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The Role of Rap Music Composition in the Experience of Incarceration for  
African American Youth

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Field of Music Education

by

Jason D. Thompson

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## ABSTRACT

### The Role of Rap Music Composition in the Experience of Incarceration for African American Youth

The research is set against the backdrop of a significant growth in the number of music programs occurring in detention centers in the US (Lee, 2010) and in international settings (Barrett & Baker, 2012; Daykin et al., 2011). This increase is an encouraging sign that music in prisons and detention centers may be a possible intervention for how detained residents experience the condition of incarceration. Certainly, the reports about the conditions of incarceration as environments filled with boredom, fear, violence, and isolation (Bernstein, 2014) are alarming.

The purposes of this case study was to explore the perceptions of the experience of incarceration and the perceptions of the role creating rap music may have on the experience of incarceration for youth detained in a juvenile temporary detention center. The following two questions guided this research: (1) How do detained youth perceive their experience of incarceration? (2) What role, if any, does creating rap music have in how detained youth experience their incarceration?

The sample population consisted of youth [n=6] who were detained in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center located in Chicago, IL. For 10 weeks, the participants used Garageband software and Apple Macintosh computers with attached 66-key piano keyboards to create rap music, primarily, and other forms of music. The participants were interviewed in a focus group format at the beginning of the study period that provided a grand tour of their perceptions of the facility and their perceptions of making music in this setting. In addition, three

participants were purposefully selected for interviews throughout the study period as another way to generate data necessary for answering the research questions set for this study. Multiple data sources were collected including field notes, interview transcriptions, music composition files, and participants' weekly reflections about their experiences of incarceration and their views about creating rap music in this context.

The data collection and data analysis process were integrated through multiple cycles of questioning, hypothesizing, and requestioning to confirm, qualify and refine emergent themes. These overlapping phases looked for objective characteristics first followed by meaning and emergent patterns in the data. Participants' interviews and responses to personal reflections uncovered the negative perceptions these youth participants held about the experience of incarceration, namely, that the restrictive environment limited participants' autonomies to make decision and curbed their self-expression. Detained youths' responses to the experience of incarceration varied from passive acceptance to active resistance.

Particular attention was paid to how creating music during their detainment may have influenced detainees' negative experiences of being incarcerated. Findings for participants' perceptions of being detained included detention as imposed structure, detention as a place of boredom, and detention as a place that diminishes the personal value and self-worth of detainees. Findings for participants' perceptions of creating music within this setting included the role of enjoyment for creating music, the role as a creative outlet, the role of a connection to life outside the facility, and a role in behavior modification.

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impact on the profession and the multiple stakeholders involved within it. I could not be more humbled to work in solidarity with you as we push the boundaries for what music should be and who should have access to it.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents  
Joseph and Carolyn Thompson

*Your love and support is second to none*

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

**A Vignette**

*It's twenty minutes passed 3 pm and the music session with 6 young men detained in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago is running behind schedule, as usual. I span the room once more to do another check for materials and equipment. The music lab that contains fifteen Apple Macintosh computers with attached 66-key piano keyboards are all opened to the GarageBand software that these young men use to make rap music. Check! The pencils at each music workstation, which the young men use to write lyrics or to plan out their compositions, are labeled with numbers that match the numbers on the computers. Check! This number system is a quick way to assure that pencils—an item that is typically considered contraband and a weapon in the detention center—are accounted for at the end of each class. Each computer workstation also contains daily reflection sheets that are designed to assess the young men's weekly experience in the detention center and their feelings about composing music in the lab. Check! The reflection sheet also serves as a way for the guys to document ideas about the music they're composing.*

*Three quick knocks at the door. Familiar black and brown faces peak through the small window at the top of the locked dark brown door of the music classroom at the Nancy B. Jefferson School. The scene is resembles any typical school where students eagerly wait to enter a music class each week. However, this school is an alternative one and housed within a juvenile detention center and only detained youth populations are permitted as students. I get up from the teacher's desk and head toward the door. As I walk, I take in a long breath, speculating*

*in my head the multiple ways today's music making might be. As I open the door the young men whom I've known for a year already before starting this doctoral project greet me both verbally and with a hand dap reserved for folks they trust. Although we share the same racial culture as the majority of these black youth detained in the facility, our ethnic cultures and life experiences couldn't be more of a stark contrast. Despite differences in our preferences, our love for creating music has united us in a common, shared bond.*

*The guys proceed to their computer workstations. A few of them move with speed as if they're happy to be in the lab. One young man carries a solemn look on his face but heads to his seat moving in a slow pace. Before finding their seats, a few young men grab microphones and headphones from the bag of materials at the front of the classroom and I scan the room to take attendance. Tyrek<sup>1</sup> and Trenton begin creating sounds using their piano keyboards that are attached to their computer workstations. Reggie and Jermaine use the microphones to start recording raps. They're voices ring out across the room but none of the other young men seem to be distracted. Damonté, in a rather loud voice, requests three different music instrumentals so he can sample parts of them into his music and use them to record a freestyle rap piece that's logged in his head. Otis just sits at his workstation and listens to music. All the young men bob their heads to beats they hear in the black headphones at the top of their heads. For a moment, it seems that these youth have shut the world around them out and have gone to a different space temporarily. What could all of these happenings mean for the young men detained in this facility?*

---

<sup>1</sup> The actual names of the young men who served as participants in this study have been omitted throughout this document to assure anonymity and to protect their identities.

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the experiences of being detained and the experiences of creating music during incarceration for youth detained in a county detention center. In this first chapter, I aim to provide an overview of the contexts of incarceration and the music programs occurring in these settings. As a point of departure from traditional dissertation formats that contain a separate chapter of previous research, I have chosen to infuse related literature within this opening chapter and throughout and throughout the remaining document. This meta-synthesis approach—an approach that integrates, evaluates, and interprets findings from multiple studies and identifies common core elements and themes—is also found in a traditional literature review chapter. My preference to include related literature in this opening chapter rather than in a stand alone literature review chapter is intentional, both as a means to situate my current study within findings from previous research and to limit the repetition found in traditional dissertation formats. Despite not including a separate literature review chapter, I hope that infusing previous literature in this opening chapter will demonstrate what Boote and Beile (2005) who argue: "a researcher cannot perform significant research without first understanding the literature in the field" (p. 3).

### **The Criminal Justice System**

This research is set against a backdrop of alarming conceptions about juvenile incarceration, which include daunting statistics and harsh conditions in which detained youth are housed. But the biggest problem with juvenile incarceration is that instead of helping troubled kids get their lives back on track, detention usually makes their problems worse, and sets them in the direction of more crime and self-destructive behavior (Davies, 2014). According to Bernstein

(2014), the greatest predictor of adult incarceration and adult criminality wasn't gang involvement, family issues, or delinquency itself. Rather, the greatest predictor that a young person would grow up to be a criminal was being incarcerated in a juvenile facility.

### *Statistics of Detained Populations*

For more than a century, the punishment of juvenile offenders in the United States has occurred in large juvenile correctional facilities. The number of youth being detained in these settings is alarming. Not counting the number of youth awaiting court trials or pending placement in a correctional facility, a recent count of youth in detention conducted in 2013 by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, reported that approximately 54,148 US juvenile offenders were held in residential placement by order of a juvenile court (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency, 2015); Nationally, females accounted for only 14% of the juvenile offender population, and the minority populations (which includes Hispanic and Black males) constituted the largest percentage (54%) of juvenile offender populations. The facilities that detained these youth populations ranged by type, including group homes, residential treatment centers, boot campus, wilderness programs, or county-run youth facilities.

### *Racial and Ethnic Disparities*

Currently, the disparities along lines of race within US detention centers are widely known and youth of color are often over-represented at every stage in the juvenile justice system. Although African Americans make up about 30% of the overall US population, they account for over 60% of those imprisoned (Kerby, 2013). In 2013, there were an estimated 2.7 million black males detained in US juvenile courts (Puzzanchera, Sladky, & Kang, 2014). Black youth regularly receive harsher sentences for the same crimes that their white counterparts commit. African

American youth are locked up at four times the rate of their peers (Puzzanchera & Robson, 2014). This over-representation of detained black male youth populations is seen nationally where offenders who identified as black males represented 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of youth who were detained, 46% of youth who were judicially waived to criminal court, and 58% of youth who were admitted to state prisons (Puzzanchera, Sladky, & Kang, 2014).

When compared to white youth, Latino youth are 4% more likely to be petitioned, 16% more likely to be adjudicated as a delinquent, 28% more likely to be detained, and 41% more likely to receive an out-of-home placement (Arya, Villarruel, Villanueva, & Augarten, 2009). The disparities for Latino/a youth when compared to their white counterparts is striking. These youths are 43% more likely than white youth to be waived to the adult system and 40% more likely to be admitted to adult prison (Arya, Villarruel, Villanueva, & Augarten, 2009).

Native youth are more likely to be admitted to an out-of-home placement such as being incarcerated in a state correctional facility or sent to an adult criminal justice system. Compared to white youth, Native youth are 1.5 times more likely to receive out-of-home placement and 1.5 times more likely to be waived to the adult criminal system. Nationally, the average rate of new commitments to the adult state prison for

#### *The Conditions of Incarceration and Detainee Experiences of Detainment*

The number of young people detained in the US criminal justice system far exceeds the number of youth incarcerated at facilities in other peer industrialized nations (Alexander, 2012; Bernstein, 2014). For example, the rate of juvenile incarceration in the United States has been reported to be seven times that of Great Britain and eighteen times that of France (Davies, 2014).

Amid these startlingly statistics are reports about the conditions of incarceration, which some report as places filled with boredom, fear, violence, and isolation (Bernstein, 2014; Davies, 2014). However, more troubling than these conditions are evidence for how detained populations experience these daunting environments. In her recent book, *Burning Down the House: The End of Juvenile Prison*, Bernstein (2014) suggested that the physical structure of juvenile detention facilities is designed to instill fear in the residents who are detained. As an illustration of her own experiences between these two worlds of being on the outside and insides of prisons, Bernstein stated that she feels as though she's stamped her passport at the border of a new country (Davies, 2014—interview).

These facilities can be so different and jarring that the conditions of detention, even when monitored and regulated, often involve serious violations of the human rights of those detained in these facilities (Beck, Cantor, Hartge, & Smith, 2013; Kysel, 2012). Ashkar and Kenny (2008), for instance, examined the incarceration experiences of adolescent males in a maximum-security detention facility and reported that detainees' experiences were characterized by:

- 1) A prison culture of bullying, substance use, and antagonism with those adults who work with detained youth populations;
- 2) Inadequate service provision and a lack of rehabilitative programming; and
- 3) A sense of loss through reduced autonomy and dislocation from those individuals who are deemed important in the lives of detainees.

If these experiences involve bullying, substance abuse, antagonism, inadequate protection, limited rehabilitative services, reduced autonomy, and disconnection from loved ones, describe

the standard of human behavior for detained populations, then it is clear that these conditions threaten the very existence to which human bodies should be subjected.

Some researchers studying populations detained in both adult and juvenile correctional systems have reported a possible connection between an inmate's perceptions of the institutional context and his or her proximate adjustment to it (Kupchik & Snyder, 2009; Moos, 1997; Wright, 1991). For youth who may only perceive of incarceration through the media or others' accounts of these facilities, the adjustment to realities of prison life can be challenging.

Undoubtedly, the outcomes of incarceration for many detained populations are not limited solely to their actual detainment. Take, for instance, that the stigma of incarceration can be so strong that it often follows youth throughout their lives, greatly affecting their abilities to compete for jobs, secure housing, assure economic stability, and maintain unbiased relationships with the community (Houchins, Puckett-Patterson, Crosby, Shippen, & Jolivette, 2009). A youth member at a church where I worked previously shared with me how discouraging life after incarceration was for him. Despite serving his time and making conscious efforts to find work, this young man admitted that the stigma attached to his record was a main factor preventing him from securing work and moving beyond his identity as a juvenile offender. Lewis and Kaba (2014) warned of the detriments the detention process might have on youth, suggesting that the process "disconnects youth from family and supportive relationships, interrupts education, and makes it difficult for youth to get adequate exercise, healthcare, nutrition, and support" (p. 2).

The realities of these environments and the influence these settings may have on how detained populations experience incarceration may not be fully understood by the professionals working in prison settings. That is to suggest that there may be a clear distinction between the

experiences of individuals detained in detention centers and professional's knowledge of detainee experiences. As a researcher working within these contexts, I was fully aware that my status as a free individual could not allow me to fully comprehend the lived experience of these detainees. Take, for instance, a personal experience I encountered during my initial involvement at the facility that highlights my experience in the juvenile detention center and my speculation about the differences between my experiences and the detainees I served. I had left the facility with an undeniable sadness one evening. It feelings was a heavy burden that I could not shake even hours after I had arrived at home. I lay in my bed and began to cry uncontrollably. It was a familiar cry, the type of emotional outburst reserved for the mourning of a relative or close friend. Despite it's familiarity, I could not pinpoint the reason for why this burden and unshakable sadness had driven me to tears. The next morning I realized that my experiences in the facility as a freed man who was detained only temporarily for a few hours each week to teach music could not adequately describe the feelings and ways of life that these young men experienced on a daily basis. In that moment, I asked the question: Can you truly understand what it means to be free if you have never been detained? The question was philosophical at its root, but I'd come to spend four years in the detention center making attempts to better understand the experience of being detained, and equally as the vignette demonstrated, the power potential music may have as an intervention in this setting. It is within this conception of professional work ethic that the potential impact of music opportunities for youth detained in these environments may be better understood.

### **Incarcerated Youth Population's Access to Music Experiences**

The importance of music and having access to it has been a significant part of the mission of the music education profession. The belief that music instruction should be available to all students is reflected in its strategic plans in 2011 where it stated:

Music is a universal expression of the human spirit; a basic human need. It allows us to communicate our deepest ideas and feelings; to explore and preserve our cultural heritages; and to celebrate the realms of emotion, imagination, and creativity that result in new knowledge, skills, and understanding. Therefore, *every* individual should be guaranteed the opportunity to learn music and to share in musical experiences. (National Association for Music Education, Strategic Plan, 2011, p. 2, emphasis mine)

More recently in 2016, the national association included that its mission was to “advance music education by promoting the understanding and making of music by all” (National Association for Music Education, 2016, p.1). Further stated in the document are sets of value statements, for which inclusion and equity are central:

Building strength and promoting diversity in a profession representing the wide spectrum of people and cultures, abilities, economic backgrounds, and gender identities. (National Association for Music Education, 2016, p. 1)

Within the goals and value statements of the strategic plan is a concern that youth detained in correctional facilities may be excluded from whom these inclusionary terms of “all” and “every” actually applies. This exclusion is not surprising, however, for some authors have argued that the profession has historically maintained a tradition that school music is reserved for a chosen and selected few (Hickey, 2015). Following graduation, it is likely that many music teacher candidates will seek employment in traditional teaching environments as performing ensemble directors or general music specialist; their university music teacher training has prepared them with the knowledge and skills to be successful in these environments. Despite the opportunities

that teaching music in nontraditional teaching contexts such as correctional facilities offers, many music teacher candidates may not view this as a viable option or be interested in working within these settings. To this end, the likelihood that formal music instruction may be made available to detained populations in the same ways that they are extended to children in public school settings is considered unreasonable and unnecessary to some individuals.

