- ³⁵ Clare, Eli. *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*. Duke UP, 2015: 7 quoted in Anna Hinton. “And So I Bust Back”. 298.
- ³⁶ Hinton, 300.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Tupac Shakur, *Runnin’ (Dyin’ to Live)*. (Los Angeles: Echo Records, 2003).
- ⁴⁰ Hinton, 300.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² McRuer, 298.
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