### **Music Programs Occurring in Correctional Settings and Research**

#### *Benefits of Participating in Music for Detained Populations*

There has been a significant growth in the number of music programs occurring in US detention centers (Abrahams, Rowland, Kohler, 2012; Cohen, 2010; Hickey, 2008; Lee, 2010; Shieh, 2010; Thompson, 2015; Warfield, 2010) and in international settings (Barrett & Baker, 2012; Silber, 2005). This growth to connect youth offenders with music making opportunities may be indicative of the positive role music may play as an intervention within correctional facilities. Research outcomes purport positive benefits for detained youth who participate in music during their detainment. Daykin, Moriarty, Viggiani, and Pilkington (2011) reported that music could be a vital resource for helping detained youth to cope with the affects of being incarcerated, make meaning of their detainment, and interpret the aftermath of the crimes with which they were charged. Additionally, these researchers asserted that being involved in music programs provided young people with the tools to regain control over their lives. As a case in point, de Roeper and Savelsberg (2009) proposed that participating in music could be a safe means for expressing difficult emotions and conflicting thoughts, providing for incarcerated young people a platform to communicate their hopes and dreams.

The role of music in prison environments has advanced from being merely a pastime to

an activity designed to increase the musical skills and social-emotional development of detained populations (Clements, 2004). Although divergent ideas abound about what music's role in prison contexts should be, Clements (2004) has argued that possible roles for music making in prison settings may include building prisoners' choice, increasing their feelings of inclusion, and promote individual change from prisoner identities to human/citizen identities. Studies have reported higher self-esteem for prisoners who participate in music and art programs (Digard, Grafin, von Sponeck, & Liebling, 2007; Silber, 2005; Wilson & Logan, 2006). In the context of correctional settings, some researchers have found that music-making and music projects have the capacity to widen horizons and address disadvantage by bringing awareness to the cultural issues that affect the communities from which detained come (Baker & Homan, 2007; de Roeper & Savelsberg, 2009).

### **Rap Music As Content in Prison Music Programs**

Norfleet (2006) defined hip-hop as a form of creative expression, a sensibility, and an aesthetic, with rap music as "the most celebrated component" (p. 353) of hip-hop culture. This conception of rap moves beyond previous description that characterized rap music as "a musical form that makes use of rhyme, rhythmic speech, and street vernacular, which is recited or loosely chanted over a musical soundtrack" (Keyes, 2002, p. 1). Current descriptions moved beyond Keyes' conception of rap as a purely tonal genre by reflecting a complex system of ideas, cultural values and concepts, and may take several expressive forms such as spoken word, film and fashion, and song forms (Taylor & Taylor, 2014).

Multiple benefits for youth who engage in music during their detainment have been cited in previous literature. Baker and Homan (2007) reported several benefits for using rap music

with detained black youth in a study that explored the success of a music program that used hip hop music primarily. Their music program used rapping and basic music sequencing and composition as a primary way to engage youth in the musical experience. The benefits these researchers observed included a fostering of individual creativity, self-esteem and social communication among participants.

Despite its roots in African American culture, the rap music genre is enjoyed by a wide range of urban youth (Baker & Homan, 2007; Lashua, 2005), and rap music and its associated hip-hop styles (which may include attired language patterns, to name two examples) are undeniable parts of youth cultures including the culture of youth detained in the criminal justice system (Tyson, 2003). Some researchers have suggested that detained youth populations may respond positively to rap music and hip-hop styles because these song forms may reflect their cultural backgrounds and constitute what they view as *their* music (Daykin et al., 2011).

Recent literature about music occurring in correctional facilities has reported an increase in the use of rap and hip-hop music as content in their programs (Baker & Homan, 2007; Daykin et al, 2011). Baker and Homan (2007) examined the use of rapping and music sequencing with youth participants and suggested that the arts and engaging in it provided youth offenders with an alternative view of themselves. This alternative view provided those young people an opportunity to reimagine themselves as creative individuals and not merely as juvenile offenders (p. 472). More specifically, these researchers reported positive behavioral changes in how detained youth not only viewed themselves but also their peers. Additional behavioral changes were noted, including an undeniable pride these youth participants had in the musical work they created and an overall enjoyment of the music making process.

The use of rap music as content used with youth detained in correctional facilities is a possible intervention to counter the negative perceptions for which correctional facilities are known. Daykin et al. (2011) strongly suggested that music projects occurring in correctional settings utilize music genres like rap music and hip-hop because of their ability to connect with these populations in genuine ways. However, the impact of music projects in correctional facilities depend largely on the extent to which participants in these programs feel a sense of ownership to the music content used as a curricular inclusion (Baker & Homan, 2007; Thompson, 2015; Tyson, 2002).

#### *Rap Music as a Contested Genre*

Despite the multiple benefits for using rap music as content in their music programs with youth offenders, some researchers have noted a few negative effects of rap music used with offenders. Take, as an example, Baker & Homan (2007) reported that some participants found the rules about not swearing or using inappropriate ideas in their lyrics to be problematic to their ideas of music making. Participants considered these filtered versions less authentic representations of their feelings and experiences.

Tricia Rose, noted scholar on hip hop music, wrote about the negative association of rap music in society and attributed this startling perception to the interests of a commercialized rap music industry. Rose (2008) strongly condemned the influence of corporate interests in promoting socially destructive themes in hip-hop music, suggesting that, “what began as a form of releasing and healing has become yet another lucrative but destructive economy for young poor black men” (p. 58). She further posited that the sexist and violent tropes that have come to dominate commercial hip-hop have done so for the sole benefit of profit-minded record labels.

Hirsch (2012) explored the embedded issues at play in the use of defendant-authored rap music as criminal evidence and the role of the composer in rap music. The author showed how issues of race may complicate the use of rap lyrics as evidence in criminal cases and how rap lyrics are conditioned by the construction of authenticity in contexts of marketing. To this end, because commercialism often depicts rap in a specific way, that is, that it promotes the most sexist and violent tropes in certain types of music, society often comes to view rap music and the artists who create the genre in this one-dimensional way. For the detained youth in this current study, the combination of their interests and preferences for rap music, their status as youth offenders, and their race may place their music composition in a negative view.

### **Statement of Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this case study was twofold: to explore the experiences of being detained and the experiences of creating music during incarceration for youth detained in a county detention center. Two research questions guided my inquiry:

- (1) How do detained youth perceive their experience of incarceration?
- (2) What role, if any, does creating rap music have in how detained youth experience incarceration?

### **Contribution of the Current Study to Music Education**

The findings of this study will add to previous research literature about music projects occurring in correctional facilities. Music programs within these settings have occurred since the mid-century, yet literature confirms that research occurring in these contexts remains minimal. In addition, there is limited research on how creating rap music—a genre with which many youth cultures identify and prefer—may influence how detained youth experience their detainment.

Working with detained youth requires effective, evidence-based strategies (Abrahams, Rowland, Kohler, 2012; Bittman, Dickson, & Coddington, 2009). Music educators working within these correctional facilities or professionals who are interested in working with diverse student populations such as detained youth and with diverse musical practices such as rapping and creating instrumentals, to name two examples, may value research investigating the role that creating rap music may have on the experiences of youth detained in the criminal justice system. Knowledge of the multiple roles that creating rap music may have on detained youth's experiences within these contexts may inform future efforts to provide music instruction in correctional facilities. Additionally, the outcomes obtained from this study may help to build the "analytic generalization" (Yin, 2009) of findings across research studies in ways that build broader theories about music making with detained populations.

### **Relationship to the CSEME**

Dr. Bennett Reimer founded the Center for the Study of Education and the Musical Experience (CSEME) in 1985 as a way to support the academic work and collaboration between faculty members and doctoral students in music education. As a primary mission, the CSEME remains committed to pursue solutions to problems in the profession through consistent research that examines multiple perspectives on complex issues. The following framework was recently enacted as a way to guide CSEME research:

- CSEME promotes systematic inquiry designed not as an isolate study, but as a program of research that seeks to explain or transform music education theory and practice;
- CSEME functions as a collegial laboratory with members supporting another's work through careful scrutiny and constructive dialogue, and;

- CSEME facilitates collaborative research in music education and related fields, providing opportunities for the exchange of information, individuals, and resources both within and across institutions.

It is within the above framework that this current study and previous doctoral projects are united. This dissertation connects to several research projects and dissertations in the CSEME. First, this current project relates to several research projects about music and juvenile offenders. Two research projects under the direction of Dr. Maud Hickey include the *Music Composition in Juvenile Detention* and *Arts and Music Projects for Education in Detention Centers (AMPED)*. The *Music Composition in Juvenile Detention* project was funded through the Chicago Community Trust to provide an opportunity for detained youth to work on music composition projects. In addition to providing detained youth access to music making opportunities, Dr. Hickey has explored participants' attitudes about music making and their efficacies for music compositional abilities.

The dissertation also relates to Dr. Hickey's *Arts and Music Projects for Education in Detention Centers (AMPED<sup>2</sup>)*, a music-mentoring program that connects Northwestern students with young men incarcerated at the Detention center. Detained youth participate in weekly music sessions where they learn to compose music using GarageBand music software that a music education professor provides. Additionally, in collaboration with Northwestern University's Center for Civic Engagement, students from the university travel to the detention center each week to provide detained youth with a range of help on their music composition projects. The program also aims to increase the social-emotional support to the young men in the program

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<sup>2</sup> More detailed information about AMPED can be found at <http://www.engage.northwestern.edu/AMPED>

while simultaneously connecting university students with surrounding communities. This current doctoral dissertation also relates to a previous study I conducted as a member of the CSEME (Thompson, 2015). That analytic autoethnographic research highlighted my personal journey toward becoming culturally responsive in music instruction with Black youth detained in the criminal courts in Chicago, IL. The study used a framework for cultural responsiveness attributed to Ladson-Billings (1996), and analyzed data for emergent themes related to achieving musical success, validating cultural competence, and developing critical consciousness.

Several CSEME dissertation studies explored the concept of culture in some way: Tahir (1996), Armetta (1994), Fitzpatrick (2008). Both Tahir (1996) and Armetta (1994) advocated that music instruction ought to be responsive to the cultural identities of students within classrooms. These studies were helpful in justifying my use of rap music with these participants who both identified and preferred rap music.

### **Overview of Remaining Chapters & Organization**

The remaining chapters are an attempt to answer research questions listed above. Chapter 2 details the research method used in this study, which includes justification for assuring confidence in the research methods, analysis, and findings. This chapter also provides a brief description of the setting and study participants. Chapter 3 provides more detailed information about the participants in the study including a brief narrative of the characteristics of each young man in the study. In addition, a more detailed narrative is included for each of the three participants purposefully selected for individual interviews throughout the study period. Chapter 4 presents the findings obtained from the study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings and implications these results may have on professional practices.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

An important aspect in gaining a true understanding of the conditions of incarceration and possible roles that creating music may play in how detained young populations experience these environments is listening to and accurately interpreting the voices of the detained young people themselves. Far too often, the meanings that researchers assign to participants' responses and the ways these findings are reported do not adequately portray accurate representations of the young people detained in these contexts. In this current study, spending time with young people detained in a juvenile detention center and asking them to describe their experiences of being incarcerated and their experiences with composing music during these detainments can provide a firsthand account of how youth experience the contexts; the intent within this document is to bring voice to their perspectives and their untold stories. The meanings young people ascribe to their experiences of both juvenile detention and creating music in this setting can help us to better understand how, and how much, creating music may mean for this population and within this specific context.

This chapter outlines the methods used to explore the experiences of being detained and the experiences of creating music during incarceration for youth detained in a county detention center. Previous research on music and detained youth has recommended that future studies should provide more detailed information on sampling, data collection, and data analysis—along with more discussion of ethical issues such as participants' rights, confidentiality, data protection, and risk reduction (Daykin et al., 2011).

This chapter responds to those recommendations by providing a context for the study, including descriptions of all of the following: the setting, the participants who were detained within the setting, the data collection tools, procedures, and the framework for analyzing the multiple sources of data generated throughout the study. Additionally, I served as a participant-researcher in this study by being actively engaged with the participants as a full and dynamic member of the music making process and as their music teacher. At the same time, I held a distinctly visible identity as a researcher in the setting. To this end, this chapter will also address my role as a contributor to this dissertation project to aid readers in interpreting the findings and implications of the research.

### **Study Initiation**

#### *Gaining Access.*

I sought approval to conduct this study from two groups: the Northwestern University Institutional Review Board (NUIRB) and the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center's Office of the Transitional Administrator (OTA). The groups were responsible for assuring the protection of the rights and overall welfare of human participants involved in research studies. Given that the participants were both prisoners and under the legal age to consent to being research participants, the NUIRB required that the current study go through a full review process before they granted approval to conduct the research.

#### *Research Timeline*

Table 1 shows the proposed activities that occurred each week during the research project. The music sessions that were canceled in weeks 2, 3, and 12 were due to staff shortage at the juvenile detention center. In week 11, however, I canceled the music session to attend a

conference.

Table 1.  
*Timeline for Research Study Activities*

Week	Date	Activity
1	6/8	Researcher recruits and procures assent of participants; <b>Researcher conducts focus group interview (all participants in music class);</b> Participants create music
2	6/15	<i>cancelled</i>
3	6/22	<i>cancelled</i>
4	6/29	Participants create music
5	7/6	Participants create music
6	7/13	Participants create music; <b>Researcher conducts individual interview #1 (Reggie)</b>
7	7/20	Participants create music <b>Researcher conducts individual interviews #1 (Jermaine<sup>3</sup> and Tyrek)</b>
8	7/27	Participants create music
9	8/13	Participants create music
10	8/10	Participants create music; <b>Researcher conducts individual interviews #2 (Reggie and Tyrek)</b>
11	8/17	<i>cancelled</i>
12	8/24	<i>cancelled</i>
13	8/31	Participants create music
14	9/28	Participants create music <b>Researcher conducts individual interviews #3 (Reggie and Tyrek)</b>

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<sup>3</sup> Jermaine was released from the facility before the end of the study period. As result, I was unable to conduct additional interviews with him.

### **Research Design**

This research uses an intrinsic case study design (Stake, 1995). Case studies are holistic analyses—using one or more methods—of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems. The intent of a case study design is to understand human interaction through detailed and in-depth collections of multiple data sources aimed to better understand a particular phenomenon being studied (Stake, 1995). The intrinsic case study does not attempt to extend theoretical work. Rather, the intent of the intrinsic case study is to learn about a particular phenomenon and to attempt to define its uniqueness and distinctiveness. The boundaries for this project were the music classroom in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center and the visitation area where parents and other visitors went through a security checkpoint and gathered to wait for clearance to visit the detained youth.

According to Yin (2003, p. 9), a case study design is helpful when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) the researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of study participants; (c) it is necessary to explore the contextual conditions that are relevant to the phenomenon studied. Given the criteria of Yin’s definition above, the case study method was an appropriate design for this research study because I was interested in *how* detained youth perceive their incarceration and *why* creating rap music in this setting may influence *how* participants experience their detainment. Because I was observing young people as they created music in this setting, I did not attempt to manipulate their behaviors for composing music. Additionally, I was interested in the contextual factors that may have influenced the experiences these detained youth had while creating rap music.

### **Setting and Participants**

### *The Facility*

The setting for this project was the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago, IL. The massive five-story facility was completed in 1973 and includes 30 separate housing pods that accommodate 16 to 18 residents each, providing a maximum occupancy of 498 residents for the entire facility. The detention center provides temporary housing and education for court-detained juveniles between 10 and 18 years old who have legal action pending in the Cook County criminal court system or who are awaiting transfer from juvenile court jurisdiction to criminal courts. At the time of this study, the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center was the largest juvenile temporary detention center in the US.

When I began this project in 2014, the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center was working diligently to clean up its negative reputation as an institution. Lewis & Kaba (2014) reported that the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center had been dogged by years of mismanagement, allegations of abuse, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and inadequate services for the youth who were detained in the facility. As result, in 2007, a US Federal Judge took over the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center and appointed a temporary administrator who was responsible for bringing the detention center into compliance with regulations following a class action lawsuit, *Doe v. Cook County*: No 99 C 3945, that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed in 1999 regarding inadequate conditions of confinement at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. Although conditions at the facility have improved, a report by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency has strongly called for the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center to close as a facility detaining youth (Lewis & Kaba, 2014).

Housed within the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center is the Nancy B Jefferson School, an alternative public school in the Cook County Public Schools system that educates youths during their detainment. The school's physical structure resembles most US schools where the walls of the facility are decorated with college paraphernalia and brochures about career options like becoming barbers and funeral home directors. In appearance, the Nancy B Jefferson School resembles most typical schools, where student artwork and other assignments adorn the walls to showcase the students' accomplishments. Residents can check out books and also spend time reading books and magazines in the quaint library facility. Arguably, the only indication that the school is housed within a juvenile detention center consists of the inmates walking in single file with their hands behind their backs, accompanied not by teachers but by the youth development specialists charged with their care.

The music lab in the Jackson School, where I conducted the actual research study, is a rectangular room that has one large window that stretches the length of its longest wall. The bars covering the entire window to prevent residents from breaking the window, along with the camera in the upper corner of the room, are the only physical reminders that the music room is enclosed within the detention center. The music lab contains 15 Apple Macintosh computer stations, 15 66-key piano keyboards, and headphones with attached microphones for resident use. The teacher station at the front of the classroom also contains an Apple Macintosh computer, piano keyboard, and set of speakers. This teacher station contains software allowing the music teacher to communicate audibly with students through a microphone and to view the computer screens of each resident. Garageband, a software application for composing and editing music, is installed on each Apple Macintosh, and participants use this software

application as the primary means for creating music during the study period. The classroom also contains an overhead projector and a screen so that the teacher could display images during lessons.

### *Sampling Strategy*

A criterion sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to identify young men (N=6) detained in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center as potential participants in the study. Eligibility for the study entailed that the participants: (1) were current residents in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center; (2) had taken part in an after-school music composition program that the adviser of this current doctoral research and I had taught previously; (3) had a strong interest in creating music; and (4) agreed to be a part of the study.

I particularly wanted young men that I had previously work with to be part of the study since I had built trust with them and were confident in their abilities to and interest in music making. Before these young men agreed to be study participants in the current study, I knew them and had worked with them for 20 weeks when they were enrolled in another music composition class that my advisor and I taught previously in the detention center. Because these young men had already been a part of another music composition class, they were accustomed to the procedures of the lab, the equipment, and the process of creating music. This foundational knowledge was vital to me focusing on the purposes of the current study. These particular young men were in a group classified as “Automatic Transfers,” a special designation given to juveniles who were charged with serious or felony offenses; the designation also applied to young men

whose cases would ultimately be transferred to adult criminal court when they turned 17 years old.

### *Recruitment and Assent*

The participants (n=6) for the study were Jermaine, Reggie, Tyrek, Trenton, Damonté and Otis. However, due to the transient nature of the detainee population housed at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, I will detail the changes in my study population so it is clear how I arrived at six participants. I initially met with 7 young men in the music lab<sup>4</sup> on a Sunday afternoon in June 2014 to inform them of the study. These young men were Derrick, Jermaine, Reggie, Tyrek, and Trenton, Enrique and Gutiérrez<sup>5</sup>. I described to them the nature of the study and the details of the informed assent document (see Appendix A); I then allowed the young men to ask questions about the research project and their involvement in it. The young men were informed that serving as participants in this study would not affect their legal cases, court proceedings, or terms of probation. In addition, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty.

With the exception of Derrick who declined participants, 6 young men formed the focus group for the study (I provide more details about the focus group later in this chapter).<sup>6</sup> During week three of the study (the detention center canceled the research during week two due to staff shortages), Enrique and Gutiérrez dropped out of the study because the state transferred them out

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<sup>4</sup> The music lab was located in the Nancy B. Jefferson School, an alternative school housed within the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center that educated the detainees during their incarceration.

<sup>5</sup> Although Enrique and Gutiérrez were a part of the focus group, they were transferred out of the detention center after the focus group. As result, I did not include them as study participants in the final analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Accounts of the music class and the characteristics of these focus group participants are included in Chapter 3.

of the detention center to the county jail. Because they were only involved in the focus group and not the remainder of the study, I did not include them as study participants. At the same time, Damonté and Otis, whom I also had worked with in a previous afterschool music class, joined the study and were assented as research participants. As stated above, the participants (n=6) for the study were Jermaine, Reggie, Tyrek, Trenton, Damonté and Otis.

### *Music Class*

Participants came to the music lab once a week to create music for 1.5 hours. As mentioned previously, all of these participants had experience composing music and coming to this specific lab because they were a part of another music composition project that my advisor and I taught during the school year. These young men were accustomed to the procedures of the lab and worked well with me. Prior to the start of the dissertation project, I adopted the following format to structure the allotted time (see Table 2).

Table 2  
*Schedule and Purpose of the Music Class Session Activities*

Time	Activity	Purpose of the Activity
3:00pm–3:10pm (8–10 min)	“Jam” Session	To recreate various layers of an instrumental composition using sounds on the Garageband software.
3:10pm–3:30pm (15–25 min)	Music Lesson	To teach and review selected skills for composing music.
3:30pm–4:15pm (45–50 min)	Individual Work	To allow participants time to work on their compositions; to retrieve instrumentals for recording and

		sampling; to monitor progress and offer feedback; to interview participants.
4:15pm–4:20pm (5 min)	Clean Up Time & Close Out Procedures	To collect microphones and headphones, save participant audio files, and complete and collect participant reflection forms.
4:20pm–4:30pm (8–10 min)	Share Session	To provide a space for participants to share the progress of their compositions with the class and provide feedback on each other's music.

This format was borrowed from the music composition project that my advisor and I taught previously. The only difference between the schedule adopted for this current study and the previous music composition project in which these young men were a part was the music lesson activity. In the previous music composition class, the music lesson activity was a planned lesson. However, since the participants arrived late to the lab (usually their tardiness ranged from 20–30 minutes of the overall time), the structured portion of the music lesson was changed to allow participants enough time to create music. During this time, participants were engaged in a range of activities including listening, creating instrumentals, writing and recording rap lyrics, and requesting instrumentals that I could obtain from the teacher workstation (which had limited access to the internet). The young men often engaged in conversation with each other and me about various aspects of their music making. For example, the participants often asked their

peers or me to listen to portions of the music they were creating. It was also common to see two young men working collaboratively on a music project, typically with one peer serving as the other's "guest rapper" on a small portion of a composition.

I monitored the music class and often encouraged the participants to stay on task, inquiring about their progress with their compositions and listening to their music in order to provide feedback. Typically, this feedback was in the form of questions to determine overall goals for the music and suggestions for editing to improve quality.

### **Data Collection**

#### *Data Generation*

The study generated multiple sources of data, including research field notes, transcriptions of the semi-structured group interview and the individual interviews from selected participants, the digital files of participants' music compositions, and the weekly reflections that participants completed at the end of each music session to document their feelings about being incarcerated and their views about creating music in the music class. These data sources were generated for 10 weeks, the duration of the study period.

#### *Observations*

I conducted observations at the research site each week of the study period. During these observations, I served as a researcher-participant, being generally engaged as a full member in the music making experience with the young men while holding a distinctly visible identity as a researcher in this setting. I was constantly aware of my connections to, actions within, and interpretations of the research setting while helping the young men with their music composition projects.

While observing, I made jottings on a pad that I kept with me. The jottings were both descriptive and reflective. For example, I recorded information about the young men, the setting, and other particular events and activities that occurred during the observation. As I wrote down these descriptions, I also included my overall experience, any hunches that I had, and any general knowledge that might be pertinent to my analysis of what was happening each week.

In my role as the teacher, I made notes about each participant's needs in their music. For instance, some young men requested a specific instrumental, which I provided to them as a sound file on a flash drive. Although I encouraged these young men to communicate any needs or software issues on the form they completed at the end of the class, many of them opted to simply tell me their needs rather than using the form. As much as possible, I tried to use my teacher role to help them navigate their music composition plans. Often, this included listening to their music in progress, providing music samples, and even reminders to stay on task.

#### *Field notes*

At the end of each observation, I immediately generated field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) based on the jottings I had made on my notepad during the observation. These field notes were descriptions of the events that had occurred at the research site and my reflections on those events. The field notes also served as material from which to craft more specific questions for participants' individual interviews that I conducted throughout the study period.

#### *Interviews*

I conducted two types of interviews during this study: a focus group interview and multiple individual interviews with selected participants throughout the study<sup>7</sup>. The purpose of the focus group interview was to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions concerning the conditions of their incarceration, their thoughts about rap music and their participation in creating the genre, and their reflections upon the impact that creating rap music may have had on their experiences of being detained. The focus group interview, which was conducted the first day of the research study in the music lab, lasted for 1 hour and 15 minutes and included the following participants: Jermaine, Reggie, Tyrek, and Trenton, Enrique and Gutiérrez. Although Enrique and Gutiérrez contributed to the focus group interview, they were transferred out of the juvenile detention center and not a part of the rest of the study.

The purpose of the individual interviews with the three selected participants was to gather more detailed information about the research questions by focusing on these young men and the specific music compositions they created during the study period. Artifact elicitation was used during each interview, by playing a music composition that each young man created previously to elicit memories, knowledge, and attitudes associated with creating music in this context (Barrett & Smigiel, 2003; Langston & Barrett, 2008). From the participants who were initially assented as study participants, three black males<sup>8</sup> (Jermaine, Tyrek, and Reggie) were purposefully selected (Patton, 1990) for individual interviews three times during the study period. These three black males were chosen to reflect the demographics of the resident population in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, where black males constitute the largest percentage of residents in terms of race (84%) and gender (92%) (Dunlap,

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<sup>8</sup> Detailed profiles I constructed of these three young men are included in Chapter 3.

2013). I conducted three individual interviews with Reggie and Tyrek. However, because time prevented a second and third interview for Jermaine before he was transferred out of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, only one interview was conducted with him during the study period.

My original plan was to conduct all interviews with on a day different from the day and time of the music composition class. However, the staff shortages in the detention center prevented these interviews from being conducted separately. As result, I had to change those original plans and conduct interviews during the music class. For instance, I conducted the focus group interview on the first day of the study period, which limited the time the young men had to compose that day. As another example of my accommodations to include the interviews, I conducted individual interviews with three selected participants while they were composing music. This accommodation allowed me to be “in the moment” with them as they composed and provided a backdrop against which to have conversations about their actual music making.

At the beginning of each interview, I reminded participants not to discuss illegal behavior or the specific nature of their cases, as required by the NUIRB. Interviews included basic questions related to the study’s purpose and were grouped according to two distinct tracks: (a) the study’s research questions, and (b) issues and questions that emerged during the study period. Although interview protocols (see Appendix B “Focus Group Interview Protocol” and Appendix C “Individual Participant Interview Protocol”) were created for both the focus group interview and the individual participant interviews, these interviews were semi-structured (Roulston, 2010) to allow for a comfortable exchange between the participants and me. In addition, the semi-structured interview format allowed me to cover the salient parts of the interview

protocol while remaining open to any variances in the responses of the participants. All interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes, were recorded using the Garageband software program on my laptop computer, and later transcribed for analysis.

### *Participant Reflections*

Participants reflected on their music compositions at the end of each weekly music session using a “Daily Reflection Sheet” (see Appendix D for initial document used at the beginning of the study). The purposes of the initial reflection documents were to gather descriptive information about the young men’s music compositions, their compositional plans, and any technical issues they may have encountered with the software program while creating the music. Despite these questions and my entreaties that they provide full answers, the participants’ responses were minimal and became more generic each week. For example, when asked what their compositional plans might be for the next week so that I could prepare teaching plans, many participants gave a response along the lines of “[I want to] do more with my music.” I surmised that the participants might not have had concrete plans for the next music class and in general only focused on their projects once they were in class. For some participants, completing the form became pro forma and, as result, their responses became standard and perfunctory, providing little in the way of information, data, or insights to me as a researcher (although they were helpful to me as a teacher in the setting by providing me with knowledge about what I needed to include in my teaching plans).

As a way to get more reflective answers from the participants that the original document for which the original form did not ask, I updated the “Daily Reflection Sheet” (see Appendix E for this updated version) on 7/13/14 to include the following two questions, which specifically

sought to determine participants' perceptions of both being detained and creating music that week (See Figure 1). For both questions, participants were asked to check boxes corresponding to a Likert-type scale: 1 for Positive (good, fun, interesting); 2 for Neutral (okay, alright); 3 for Negative (bad, boring). They were then asked to provide written responses to explain their choices. The participants were familiar with the format of this form because it mirrored a data collection sheet that my adviser and I had used with them during a previous music class in which they had been enrolled. However, participants were accustomed to providing responses that related to that specific week in detention (Question 1 from Figure 1) and that specific music class (Question 2 from Figure 1) only.

**1. How was your experience of detention this week?**

Positive  
(good, fun, interesting)     Neutral  
(okay, alright)     Negative  
(bad, boring)

Explain your rating below:

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**2. How was your experience of creating rap music today?**

Positive  
(good, fun, interesting)     Neutral  
(okay, alright)     Negative  
(bad, boring)

Explain your rating below:

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*Figure 1. Two Additional Questions for the Daily Reflection Sheet*

I collected these documents from participants at the end of each class and transferred the information to an online spreadsheet I created and maintained. The information obtained from these documents was used as an assessment tool for helping participants each week and for identifying themes during the analysis stage of the research.

### **Data Handling and Confidentiality**

Data were maintained in hard copy and electronic formats. Hard copies of all documents pertaining to the dissertation project were kept in a 3-ring binder that I carried. Data were also

transferred to an electronic format and kept secured and confidential on my personal password-protected laptop computer. Participants' music compositions were saved from the participants' individual workstations and transferred to the Garageband software on my laptop. In addition, audio files of participant interviews and the transcriptions of these interviews were maintained on my laptop. After transcribing participants' interviews I removed any information that could reveal the identities of the participants to further maintain confidentiality. The actual names of participants in the study were changed to aliases so that the participants could not be identified. Additionally, audio files of the focus group and individual interviews were destroyed after transcriptions of these files were created.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

I integrated data collection and data analysis using techniques drawn from grounded theory. This process included using multiple cycles of *questioning* (through observation and interviews), *hypothesizing* (by identifying themes or concepts in the data), and *requestioning* (confirming, qualifying, or refining the data themes) (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Within this framework observations and interviews from the later weeks of the study period were influenced by the ideas developed and data collected and reviewed during the previous weeks. Field notes from observations and interview transcripts were used to hone the next round of observation foci and interview questions.

Data interpretation occurred in several overlapping phases. The first layer of coding looked for "objective" characteristics of the data. Say, for instance, that objective characteristics recorded in the field notes may have included location (e.g., the music lab, the visitor check-in station), the role of participants (e.g., myself as the researcher-participant and the young men in

the study), and the context of the data (e.g., descriptions of people and places, interactions between people, and topics of discussion). For interview transcripts, the first layer of coding focused on the interview topics (e.g., the research site, the detainees' perceptions of incarceration, and their ideas about their music compositions). Further layers of coding aimed to uncover meanings, emergent patterns, and data codes. The goals of these subsequent phases of coding were to elaborate and refine ideas drawn from the data and to craft narratives representing the three selected participants. A constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to analyze across data sources. The process of constant comparison was helpful in stimulating my thoughts about descriptive and explanatory categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Trustworthiness of the Research Process and Findings**

Evaluating the effectiveness and usefulness of the arts and music in complex and social environments such as prisons can be challenging. Anderson (2009) warned that although evaluative methods can tell us whether or not a given arts program works, they often do not provide a more accurate picture of *why* or *how* an intervention may work for an individual group of people in a specific setting.

Hughes, Miles, and McLewin (2005) have argued for clearer methods for evaluating the claims researchers make about the arts in prison contexts. Several strategies for validating data collection and analysis were implemented throughout various stages of the dissertation project. These validation strategies included prolonged engagement and persistent observations at the research site, triangulation of data sources, and clarifying researcher bias (Creswell, 2007).

#### *Prolonged and Persistent Observations*

Prolonged engagement in the field and persistent observations were vital to this study. I began working at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in 2011 along with the advisor and her music composition project. This period of four years provided me with the prolonged engagement and observation time that were necessary for “building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher” (Creswell, 2007, p. 207).

#### *Triangulation of Data Sources*

As stated before, I integrated data collection and data analysis using techniques drawn from grounded theory. This process included using multiple cycles of *questioning* (through observation and interviews), *hypothesizing* (by identifying themes or concepts in the data), and *requestioning* (confirming, qualifying, or refining the data themes) (Huberman & Miles, 1994). In addition, a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to analyze across data sources. The process of constant comparison was helpful in stimulating my thoughts about descriptive and explanatory categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### *Clarifying Researcher Bias*

I have taught music to incarcerated juveniles—as part of my adviser’s grant-funded music composition project in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center—and have conducted scholarship in this setting since 2011 (Hickey, Niknafs, & Thompson, 2012; Hickey & Thompson, 2013; Thompson, 2015; Thompson & Moroz, 2013). The experiences obtained from this prolonged engagement in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center have provided me with an insider’s perspective on how music functions within this setting and how participants detained within it engage with music and their peers. Undoubtedly, these

experiences have allowed me a unique opportunity to develop relationships with the young men detained in the facility and to learn to speak their language and communicate effectively with them (Fontana & Frey, 1994). As an example of a shared language, the notion of code switching as a way to communicate effectively with the detained men was raised during a presentation given at an international music education conference in the UK (Hickey & Thompson, 2013). During the presentation, we played narratives written from field notes generated after each music session with a group of detained young men. A conference attendee asked, “I noticed that your voice in the recorded narrative is much different and I’m wondering if you could talk more about the code switching you had to do at the facility.” I found this question peculiar, mainly because of its assumptions and replied, “Well, it’s interesting that you’d notice the difference/. However, the real question is whether I’m code switching while at the detention center with young men who arguably share the same racial culture as me or possibly code switching while giving this presentation to an academic crowd.” The verdict is still out since I never provided a definite answer to the question. Undoubtedly, the time I have spent observing and teaching at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center has overwhelmingly shaped my belief in the power and potential music may have for youth detained in the criminal justice system.

Despite these advantages, I was also aware of the disadvantages my experiences may have had on this doctoral research. For example, my role as a researcher was both *emic*—characteristic of an insider who was a full participant in an activity, program, or phenomenon—and *etic*, indicative of an outsider who viewed the research setting as an objective viewer. I was generally engaged with this social group and setting as a full and dynamic member of their music making but held a distinctly visible identity as a mindful researcher inside the context of the

research setting. To assure objectivity, my field notes contained both emic and etic perspectives. Additionally, peer debriefings of data findings with my faculty advisor and a music teacher who had taught previously at Cook County helped with understanding how my personal perspectives and beliefs about music making in this context may have affected the findings (Saldana, 2014).

### *Researcher Background*

I am an African American male, age 38 at the time of this writing (I was 36 when the study began). I grew up in a small middle-class town that bordered the two college basketball towns of Chapel Hill and Durham, NC, in a home with my parents and older brother. Although neither of my parents was a college graduate, their income and assets placed our family in the middle-class bracket and allowed my brother and me to enjoy yearly family vacations and to attend public and private universities, respectively. I have managed to enjoy a successful career as a music educator in the public school systems of North Carolina and Virginia. Additionally, I became a lecturer at a liberal arts university in North Carolina after completing graduate school in music education. These experiences have afforded me a level of social and economic privilege not enjoyed by many members of my peer group.

### *Family Cultural History*

My family culture is one that wholeheartedly embraced the African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child.” This notion was embedded in the fabric of a small-town community whose members looked out for each other. For example, I was a latchkey kid, but my neighbors served *in loco parentis* (in place of parents) until my mom made it home from her job at a hospital in a neighboring town. I remember looking up to those neighbors with the same level of respect I gave my parents. Additionally, my parents were always quick to help others in need:

my mother, for instance, routinely took food to friends and neighbors who needed a meal and tactfully pretended that we had more leftovers than we could finish before the food spoiled.

In addition to our connected community, my family's involvement in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church has greatly influenced our social and service-oriented culture. The AME Church evolved out of the Free African Society at the end of the 18th century in Philadelphia. In its inception, the Society was a response to the discrimination against black Methodists who requested aid from the charitable funds of their church. Despite these origins, the Society (which later became the AME Church) expanded its purposes to include religious, social, and intellectual pursuits. The AME Church continues its mission as an institution that seeks out the oppressed and those in need, spreading the gospel of liberation in the spirit of social justice. This aspect of our religious affiliation undeniably shapes my family's involvement in the welfare of others, and as result, our family looks critically at social systems, with a focus on identifying and uprooting oppression and injustice.

#### *Cultivated Objectivity for Conducting Research*

My scholarship and research have tended to focus on marginalized populations and intersections of race, gender, and education. I have long taken an interest in research that is socially engaged and focused on bringing voice to citizens who are marginalized. It is my hope that this music research with juvenile offenders will broaden our professional understanding of music education, the musical experience, and rap music's potential creative role within the profession.

My cultivated objectivity for conducting field research brings with it the need to strike a delicate balance in my roles as both an advocate-mentor for these juvenile offenders and a

neutral researcher-observer. While analyzing data, assembling results, and disseminating findings I am also invested in telling the stories of these young men's (often negative) experiences as detainees. At the same time, I must balance my empathy and my desire to advocate for them with the knowledge that their interactions with the guards and other staff are generally positive and that staff work hard at a tough job and do their best to ensure the well-being of these young men.

#### *Implications of the Researcher's Role in this Study*

I acknowledge that my role in this research cannot be that of a neutral observer. I have imagined, designed, and carried out this dissertation project from start to finish with an interest in understanding and conveying to others the perspectives of the participants in my study. Undoubtedly, my own background, family history, teaching experiences, and interest in social justice issues have all deeply informed every component of this research project. Nevertheless, I have endeavored to keep any personal agenda or personal feelings about the study's participants in check because I believe that unbalanced subjectivity would greatly hinder the trustworthiness and usefulness of these research findings.

My attempt throughout this study has been to keep the perspectives of the participants themselves at the forefront and to ensure that the data and my analyses accurately represent these young men's experiences. But my interest in hearing and understanding their perspectives and their concerns about incarceration and the role of music within this setting does not mean that I am on a mission to "save" these young men. I see my role not as that of a researcher seeking to intervene in the lives of the underserved from my own position of privilege: rather, I aim to work

in solidarity with these young men and help them to discover music as a powerful means of constructing and telling their stories

### **Summary of Chapter 2**

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the methods used in this study for data generation, analysis, interpretation, and verification. I have also indicated the study's components, including the research design, setting, participants, researcher's role, and potential for research bias. In Chapter 3, I provide narratives of the 6 participants who were assented as research participants, with detailed narratives provided for the 3 participants who were purposefully selected for individual interviews over the study period.

### CHAPTER 3

#### PARTICIPANT PROFILES

In this chapter I provide information about the primary contributors to this dissertation: the 6 young men who served as study participants: *Trenton, Reggie, Jermaine, Otis, Damonté,* and *Tyrek*—who all self identified as African American. In addition, I include profiles of the two focus group members only (*Enrique, Gutiérrez*) because their responses provided insight into detainee experiences of being detained.

The young men were detained together on a resident pod called Omega, and were known as the Omega pod within the facility. Unlike residents in temporary detention due to minor offenses, the residents detained on the Omega pod had committed more egregious crimes and were awaiting transfer to a more permanent facility when they aged out and would no longer be considered juveniles. As a reminder, before these young men agreed to be study participants in the current study, I knew them and had worked with them for 20 weeks when they were enrolled in another music composition class that my advisor and I taught previously in the detention center. My interactions with them over this time period provided me with the knowledge to construct profiles for them. As a form of member checking, I shared my constructed profiles with them and solicited their approval of these profiles for use in this study.

The purpose of these profiles is to present these young men as *people*, and not their identities as juvenile offenders. My agreement with the participants and the review boards for conducting research at both Northwestern University and the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center prohibit me from disclosing the specific charges of their juvenile record that links specific events and charges with the participants in this study. In that regard, the narratives of the

participants in this chapter are intended to be personal and individualized so that readers can better interpret the findings with which these specific youth are associated. Their stories are intended to better highlight the characteristics of the youth in this study and how these participants experienced both incarceration and creating music in these contexts. These narratives of these participants are intended to be informative rather than typical of all youth detained in the facility. Certainly, the experiences highlighted with these selected young men represent only a limited aspect of the characteristics of inmate populations, their musical preferences and practices, and the role creating rap music may have on how these youth experience incarceration. In order to protect participants' confidentiality, their names and some aspects of family life and history have been altered.

#### ENRIQUE

There are some people who fly under the radar and remain unnoticed to others. Enrique, a 16 year old Hispanic male, is not one of those guys. His physical presence and personality makes others stop and take notice of his strong disposition. For instance, Enrique's walk and stance suggest an undeniable confidence. I suspect that the machismo he displays is a learned behavior, partly the result of his community's norms for how males should carry themselves, the other part, perhaps, the result of the cultural norms within the detention center for ways that detained youth can appear strong. The softness of Enrique's flowing, silky black hair, which hangs past his shoulders, makes a stark contrast to a rather hard outward exterior. Similar to Samson in the Christian Bible, Enrique wears his hair like a badge of honor—it's his strength.

Despite his "tough" exterior, Enrique is sensible and responsible. He's never too loud, never too immature, but reserved. Enrique's mature disposition can be explained partly by his

disdain to be imprisoned and partly due to him being a father to a young child. He talks about his son often and how much he misses him. Enrique wants nothing more than to be the father that his status as a detained youth limits. Incarceration puts the responsibility of fatherhood into proper perspective for Enrique.

Enrique loves music and enjoys listening to rap primarily, but he also loves hip hop styles. He listens to rap artists like Kanye West and Yo Gotti in his room on the pod where he and his peers reside. He earned the radio through good behavior and he's especially proud to be a "level 4," the highest level awarded to good behavior in the detention center. For Enrique, having rap music is important for detained youth. Similar to his peers, Enrique suggested that having music to listen to while being detained was helpful in decreasing the levels of stress that he and his peers experienced through daily incarceration. As he states, "it [rap music] helps to keep your mind off stuff" (Enrique, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). Although he enjoyed listening to rap, Enrique didn't like performing rap nor did he have interests in doing so. Rather, he enjoyed creating instrumentals of sounds that reflected his emotions and feelings. According to Enrique, the joy of creating music in the lab was more "the opportunity to get off the pod to do something different" (Enrique, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14) than a means for artistic expression.

#### GUTIÉRREZ

Gutiérrez's hands are covered with tattoos that are reminiscent of a street gang culture. The low quality of his tattoos suggests they were a home job rather than the type completed by a licensed professional. He admits that his homeboy did most of the tattoos for him but he likes them just the same. His friend was a fellow gang member, an affiliation to which he proudly

admits. For Gutiérrez, a 15-year-old Hispanic male, being involved in a gang isn't something to be ashamed of. Rather, gangs are his family and a type of protection in the neighborhood where he lives.

Gutiérrez's tattoos are the only visual sign connecting him to the streets or his gang. He's extremely articulate and his command language makes him stand out among peer detainees whose banter is often muffled and spoken in a low volume. His words proceed from his mouth in sentences that sound more like a verbal weapon:

- JT: Why do you think some people oppose rap music?  
 Gutiérrez: Maybe they oppose it because it's filthy. Maybe they oppose it because it promotes violence and people don't like that.  
 JT: Do you think those reasons are valid?  
 Gutiérrez: Well, folks gotta promote their own agendas so sometimes rap music is a part of that agenda.

(Gutiérrez, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14)

Amid this knowledge of how some people view rap music, Gutiérrez still proudly loves rap music because he relates to the lyrics (Gutiérrez, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). He admits that he does listen to some R&B styles when they come on the radio station he listens to in his room on the living pod. In a display of humor, Gutiérrez talked about his music preferences that expanded beyond rap music. I asked the young men if any of them preferred music beyond rap like Zydeco, classical, or opera, to which Gutiérrez replied: "I like Spanish songs (with a little laughter under his voice)." The entire room laughed along with Gutiérrez who wasn't afraid to admit his varied music interests.

## TRENTON

Trenton is African American whose brown skin is the hue of a rich chocolate. Physically, he's tall and wears his hair at a short length. He reminds me of the high school jock

that everybody wants to befriend. He's laid back but speaks his mind when needed. Trenton is almost 18 years old when the study begins and he's the oldest of the participants. Because of his age, he carries himself in a reserved and laid-back demeanor. Many of Trenton's peer residents seem to view him as an older brother type rather than a peer. These peer residents seem to view Trenton as their unofficial leader. They often ask him questions and seemingly value his opinion as if he's the authority figure within the detention center. One day, when the guys came to the lab, Trenton and Reggie were discussing the fight that happened over the weekend. A few parents discussed the same fight in the waiting area (Researcher field notes, 7/6/14). Trenton talked about how the fight had changed the levels of some of the detainees involved. I overheard Trenton mention that his behavior level had been decreased which led me to believe that he might have been involved in the fight somehow. Reggie and Otis were inquisitive about what influence the level change may have had on Trenton, to which he replied that he didn't really care that he was no longer on "level 4" anymore, the highest level awarded in the detention center for good behavior. This sounded like tough talk, the kind of banter that some boys learn from an early to come across as strong. If that's what Trenton was going for, the expressions on the faces of Reggie and Otis were clear examples that he passed with flying colors. The two residents were convinced.

Trenton enjoys creating music. In addition to being a part of the afterschool music project, Trenton was enrolled in the music class that's offered in the school that educates the detained youth during their incarceration. He admitted that he doesn't like to miss music class because he and his peer residents look forward to the opportunity to get into the lab once a week. As an example, the assistant team leader of these young men—a middle manager in the detention

center who is responsible for the care of the residents and the administration of the staff members working within the unit—escorted me down the hallway of the detention center to the music lab at the detention center’s in house school, Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School. As we turn down the first hallway, we ran into Trenton who is on his way to the facility’s commissary store. Trenton sees me at the end of the hallway and shouts, “Hey, I’m going to commissary but I’m still coming to music, ok?” (Researcher field notes, 6/29/14). Trenton as his peers talk about how important coming to the music lab is for them each week. Trenton’s indication that he’s still coming to the lab after commissary is evidence.

### OTIS

Otis, is a quiet 15 year old teenager. I often catch him scanning the room with his large brown eyes. Although he doesn’t say much, I surmise that Otis knows a lot more about his surroundings and the people in it than he admits. He’s so quiet that often it’s possible not to know that Otis is in the room with others. His jet-black hair is cut extremely short and resembles a style often worn by African American boys who are much younger than Otis. His “team player” attitude allows him to get along with his fellow detainees. He admitted that doesn’t come to the music lab because of his interest for music; rather, he comes to the lab because that’s what the other residents decided to do. They’ve become his temporary family and being with them means a lot to them.

Otis doesn’t say much about his music. In fact, he doesn’t make much music. He sits at his computer station, listens to music, and talks about what he is planning to create. He never does create any music, though, because his skills for creating music are the most limited among his peers. He does enjoy listening to the music on his computer. His peers ask him to listen to

their music and provide feedback. He always provides approval to their music making, and seems to enjoy being an advocate for them.

### DAMONTÉ

Damonté is an African American male with medium brown skin. Of all the participants, Damonté is the shortest in height and the only one that's 16. Despite his height, the volume of his voice makes him a tall stature among the group. Damonté is a bit headstrong, even defiant at times when he believes that staff members' corrections of his behavior are unwarranted or excessive.

Damonté enjoys creating music and listening to it music on his headphones while in the music lab. Often, he requests specific instrumentals over which to record his raps. Despite his interests for rapping, Damonté's technical skills for creating music are limited. He claims not to remember the fundamentals for using the software program that he learned in the previous music composition class. Damonté often becomes very impatient when his limited knowledge prevents him from getting started each music session.

The following three participants participated in the focus group but were also selected for individual interviews. As result they become central to the study's findings:

### REGGIE

Reggie is a 15-year-old African American male from the Chicago's Southside. The neighborhood where he grew up and lived before being detained has been infamous for violence. News media constantly report stories about the shootings but Reggie liked the community because he had friends there and hip-hop music was a part of their daily life. I initially met

Reggie a year before my study when he and peers were chosen to be a part of my adviser's music composition class that occurred as an after-school opportunity for the young men. Physically, his tall and lanky frame coupled with his slim build give him a pubescent appearance that is a common look among teenagers. The length of both Reggie's face and tattoo-covered fingers matched his tall and lanky frame. During one of our music sessions, I asked Reggie if he played the piano because the length of his fingers would be perfect for the dexterity that playing the piano requires. After informing me that he did not play the piano, he indicated that other people also had asked him that same question, and he admitted to me that he always wanted to play the piano but never had the opportunity to do so before our music class.

Reggie liked to talk a lot and the volume of his voice that seemed to match his facial expressions were comedic in nature. The volume and timbre of his voice was so pronounced that Reggie could be heard coming down the hall well before his body reached the room where he and his peers created music. Reggie's noticeable presence and character was noted often in my field notes:

Reggie is a lively character! His long face always looks like it's up to something or thinking of something. He talks constantly to his peers, me, and even to himself, more than he creates music. "How much time do we have?" "So, I'm suppose to create something in 20 minutes?" Come on, man. How I'mma do that?"

Researcher Field notes, 6/18/14

Despite the idle chatter, Reggie wasn't afraid to address issues that he considered important. He didn't hold back his views about life in the detention center, his thoughts about the police, and his views of his family, as a few examples. His viewpoints were well formed and articulate and the manner in which he expressed them exuded an undeniable confidence. The importance of speaking up was Reggie's norm; in fact, speaking up and voicing his concerns was his hallmark.

While being assented as research participants, many young men read through the assent form and began to sign the document agreeing to be a part of the study. Two of the guys were puzzled as to why the assent form used the word ‘subjects’ to describe their participation. Reggie, in an outspoken manner said, “They calling us subjects like we some animals or something!” Reggie made an interesting point, and certainly a response that seemed more logical than the one I attempted to provide as justification for the word choice. Was he really a subject or could he and his peers been better labeled as collaborators or contributors to the study? He looked up at me with a face that suggested his disbelief in my answer before signing his signature on the document.

Reggie loves music but indicated that he listens to rap music exclusively; particularly rap music that his friends (who he calls “homies”) have created in their neighborhood. Reggie expressed how much he enjoyed coming to the lab to make music, write lyrics, and rap. Often, these styles reflected the types he and his friends created back home. These lyrics reflected gangsta’ style rap themes whose music often contained explicit lyrics about women, communicated threats, and were filled with curse words. Reggie was very knowledgeable about how contested this type of music was for many listeners and fully understood that creating music with these themes was not allowed for the study as a way to protect him against these lyrics being used against him in his cases. Although he indicated that he understood the parameters, Reggie viewed his music preferences and this type of music making as just something fun to do to take his mind off being detained.

During the focus group interview, Reggie expressed how excited he was to be back in the music lab again for my study because creating music in the other music composition class my

advisor and I taught a year ago had helped him maintain the behavior level needed to remain in good standing (a system the facility used to monitor inmate weekly behavior). As a response to a question about what being in this current music class was like for the young men in the detention center, Reggie indicated that although he had maintained a “level 4,” the highest level awarded for positive behavior in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center while being in the music class last year, he had dropped back down to a “level 1” when the 10-week music class ended. He was looking forward to the motivation being involved in music again with this current study would provide him.

#### JERMAINE

Jermaine described himself as a laid-back 15 year old. The description fits him perfectly since he remain consistently even-tempered throughout the study period and during the music composition class he and his peers were in a year before the study. Jermaine’s hair was dreadlocks that hung proudly on either side of his face and were shoulder length. His skin was pecan-colored.

Jermaine loved music and being involved in it. He listened to music in his room with a radio he’d earned for good behavior while in the detention center. Jermaine especially liked music because it allowed him to express himself. For example, when asked what it meant for him to have rap music while being at the facility, Jermaine connected his music listening preferences to his experience of being detained: “Cause in this type of environment you’re constantly being controlled all the time. So it’s nice to listen to something you want to listen to” (Jermaine, Interview #1, 7/20/14). Jermaine further exclaimed that creating music also gave him a sense of control that was important for him.

Although he liked rap music, his preferences for drill music, a hip-hop subgenre that originated on Chicago's Southside, were apparent. This contemporary form of Chicago hip-hop is defined by its dark and often violent lyric content that often focuses on the gritty life of Chicago's Southside culture in ways previous gangsta rap styles had not. These lyrics are rapped over voiced trap-influenced beats<sup>9</sup>. Jermaine's "nice guy" demeanor is in stark contrast to the themes common in drill music. During the music session on 6/29/15, I observed Jermaine writing lyrics for the majority of the period. Despite spending quite a bit of time writing, Jermaine still managed to record two music compositions that day. I had a brief conversation with Jermaine during the class about his preference for Drill Music. He also had written about this genre in his previous daily reflection sheet and I was interested in his preferences for this style. Jermaine and I shared a laugh at the fact that his "nice guy" image defies stereotypes about what Drill music fans might be like. He expressed that he really just enjoys that kind of music as an art form.

Jermaine enjoyed coming to the lab to compose music. He viewed the opportunity as a chance to get off his living pod and do something different. Because Jermaine had aspirations of becoming a rap artist, he viewed the opportunity to create music in the lab as an important way to build the essential skills he'd need to achieve his career goals.

### TYREK

I met Tyrek the year before my doctoral study when he and his peers were selected to be a part of the afterschool music-composing program that my adviser ran with the juvenile

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<sup>9</sup> Trap music is known by its aggressive lyrics, 808 kick drums, heavy extended bass lines, double or triple time, and other fast division high-hats, layered synthesizers, and cinematic strings. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/trap-rap-edm-flosstradamus-uz-jeffrees-lex-luger/Content?oid=7975249>.

residents who were not offered music during the academic year. Physically, Tyrek was shorter than his peers but his build was more athletic than the other young men. His milk chocolate complexion was flawless with no noticeable trace of acne typical of adolescence.

Tyrek expressed that although life in the juvenile detention center could be boring at times, he tended to manage incarceration in the juvenile detention center just fine. His time was spent going to school, playing cards and chess, and watching television. Because he loved sports, Tyrek enjoyed the football tournaments he participated in at the facility's courtyard when the weather was nice. Despite these activities, Tyrek loved his family and looked forward to going home so he could finally meet his baby brother who was born during the incarceration.

Unlike Reggie and Jermaine, Tyrek enjoyed creating instrumental music and didn't view himself as a rapper. Further, Tyrek's musical interests expanded beyond rap and hip-hop styles and included a wide range of musical styles. Take, for instance, a conversation I had with Tyrek about his music preferences. I was amazed that he referenced so many different music genres. He indicated that he listen to a lot of different music in his room upstairs on the pod and expressed "I just like the way people do music. I don't discriminate. If it [the music] sounds good then it sounds good. Period!" (Tyrek, Interview #2, 8/10/14).

Tyrek's exhibited a reserved character. He wasn't very talkative with his peers or with me other than when he asked for help navigating a software issues while composing or when he requested a specific instrumental to sample in his music. Despite being reserved in behavior, he wasn't aloof. Rather, Tyrek was just quiet. Tyrek channeled his quiet energy into diligent work on music compositions, where he consistently walked into each music session ready to work and remain diligent until the end of each session.

### **Summary of Chapter 3**

The participants [n=6] in this study were males detained on the Omega living pod of residents detained in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago, IL. At the time of the study, participants were between 15 and 17 years old. All participants represented typical teenagers and enjoyed laughing and joking with each other in ways that members of a shared peer group tend to do. This group of detained youth enjoyed coming to the music lab to listen to and create music alone and in collaboration with each other. In this next chapter, I detail the results of these young men's experiences of both their incarceration and creating music in this context.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter will present the findings that emerged from a systematic analysis of the data sources used to answer the research questions for this study. These findings will be presented in the same order as the study's research questions:

1. How do detained youth perceive their experience of incarceration?
2. What role, if any, does creating rap music have in how detained youth experience incarceration?

Findings for participants' perceptions of being detained included detention as imposed structure, detention as a place of boredom, and detention as a place that diminishes the personal value and self-worth of detainees. Findings for the role of creating music within this setting included positive ratings for the enjoyment of creating music, as a creative outlet, a connection to life outside the facility, and as a means for behavior modification. Finally, findings also uncovered that participants' awareness of societal views of them as an offender population and a disapproval of rap music styles.

#### Research Question 1: **How do detained youth perceive their experience of incarceration?**

The main themes that emerged from this question were: detention as place of imposed structure, as a place of boredom, and a place that diminishes the personal value and self-worth of detainees.

#### Ratings for Incarceration

##### *Negative perceptions*

I triangulated data from researcher field notes, interviews with participants, and participants' weekly reflections on detainment to determine how the detained youth under study perceived their experience of incarceration. Overwhelmingly, these data revealed that participants perceived the condition of being detained negatively and the contexts of their incarceration unfavorably. Otis, for example, described his detention as "not a good place to be in" (Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14) and felt negatively about incarceration "because I'm locked up" (Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14). Several other participants shared Otis's sentiments.

I updated the "Daily Reflection Sheet" on 7/13/14 with two questions that reflected the first two research questions set for this study: "How was your experience of detention this week?" and "How was your experience of creating music today?". For both questions, participants were asked to rate their weekly experience of being detained by checking a box corresponding to a Likert-type answer choice: 1 for a *Positive* (good, fun, interesting) experience; 2 for a *Neutral* ("okay," "all right") experience; and 3 for a *Negative* (bad, boring) experience. Participants always rated their experience of being incarcerated as either a 2, a neutral experience or as a 3, a negative experience. Mean scores for perceptions of being incarcerated across all participants' responses during the rating period ranged from 2.4 to 2.66 for the rating period, according to data obtained from the Daily Reflection Sheets from 7/13 to 9/28 (see Table 4.1)<sup>10</sup>. Across all weeks of the rating period, participants' ratings for being

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<sup>10</sup> The rating period on the revised "Daily Reflection Sheet" ran from 7/13 and 9/28. Before 7/13, I surmised that completing the initial "Daily Reflection Sheet" had become pro forma for some participants and that, as a result, their responses had become standard and perfunctory, providing little in the way of information, data, or insights to me as the teacher. Because the previous "Daily Reflection Sheet" only asked participants to provide descriptions of their compositions, compositional plans, and technical issues with the software program, no ratings or qualitative descriptions to explain participants' ratings were collected before 7/13 of the study period.

detained were averaged together, revealing an overall mean of 2.43<sup>11</sup>—a negative rating—for how participants perceived their incarceration.

Table 4.1

*Average Ratings for the Experience of Incarceration across All Participant Responses by Week*

Date (and week) of Music Session	# of Participants	Participants' Ratings of Being Detained	Average Ratings of Being Detained
7/13/14 (6)	n=6	3, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3	2.5
7/20/14 (7)	n=4	2, 2, 2, 3	2.25
7/27/14 (8)	n=4	2, 3, 2, 3	2.5
8/10/14 (10)	n=5	2, 2, 3, 3, 2	2.4
8/31/14 (13)	n=4	3, 3, 1, 2	2.25
9/28/14 (14)	n=3	3, 3, 2	2.66

**Average: 2.43**

On the Daily Reflection Sheet, participants wrote qualitative descriptions as context to the numeric ratings they assigned to their experience of incarceration. These responses are explored more fully throughout this chapter to provide evidence of the emergent themes to which they are associated. These negative qualitative perceptions and their associated numeric rating are found in Table 4.2 are accounts of participants' perceptions of being incarcerated.

<sup>11</sup> The average rating that participants assigned to their perceptions of being detained (*Mean*: 2.43) was consistently lower than participants' average rating for creating rap music during incarceration (*Mean*: 1.34). This comparison is explored further in the second research question in this chapter, and in the discussion, which follows in the following chapter.

Table 4.2  
*Perceptions and Ratings for Being Detained*

<u>Assigned Rating</u>	<u>Description about the Perception of Detention</u>
2	“Because I be good most days but some days they [detention staff] be tweaking on me.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)
3	“Because this not a good place to be in” (Otis, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)
2	“Cause I don’t get a chance to do a lot while in here. I also be thinking about my baby [child]” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)
2	“It been the same thing. Nothing new. I wake up, eat, sleep, watch movies, go to the gym, eat, watch movies, eat, go to sleep.” (Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)
1	“I made level three and today has been a really good day” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14)
2	“It’s been ok cause I made level 3. And I talk to my people.” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14)
3	Because I’m locked up! Nothing can be good about being in here.” (Otis, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14)
1	“I made my next level and talked to the guys yesterday, and I’ve been listening to a lot of good music on the pod.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 9/28/14)
2	Not too much [happening on the pod]. It’s the same thing everyday. (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 9/28/14)
2	“I got in a little trouble but I’ve been doing good otherwise.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14)
1	“Good, because today I got to see all my little brothers. I was just happy to around them again.” (Jermaine, Daily

Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14)

- 2 “It’s been normal, wake, the same, eat the same, do the same thing.” (Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14)
- 2 “Because I made level four and talked to some hoes. But the staff been tweakin.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/20/14)
- 2 “Ain’t nothing happening to make me feel negative and nothing too much happen make me feel more positive. I’m just cooling.” (Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/20/14)
- 2 “I’ve been cool. Just waiting for my court date to come up on the 31<sup>st</sup>. My birthday on the 29<sup>th</sup>.” (Jermaine, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/20/14)
- 3 “Because I’m locked up.” (Otis, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14)
- 3 It [being detained] is boring cause there isn’t anything to do.” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14)
- 2 “I don’t like being controlled.”(Jermaine, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14)
- 3 “Tired, and ready to go home.” (Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14)
- 2 “Everyone has been doing ok on the pod this week.” (Tyrek, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14)
- 2 “Because ain’t nothing happen to me this week.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14)

### *Positive Perceptions*

Despite the negative perceptions of being detained, a few youth nonetheless expressed that their weeks in detention were positive in their qualitative descriptions. A review of the qualitative data on the Daily Reflection Sheets provided more specific information to explain the few positive responses for being detained. Two youth—Jermaine and Reggie—reported positive

experiences in their qualitative descriptions in weeks 6 and 7 respectively, attributing these positive experiences to family visits and an increase in an assigned level for behavior in the detention center, respectively<sup>12</sup>. Rating his detainment as a 1, Jermaine reported that the day was “good because today I got to see all my little brothers. I was just happy to be around them again” (Jermaine, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14). Although Tyrek did not rate his own detention as a positive experience, he spoke, similarly to Jermaine, of the positive impact his mother’s visits had had on his time in detention (Tyrek, Interview 3, 9/28/14).

Visitations are granted primarily to parents. Provisional visitations may be granted to the siblings of residents, although these visitations are not common. The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center encourages regular visits as a way to maintain the connections between residents and their families. Despite these opportunities, many parents are unable to visit their children regularly and I noted several times in the field notes I recorded while sitting in the waiting area how several parents expressed their frustration to each other and to me that they could not visit their children as often as they would have liked. Their work schedules conflicted with the visitation times assigned to them or because transportation was difficult (Researcher field notes, 6/29/14; 7/13/14). Despite opportunities to see his mother on a semi-regular basis, Jermaine mentioned that he had not been able to visit with his brothers because only parents

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<sup>12</sup> During one of my visits, an Assistant Team Leader for the youths informed me that the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center took two approaches to discipline with varying living pods of residents: a token economy approach and a cognitive behavior therapy approach. In the token economy used in the facility, the young men earned “tokens” for good behaviors. In the cognitive behavior approach—the approach used with the guys in this study—no tokens were rewarded as incentives for good behavior. Rather, the young men detained in Cook County were encouraged to use rational thought both to problem solve and to exhibit positive behaviors.

were allowed to visit. Still, he believed the opportunity for any family visitation was so special that it had overshadowed any negative experience related to that week's detainment.

Tyrek talked about the importance family visits can have on how detained youth experience their incarceration. The importance of family came out during a final interview with Tyrek. As typical, I asked him how life on the pod had been for him since our last music session. I asked this question both as part of the research and my general interest in their well being. Tyrek mentioned that his time in the detention center had "been all right; it's been better than before so detention has been all right. I was often curious as to what these guys meant beyond the words and after a bit of probing Tyrek answered:

- Tyrek: Yeah, it challenging sometimes. You feel me?  
 JT: Well, what's the most challenging part?  
 Tyrek: Not being able to get your freedom, not being at home.  
 JT: You've been here for some time now. Do you think being detained has gotten better or worse since you've been locked up?  
 Tyrek: The same.

These young men generally characterized their time in detention as "the same" or "nothing new." When asked what could help make their time in detention better, the guys usually did not have much to say other than the hopes of being released. During one interview (Tyrek, Interview #3, 9/28/14), Tyrek mentioned his mother's visits as a positive moment during his incarceration. Although parents are permitted two weekly visits, Tyrek's mother had recently had a baby the week before which prevented her from coming to the detention center for weekly visits. The memory of her visits and the hopes of seeing his new brother are positive for Tyrek:

- JT: Oh, that's exciting news!  
 Tyrek: Yeah [Tyrek almost appears to smile slightly, but remains calm so as to not show too much emotion]. I have a younger sister, too.  
 JT: How do you feel when you get a chance to see your new brother?  
 Tyrek: I feel happy for the moment.

Tyrek, Interview #3, 9/28/14

Participants' positive qualitative descriptions for how they experienced their detention were minimal. These positive qualitative descriptions were attributed to positive moments in detention, namely family visits and moving up in the behavior levels to which detained young men in this setting were assigned.

Reggie offered a perception of being detained in a positive light. In his qualitative response during week 7, he reported that he "made [behavioral] level 3 so today has been a good day" (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14). Reggie's favorable description is set against a backdrop of behavioral level changes that fluctuated due to his admittedly not-so-good behaviors.

#### Detention as a Place of Imposed Structure

The conditions of detention are highly restrictive for detained youth, which participants viewed as a type of structure imposed on them. This imposition was evident in the routines that the facility used to maintain order and a lack of autonomy that these structures limited for these youth.

#### *Routines to Maintain Order*

My persistent observation since 2011 allowed me to see how routine was a norm in the juvenile detention center. Facility staff used the practice of routines to assure that residents' daily schedules were orderly and organized. Routines for residents included an array of activities that were educational (e.g., school), extra-curricular (e.g., arts-based activities), social (e.g., playing cards, watching television), recreational (e.g., sports, gym), and general (e.g., sleeping, showering, family visitations). Mandatory bedtimes, as one example of the routines the youths

mentioned, ranged between 8:30 pm and 9:45 pm and were based on each resident's behavior level. Participants indicated that they had never gone to bed as early before being incarcerated.

The only time the youths' routine changed was during extra activities like Free Write Jail Arts & Literary Program,<sup>13</sup> Storycatchers Theatre,<sup>14</sup> and the music-composing project<sup>15</sup> that my adviser and I taught. Another moment was when eligible youths were permitted to purchase items from the facility's commissary store, which sold food and other personal supplies. Youth participants who were able to participate in these multiple activities indicated that they looked forward to the relief these activities brought from the monotony of their daily schedules (Focus group, 6/29/14).

Participants often expressed frustration when the time allotted for activities they enjoyed, such as family visits and creating music in the lab, was cut short because sticking to daily schedules often caused staff to alter the time allotted to those activities. Although routines structured the day, start and stop times for activities were not guaranteed; unforeseen events within the facility often altered them. Youths might be late to an activity, for example, when staff approval required for them to move through the facility was delayed. As a safety precaution, no two pods were allowed to move through the hallways at the same time. At the end of one music session, one of the youths mentioned that he was dissatisfied that the session had to end

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<sup>13</sup> Free Write is designed to enhance literacy (print, cultural, media, technology) learning and artistic skills of the young people detained in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. The program is committed to building the capacity of detained students to become the narrators of their own stories and authors of their own futures.

<sup>14</sup> Storycatchers Theatre is a youth development arts organization that prepares young people to make positive life choices through the process of writing, producing, and performing original musical theatre inspired by personal stories.

<sup>15</sup> An extension to this music project was AMPED (Arts and Music Programs for Education in Detention), a weekend music mentorship program that connected Northwestern University students with youth detained in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center.

(Researcher field notes, 7/6/14), but the staff maintained a rigorous schedule for youth participants even if they arrived late to an activity. During a session that occurred on 8/3/14, I asked the guys to begin cleaning up the room and saving their files for me because the music class was close to reaching the ending time. One of the participants, Damonté, said that there just doesn't seem to be enough time to work on their music. He went on about how they just got to the lab and wanted to know why their session couldn't simply be extended since they had arrived to the music session late. Of course I agreed with him and recalled how the music class had never lasted the full 1.5 hours of class time that we scheduled because neither the young men nor I were able to get to the lab by the designated 3pm start time. For the juvenile detention center, the concept of time was relative, almost fluid to an extent. The guarantee of starting at an exact time wasn't a given or a right, for various reasons: a fight upstairs in their pod has delayed their coming once, the movement of another pod of residents in the hall has delayed the start of our music class a few times. This is the nature of juvenile detention. Time is not a guarantee and the youth seem to detest this uncertainty as much as I do (crafted from field notes, 8/3/14).

Routines did not apply to the detained youths alone. In fact, parents and other visitors to the facility conform to the routines that are required before being permitted to visit the residents:

Parents are sitting in the waiting room; a few parents are in the check-in line. Their routine is a bit predictable—they give their name and their child's name, some provide a state ID or state driver's license in order to retrieve a locker key to store items that are not permitted during visits, such as keys and cellular telephones. The monotony of this routine is only obvious when a new parent is coming through the line for the first time. Their facial expressions and questions are clear indications that they're attempting to make sense of how the facility operates. (Researcher field notes, 6/29/14)

### *Lack of autonomy*

The nature of juvenile detention requires youth offenders to relinquish their freedom of choice. As juvenile offenders come to realize that they are unable to make basic choices for themselves, they become keenly aware that the youth development specialists and other officials responsible for their care have complete control over every aspect of their detainment. This control often takes the form of deciding youth offenders' daily schedules, behaviors, and norms. Participants in this study expressed their dissatisfaction with the limited range of decisions they were able to make while being detained. Not having a choice to decide simple matters like their attire, what and when to eat, or when to shower (participants were allowed one shower per day) was challenging. Before being admitted to the detention center, many youths had affirmed their individuality through clothing. The imposed structures of juvenile detention, however, required them to abandon their individuality in exchange for uniformed attire that included blue pants with an elastic band and a matching blue t-shirt with "JTDC" (Juvenile Temporary Detention Center) monogrammed in white letters across the backs of their shirts. It is typical that individuals who are accused of committing crimes are restricting the privileges they once enjoyed before being detained. Even the residents' footwear was limited to sandals or Crocs worn with socks. The clothing residents had to wear while detained was undoubtedly a far cry from the trendy fashion items that youths had been accustomed to wearing in their neighborhoods and schools. That's detention and the young men never rejected to what was deemed as a norm for detainees.

Some participants viewed their lack of autonomy within the imposed structure as a form of control. Take, as an example, Jermaine's response about his condition from being detained as "tired, cause I don't like being controlled" (Jermaine, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14). Similarly

to Jermaine, Reggie alluded to the idea of control when discussing treatment by staff. He suggested, “I be good most days but some days the staff be tweaking on me” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14).

Despite the limited choices permitted to the detained youths in this study, Reggie found that defiance was an effective strategy for regaining his freedom to make decisions. Although aware of the consequences of negative behavior, Reggie seemed to relish being able to make decisions that were not penalized by the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. Many youths enjoyed getting off the pod during the day, for example, either to attend school or to participate in physical activities, but they staff allowed them to select not to attend school or to move off the pod without penalizing them for those choices. For Reggie, however, making decisions by defying the structures that staff imposed on him was a way for him to counter the lack of autonomy he felt while detained. A conversation I had with Reggie during an interview highlights his defiance. At the beginning of each interview with Reggie, I asked him how his week of detainment had been. As we sat in the music class chatting while the other young men created their music, Reggie’s responses were generally negative. He often talked about how staff members were constantly getting on him for his behavior, but during this interview Reggie was more forthcoming about how he would resist the structured environment as a way to regain his autonomy:

JT:           How often do you get to make your own decisions while in jail?  
 Reggie:       I make my own decisions all day, every day!

*[I made a note in my jottings during the interview about how the tone of Reggie’s voice was declarative, and how his posture became more erect as a way to exude confidence.]*

JT:           Oh really. So, are you saying that *you* can decide what time to get up in the mornings?

Reggie: I can, cause if they [the staff] ain't trying to let me stay sleep then I refuse to come out of my room.  
JT: You what?  
Reggie: I refuse. If I wanna go to sleep then I'm gonna do something to go in my room.

Reggie, Interview #2, 8/10/14

For Reggie, the phrase “I’m gonna do something” meant he would engage in behaviors that warranted staff to leave him in his room to cool down.

Tyrek expressed that he felt a lack of autonomy because he was not able to see family members more often. Not seeing family made him unhappy, but he mentioned several times throughout the study that he was making the best of this difficult emotional and mental challenge. In the following interview transcript, Tyrek expresses a desire to offer more assistance to his family; however, his status as a detainee hinders his ability to help more. Tyrek mentioned that “it’s challenging [in the detention center]. But you feel me, I’m handling it all right (Tyrek, Interview #3, 9/28/14). I asked him to clarify what he meant by the word challenging to which he replied, “Not being home. Not having your freedom. Not being able to do anything about it (Tyrek, Interview #3, 9/28/14).

The participants in this study were not alone in their views of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center being a place where they experienced a lack of autonomy. As a researcher and teacher working in this setting, I also experienced a lack of autonomy during my time in the facility. On multiple occasions, I recorded how challenging it was not having more autonomy there. Despite having an official clearance memo in my possession and being recognized by staff that knew me from the prolonged time I spent in the facility, I often was unable to easily gain clearance into the facility each week or to assure that the music class began at the designated start time, to name two examples. The facility’s rules made it so that I often had

to wait for an officer to escort me to the music room or even to escort me out of the facility when the music class ended. In my teaching experiences in other settings, I have typically had sufficient time to set up the classroom and organize the materials I would use with students. In the juvenile detention center, since facility staff members were unable to escort me to the music room promptly after my arrival, my music sessions often started later than the designated time and my set up time was limited. This is how I put it in my notes:

The wall clock near the visitation desk reads 3:05pm and I realize that I'm now five minutes behind the time designated for me to monitor the music session. I arrived at 2:35pm and have been waiting to be escorted to the music room since that time. In a good scenario, I'd be setting up the music lab around 2:30pm and have enough time to breathe before the young men come to the lab for their 3pm music session. Today the class not only started late, but I learned that the music session had to end a few minutes early so the young men could attend other matters back upstairs on their living pod. If there's one thing that I've learned over my time working in juvenile detention it is that nothing in this place goes according to plan.

Narrative crafted from researcher field notes, 6/29/14

3pm comes and goes and I'm thinking about how my correspondence with the staff assigned to the boys in my study seems null and void at this point in the project. The staff that had previously informed me that all I needed to do was to have the officer working at the visitation check-in desk to call and they would come to retrieve me. Each week, I've followed those instructions, but the staff assigned to escort me to the music classroom never arrives before my 3pm music session times. Today is no different, as the staff member comes through the secured door to retrieve me at 3:20pm. I feel hopeless that there's nothing I can do to assure that start and stop times are honored.

Narrative crafted from researcher field notes, 7/13/14

During my time in the waiting area with parents before visitations, parents also expressed dismay regarding their limited autonomy when visiting the facility. The choice about appropriate attire to wear during visitations, deciding exact visitation times and days, and providing care for residents were decisions left to facility staff with seemingly minimal regard to families' needs and schedules. During the general conversations with parents that we engaged in during our wait,

many families expressed concerns that they were unable to provide more assistance to their children beyond the weekly visitations and depositing money into their commissary account to purchase the supplies they needed:

While waiting for clearance to teach the music session, Gina, a parent who sat near me in the waiting area, expressed concerns that visits can be problematic, especially for parents who have to work on Sundays. She mentioned that visitations don't start at the designated time, and even staff decisions about which of two groups to place parents in for visits seem arbitrary. During today's visit, Gina was particularly frustrated because she had to work later that day and the staff charged with deciding which parents to place into the two visitation groups had placed her in the second round of Sunday visitations, a decision that could potentially make Gina late to the Sunday job she worked.

Researcher field notes, 7/13/14

That conversation with a parent who sat near me in the waiting area highlighted her frustration with the facility that limited her rights as a parent nor did the facility honor her designated visitation start times.

### Detention as a Place of Boredom

Participants viewed juvenile detention as a place filled with extreme boredom. Despite the numerous activities that filled their time in detention, participants felt that boredom was a key experience of their incarceration. For many youths, boredom was a direct outcome of the routines the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center employed to maintain order and organization in the facility, and these young people talked often about the boredom they experienced as result of the repetitive nature of juvenile detention. Trenton's two reflections below provide a window into his association of juvenile detention with boredom. When asked, "How was your experience of detention this week," Trenton responded:

“It’s [juvenile detention] been normal. Boring. Wake up the same, eat the same, do the same things.”

Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14

In this reflection, Trenton arguably seems to suggest that the everyday activities such as waking up and eating, to name a few of his daily activities, were so common and normal that he no longer viewed them as enjoyable activities.

A youth participant named Damonté expressed similarly unfavorable sentiments about detention as a place of boredom. When asked how his week in the facility had been, Damonté indicated that “not too much [has happened], just the same thing everyday” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 9/28/14). Early in the study period, Damonté had already mentioned, “it’s [the detention center] boring cause there ain’t nothing to do” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14). Damonté often asked me during our music class if we were going to have music more often. He seemed genuinely disappointed when I reminded him that our music class only met once a week (Research field notes, 7/13/14).

When they conceived of it as imposed structure, youth participants viewed juvenile detention negatively and affirmed their belief that the monotonous nature of the routines had turned fun and enjoyable activities into lackluster events. The focus group interview revealed, for example, how fun activities such as playing cards and watching television had become uninteresting to them because these activities were common occurrences in their day-to-day routine (Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). Despite an array of seemingly fun activities that occurred each day—playing cards, school, eating, watching television—Gutiérrez commented that “there’s no fun time in here” (Gutiérrez, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). Reggie also emphasized how being detained was boring for him despite recreational activities he engaged in

each week:

Reggie: Ain't nothing else to do.  
 JT: Nothing else to do? What about all the activities you get to do like watching television and playing cards?  
 Reggie: Cards get boring after a while. We can watch TV everyday. Even that gets boring.

Reggie, Interview #1, 7/20/14

During the focus group interview, many youths became impatient with answering multiple questions rather than being allowed to compose music [although I had no other choice but to conduct interviews during the music time due to the staff shortage], an activity that the detained youths granted access to the focus group had all participated in. Many youths indicated that having to answer questions was boring to them (Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). As early as when they are first admitted as residents in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, youths become accustomed to answering questions posed by the detention staff and officers, medical and mental health professionals, and teachers working in the facility. Apparently, participants were not fans of answering questions even about an activity they preferred, music-making:

Enrique: How many questions?

[Enrique looks over my shoulder at the list of questions on my interview protocol. He begins counting the numbers next to each question as a way to gauge the length of the remaining portion of the interview. We were only 20 minutes into the interview when Enrique asked his question, but even I felt that the interview seemed to drag somewhat.]

JT: Just a few, Enrique. You've already answered most of these questions.

[I proceed to ask the next question on my interview protocol. Enrique's body language and non-verbal expressions where he crosses his arms and slowly slouches lower in the blue metal chair suggests that he has become a bit tired of sitting and answering questions.]

Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14

### Detention as a Place that Diminishes Personal Value and Self-worth

Many participants in this study hinted at the idea that the experience of incarceration diminished their sense of self-worth and personal value as individuals. Detainees are typically denied their basic privacy rights and lose access to the privileges enjoyed by the free population. Take, for instance, the fact that the detained were housed in small living quarters made of concrete and cinder blocks, were permitted minimal decorations, had to walk in the hallways in single-file lines with their hands crossed behind them to maintain order, and were under the command of correctional officers who were responsible for holding them accountable for their behaviors. The denial of these rights and privileges had an effect on how participants viewed themselves.

Youths' interactions with the guards and other staff were generally positive. I observed staff working hard at a tough job to ensure the well-being of the young men charged to their care. Despite what I perceived, some youths attributed their feelings of being devalued during incarceration to mistreatment by staff. Reggie, for instance, referred to his dislike of the way staff treated him and eluded to a possible connection between their behavior and his feelings of self-worth:

“Because I made level four and talked to some homies. But the staff been tweaking (tweaking is a cultural term meaning annoying behavior).”  
Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/20/14

“Because I be good most days, but some days they [detention staff] be tweaking on me.”  
Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14

Anecdotally, Reggie mentioned how frustrated and tired he had become of staff treatment. He

mentioned that staff members were always correcting him for the smallest things in his opinion: His pants hung too long; his responses to staff were too curt; the volume of his voice was too loud. Reggie expressed that the constant reprimands that staff directed at him made him feel less than a person at times, as if he was a “true criminal” (Researcher field notes, 8/10/14), and worthy of the punishment he felt he endured while incarcerated.

Some participants indicated that they felt infantilized and that the degraded conditions under which they lived served as reminders of their stigmatized social status as prisoners. Reggie compared the harsh conditions of incarceration to that of a daycare center, suggesting that he didn’t view his status in the facility as being that of a normal citizen:

- JT: What is being in jail like for you?  
 Reggie: It ain’t good. You gotta wake up at a certain times and all the extra stuff that comes along with it.  
 JT: So, if you were rating what life is like being in this facility then what would you say?  
 Reggie: Daycare.  
 JT: Daycare? Why do you say that about this place?  
 Reggie: Because they be tweaking on us.

Reggie, Interview #2, 8/10/14

### **Summary of Research Question 1**

Findings revealed that youth participants held negative feelings about their experience of incarceration. These negative experiences were revealed in their ratings for incarceration and the qualitative descriptions they provided as explanation for these ratings. Several themes emerged from the data. First, youth participants viewed the context of incarceration as a place of imposed structure, and generally accepted that this imposition was the norm of prison life. Participants conceived the routines that structured their daily schedules and became a way to maintain order and organization in the facility as a way to limit the basic rights and personal freedoms they had

enjoyed before being imprisoned. Understandably, these participants viewed this limitation of rights as a condition of their incarceration. In addition to the routines, participants viewed their lack of autonomy for making decisions as imposed structure within the facility.

A second theme that emerged in these findings was that participants viewed their experience of incarceration as a place of extreme boredom. This boredom is set against the backdrop of an array of educational, social, recreational, and general activities that participants were involved in daily. Despite their involvement in these activities, participants expressed dissatisfaction that the repetitive nature of these activities had limited appeal and caused the interest that participants may have had with these activities to wane.

A final theme was that many participants in this study hinted at the idea that the experience of incarceration had diminished their sense of self-worth and personal value as individuals. This decline seemed to be the result of the denial of basic rights and privileges that came with participants' statuses as detainees. Because some participants viewed incarceration negatively, they ultimately viewed themselves as deserving of the negative conditions in which they lived. What follows in the next section are findings related to research question 2.

#### Research Question 2

##### **What role, if any, does creating rap music play in how detained youths experience incarceration?**

The main themes that emerged from this question were: creating rap music as a positive and enjoyable experience, creating rap music as a creative outlet, creating rap music as a means of connection, and creating rap music as a form of behavior modification.

An African American female officer who was working the security desk questions me about the bags because she notices the microphone and headphone chords that the young men use to create music. Her question catches me off guard because I typically have proceeded through the checkpoint without officers making any eye contact with me at all, let alone a conversation. After informing her that I used the microphones and headphones in a music class I teach with the detained young men, we share a brief laugh about how she doesn't typically see such items go through the security monitor. The female officer nods her head and mentions how much these young men need more opportunities like the music composition project while in detention. I told her I couldn't agree more and hoped that the young men felt the same about the potential of making music in this setting (crafted from researcher field notes, 6/29/14).

The ending statement in the above epigraph reflects both my hunch and belief that the opportunity to create music may be a positive intervention for how detained youth experienced the condition of incarceration. While I was grateful for the officer's affirmation of this work, I was more curious about how the participants viewed the opportunity to create music, and possible roles the activity may have on their experiences of being detained. To answer this question and determine the role creating rap music may have played in how detained youths experienced their incarceration, multiple data sources including researcher field notes, interviews with participants, and participants' reflections and quantitative responses on the Daily Reflection Sheet completed after each music class were triangulated. Four themes emerged: creating rap music as a positive and enjoyable experience, creating rap music as a creative outlet, creating rap music as a means of connection, and creating rap music as a form of behavior modification.

### Creating Rap Music's Role as a Positive and Enjoyable Experience

Participants' perceptions of creating music during detainment were generally positive across all data sources. Take, for instance, the quantitative data collected from the Daily Reflection Sheet they completed at the end of each music session. I updated<sup>16</sup> the "Daily Reflection Sheet" on 7/13/14 to better assess participants' perceptions of the first two research questions set for this study. On the updated form, participants used a Likert-type answer choice—with 1 for Positive (good, fun, interesting); 2 for Neutral ("okay," "all right"); 3 for Negative (bad, boring)—to respond to the question, "How was your experience of creating music today?"<sup>17</sup> Scores across all participants' responses to this question were counted during the rating period, revealing that youths in this study overwhelmingly rated their experience of creating music during detainment as a 1, a positive (good, fun, interesting) experience.

The descriptive statistics, although not surprising, obtained from the quantitative data revealed that participants viewed their experience of creating music during detainment favorably, as evident in the mean scores among participants' ratings for creating music gathered during the

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<sup>16</sup> I revised the "Daily Reflection Sheet" to generate numeric data between 7/13 and 9/28 of the study period. Before 7/13, I surmised that completing the initial "Daily Reflection Sheet" had become pro forma for some participants and, as a result, their responses became standard and perfunctory, providing little in the way of information, data, or insights to me as the teacher. Because the previous "Daily Reflection Sheet" only asked participants to provide descriptions of their compositions, compositional plans, and technical issues with the software program, no ratings or qualitative descriptions to explain participants' ratings were collected before 7/13 of the study period.

<sup>17</sup> The Daily Reflection Sheet also included a question about participants' experience of being detained. Results from that question are explored in the first research question at the beginning of this chapter.

rating period<sup>18</sup>. As Table 4.3 reveals, the mean score of all participants' ratings for creating music across the rating period were positive (*Mean*: 1.34). In addition, Table 4.3 shows that these ratings for creating music were consistently positive across the rating period, and ranged from 1 to 1.75.

Table 4.3  
*Average Ratings for Creating Music Each Music Session Week*

Date (and week) of Music Session	# of Participants	Participants' Ratings of Creating Music	Average Ratings of Creating Music
7/13/14 (wk 6)	n=6	1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2	1.16
7/20/14 (7)	n=4	1, 1, 1, 1	1
7/27/14 (8)	n=4	1, 1, 2, 1	1.25
8/10/14 (10)	n=5	1, 1, 1, 1, 2	1.2
8/31/14 (13)	n=4	2, 2, 1, 2	1.75
9/28/14 (14)	n=3	2, 1, 2	1.66

**Average: 1.34**

Participants were also asked to provide a qualitative description to explain their ratings on the Daily Activities Sheet. Table 4.4 provides an exhaustive list across the reporting period for all participants. The list starts with the most recent music session and goes in descending order.

<sup>18</sup> The rating period occurred from 7/13 to 9/28 of the entire study period. This selected period of time reflects updates to the Daily Reflection Sheet to better assess participant responses to the research questions set for the study.

Table 4.4  
*Perceptions and Ratings of Creating Music During Detainment*

<u>Description about the Perception of Creating Music</u>	<u>Assigned Rating</u>
“It was a very good class.” (Roosevelt, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)	1
“Because I got to get a lot of stuff done” Otis, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)	1
Cause I was mad when I first came in here but I am feeling a lot better now than before.” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)	2
“Everything went good today.” (Tyrek, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)	1
“It made my day better” (Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14)	1
“Because I didn’t make a whole beat” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14)	2
“Cause I have something written down and hope I can record it soon.” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14)	2
“Because I got to do something I wanted.” (Otis, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14)	
“It was okay because I was focused on my music.” (Tyrek, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14)	2
“It was alright but I really don’t like the music I made.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 9/28/14)	2
“It was okay and I worked hard.” (Tyrek, Daily Reflection Sheet, 9/28/14)	1
“Cause this [making music on the computer is something I like now.” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 9/28/14)	2
“I got to perform live, although not long enough.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14)	2

- “I’ve been having a good time creating music.” (Tyrek, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14) 1
- “Good, I had a good time chopping my songs.” (Jermaine, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14) 1
- “Got more songs [instrumentals and samples] to help me with my plan.” (Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14) 1
- “Because I heard some new music and got some new ideas for my beats.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/20/14) 1
- “It was good. I got some new songs and finished a beat.” (Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/20/14) 1
- “I’m mixing songs like a DJ.” (Jermaine, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/20/14) 1
- “I had a good time today.” (Tyrek, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/20/14) 1
- “Because it’s the first time I got a lot done.” (Otis, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14) 1
- “Cause it makes me fee so happy that I don’t have to be up there [the pod] all day.” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14) 2
- “Today was good. I’m about to remix a beat like a DJ.” (Jermaine, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14) 1
- “Creating music keeps me relaxed.” (Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14) 1
- “It was ok because I got a chance to start my new beat.” (Tyrek, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14) 1
- “Because I made some good beats. And, I got to hear some good music.” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14) 1

During the final two weeks of the study period, participants assigned more ratings of 2 to their experience of creating music than in previous weeks where they assigned a rating of 1, a positive experience. With the exception of Reggie who explained that his rating of 2 was because “I didn’t make a whole beat” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14), and “It [the music session] was all right but I don’t like the music I made,” (Reggie, Daily Reflection Sheet, 9/28/14), participants’ qualitative descriptions explaining their experience of creating music remained consistently positive during the final two weeks of the study period. What follows are themes that emerged for this question.

As I described in the first section of this chapter, a range of activities structured the daily schedules of the detained youth participants. These activities could be categorized as educational, extra-curricular, social, recreational, and general (such as family visits). Despite being varied, the routine nature of these activities limited their appeal among youth participants. The repetitive quality of recreational activities caused many participants’ enjoyment of them to wane. Music-making in the context of detention, on the other hand, was an activity that youths enjoyed. Among the multiple activities occurring in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, youth participants in this study consistently viewed their music-making favorably, expressing how much they enjoyed creating music in the lab; these participants perceived the experience as a fun activity for them. Similar to research question 1, youth participants were asked to rate their experience of creating music using the same Likert-type response options. On these Daily Reflection Sheets, the ratings participants assigned to their music-creating experience and the qualitative descriptions that explained these ratings were overwhelmingly positive indications of their enjoyment with the activity. Take, as examples, the

following qualitative descriptions of the experience of creating music that youths provided. As reported previously in these findings, participants responded to the following question at the end of each music session: “How was your experience of creating music today?” Similar to the favorable responses for creating music found in quantitative data, qualitative feedback revealed that participants also viewed creating music positively: “I’ve been having a good time creating music” (Tyrek, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/27/14). My observations of Tyrek during each music session indicate that he’s extremely focused on his work. He doesn’t show much expression in his face so reading that he’s enjoying making music is an encouraging indication of his time in the lab. For Damonté, simply being off the pod seemed to be a positive activity and a welcomed change to his daily routine: “It [creating music in the lab] makes me so happy that I don’t have to be upstairs all day” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14). Damonté, and many of his peers, talked about how bored they had become with the recurrent nature of the detention center routines.

Several participants described the activity of *listening* to music while in the lab and while on their living pods as another form of enjoyment. These youth participants favored listening because they were permitted to choose music they preferred without censorship. While IRB protocols and the staff members at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center censored the types of music participants rapped about while in the lab, youths affirmed that staff members actually did not police their music listening preferences. The ability to listen to preferred music was important to these study participants, especially since they viewed incarceration as a place of structure and control.

Many youth mentioned that potential music making had to redirect their mood from negative feelings to positive associations. Damonté, as an example, stated that at the end of one session he was “Good. Cause I was mad before coming down here to the lab, but I am feeling a lot better than I was” (Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14). Damonté had already expressed disdain that there never seemed to be enough time to create music, further emphasizing how important making music during incarceration was for his emotional state. Similar to Damonté, Trenton also believed that coming to the lab was helpful because “coming here makes my day better” (Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14). Otis connected his feelings for coming to the lab to his ability to regain some autonomy while in the detention center. He stated, “because I got to do something I wanted” (Otis, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/31/14).

The positive responses above are clear evidence that detained youths viewed creating music in favorable ways during their detainment, namely as an extension to routine activities, as Damonté suggests in the first response, and as a way to alter their mood, as Damonté and Trenton expressed in the second two responses.

The reasons that youth participants gave for why they enjoyed creating music varied among them, and related mostly to the value and outcomes they attributed to the compositional activity:

- JT: So, are you trying to embody the style of rap music that you listen to?  
 Reggie: What you mean?  
 JT: Say, for instance, that I compared the songs you make to other artists who have already made it. Does your song compare to theirs in quality?  
 Reggie: Yeah, it would be if I really tried. But, I just do it for fun.  
 JT: So, you’re saying that being able to create music is just an outlet for fun?  
 Reggie: Yeah, I just enjoy doing it.

Reggie, Interview #1, 7/20/14

Tyrek also said that he enjoyed creating music for the sheer pleasure it gave him. Unlike Reggie and Tyrek, who enjoyed making music in the lab in a general sense, Jermaine attributed his enjoyment of music making to career aspirations. Because he considered becoming a rap artist as a possible career choice, Jermaine's enjoyment for creating music in the lab was connected to his belief that the activity provided him a necessary training ground to experiment with his skills as a rap artist (Jermaine, Interview #1, 7/20/14).

Youths overwhelmingly enjoyed creating music during their detainment. Not only did they express their desire to create music, they were equally vocal when music sessions were canceled because of staff shortages or when interviews cut into their time for composing music. Their enjoyment of composing was often noted. Take, for example, how some youths found the process of being accepted as research participants problematic and became disgruntled that the length of the process lessened the amount of time they would have to create music (Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). As another example, I recorded in my field notes (Researcher field notes, 6/15/14) after the session was canceled, my concern with how not having that music session might potentially affect the youth participants. I think about how the participants may be feeling about not having today's music class. I recall from the focus group interview the previous week that many youth participants mentioned that having the music class was both important and helpful to them while being detained. Reggie, for example, connected his class participation to his behavior level. Enrique talked about how the music class gave all the young men something to do beyond their daily routines, and an activity that helped them to think about what life might

be like outside of the facility. These young men continue to report their time in the music lab as a positive activity.

During the first session, the focus group participants overwhelmingly affirmed how engaging with music, particularly rap music, was an important activity for them while incarcerated. Creating rap music was a favorable activity among participants because rap music was a genre they preferred and with which they identified. The focus group generated a list of reasons for why they preferred rap music and creating the genre during detainment: they all indicated that rap music and its lyrical content was a genre to which they could relate. Reggie, for instance, affirmed preferences for some rap music styles because he could relate to the themes found in the genre and was able to connect those themes to life in his community:

Like in here [the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center], it ain't nothing to do [but] think about being in jail. But when we come down here and make these rap songs, we can talk about the block we lived on and other stuff we like. So, although our homies ain't here [in the detention center], it's like we're with them through the rap music we make.

Reggie, Interview #1, 7/20/14

For many participants, the rap music genre was preferable because it had a way of encouraging them while being detained, an environment they considered dismal (Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). Two young men, Gutiérrez and Jermaine, affirmed how important creating rap music was for them during detention. They indicated that the opportunity to create rap music was extremely powerful because “everybody be stressed out [while incarcerated]” (Gutiérrez, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14) and “sometimes you be feeling down and the [rap] music make you feel better about stuff” (Jermaine, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). The youths also mentioned other reasons participants gave for why creating rap music while being detained was favorable:

- JT: So, will you tell me more about why being able to listen to rap music or creating it is important while being detained in the detention center?
- Gutiérrez: Because you can use it to talk about what you're going through.
- Trenton: It help[s] me express myself.
- Jermaine: It can give you something positive to do with your time.
- Enrique: Keep your mind off stuff.

From Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14

### Creating Rap Music's Role as a Creative Outlet

#### *Creative Outlet for Mental Escape*

Participants viewed creating rap music an outlet for creative expression. In many ways, creating music (and editing it), and writing lyrics provided participants with a platform to express a range of narrative and compositional interests, such as rapping about the issues most relevant to them and creating instrumentals as stand-alone music pieces or foundations for lyrics. This outlet was extremely valuable to participants who believed that showing outward signs of emotion could be viewed as a weakness in a juvenile detention center. Take, for instance, that in my conversations with Tyrek and Jermaine that these young men affirmed that despite missing their parents and families that they had to be strong and not let on to these emotions (Researcher field notes, 8/10/14). To this end, youths viewed music and creating it as a safe ground for their emotions. Such a safe ground was evident in Reggie who used music as a way to transport himself out of the confines of detention to a place of musical freedom. Take, as an example of Reggie used rap music as an outlet of escapism from the confines of detainment. Reggie was rapping along with a voice on an instrumental. His body movements and facial expression, coupled with his rapping, resembled a rap artist's performance on stage. Reggie was holding an imaginary microphone in one hand while simultaneously waving his other hand to the left and

then to the right as if to help him communicate the text of his rap more clearly and definitely. Reggie performed his rap in the direction of Trenton, his peer resident and friend, who was currently sitting at music station number 10.

Trenton doesn't appear to notice the rap Reggie was performing next to him. I catch Reggie looking at me through his peripheral vision. I wondered, for a moment, if Reggie was looking to garner a bit of attention for his performance, a hope that his imaginary audience would turn into an actual audience of inmate peers. I also wondered whether Reggie's behavior was merely signs that he was enjoying the music-making moment.

As Trenton got up to move back to his usual music station, Reggie continued to rap to an imaginary audience, only this time he changed the song and was whispering these lyrics. The song had a few curse words and I wanted to stop Reggie to remind him that songs had to be "radio ready." However, I was so intrigued about what was going on for him in this moment. Later, I asked Reggie to recall what that moment was like for him, to which he said he was "in the zone"; he didn't feel like he was actually detained while in that zone (Researcher field notes, 7/27/14). His response explained clearly what seemed to be so obvious. Creating rap music in the lab was a form of escapism for Reggie and others. In that moment, Reggie is fully immersed into the music that blasts inside his headphones. In many ways, that moment of creating music, listening to it, or even performing it to an imaginary audience becomes a way of transporting him from the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center to the outside world, to the stage perhaps.

The idea of escapism was seen in other youth and could explain the extreme focus and diligence they exerted while working on various music compositions. Many participants write

lyrics at their workstations while several youths search for instrumentals on their computers. They all seem to be in another place, which I mentioned often in my notes. A few rap on music they began in previous music sessions. The flurry of activity occurring in the music lab is quite fascinating to observe, further supporting the notion of this form of outlet as a mental escape from the brick and mortar of the detention center. I observe Jermaine a few minutes before interrupting him for an interview. He's focused on his creative output of music using a chopping technique that he's learned from another teacher. Jermaine informs me that he uses the musical typing feature to chop together two separate instrumental beats. He explains:

I'm just mixing these two songs together right now. Basically, I'm just taking parts of the two songs I like the most and putting them together in this new song.

Jermaine, Interview #1, 7/20/14

As he demonstrates, he appears to go into "the zone" that Reggie referenced, and his facial expressions suggests that he's doing more than simply concentrating. Jeremiah later explains:

Yea. I just be go off how I feel when I'm chopping. I have one instrumental on one key and the other instrumental programed into the other key [on the computer keyboard]. And, then I just start going at it and switching back and forth between the two songs.

Jermaine, Interview #1, 7/20/14

### *Profanity and Lyrics as a Form of Creative Outlet*

Curse words and other phrases that might be considered inappropriate for detainees and youths are one of the primary ways youth participants expressed their identities. Participants affirmed that curse words were common cultural markers in the rap music they listen to and favored. The youths believed that using curse words and other expletives in their music compositions was a way to create music that was culturally authentic and valid within their youth communities. Each music session, youth participants sought to recreate music products that

mirrored their favorite artists or music that resembled the music to which they listened and identified. Curse words and other expletives were markers of their music. Despite our agreement that curse words should be used in poetic and artistic ways, youth participants used them as a type of everyday language in the music, rather than words from which to shy away and to curb. Once, Mr. Burns, the Team Leader responsible for the youth participants in the study, came back to the music to retrieve the youths and escort them back upstairs to their living quarters. Because he arrived earlier than our scheduled end time for the class, Mr. Burns sat in a chair at the door so that he could observe the youths in the music session and have an eye on the happenings within the hallway. Damonté, one of the participants who enjoyed creating music, but rarely got much done, is rapping aloud at his music station. A series of curse words and other inappropriate words proceeded from his mouth—first ‘nigga,’ then ‘bitch,’ followed by “fuck.” I began walking toward Damonté to remind him of the restrictions of music being “radio-ready” when Mr. Burns beat me to it: Damonté, watch the language! Damonté doesn’t say anything but gives a smirk and shakes his head. The first guard that had been with the young men for the majority of the class period had already reminded Damonté that he wasn’t allowed to use curse words, to which he replied, “We can use curse words in *our* music. *Our* music has curse words. [The emphasis is my interpretation of what Damonté was saying.] The volume of Damonté’s voice grew louder as he made this declaration. I didn’t say anything to confirm or deny whether curse words were permitted or not but simply touched Damonté’s back with my hand and said matter-of-factly, “Damonté, don’t fuss back.” He stopped and got back to his work (crafted from researcher field notes, 6/29/14).

Damonté's response spoke volumes by affirming that his music used curse words. It was a part of the identity and social fabric of the music. To deny Damonté's access to using these words to deny him access to his own music culture and musical practice.

Similar to Damonté's beliefs regarding his music, several songs include curse words, sexual innuendos, and gang codes. As a way to protect these participants from having their music used as circumstantial evidence against their court cases, the Institutional Review Boards at both Northwestern University and the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center approved this study only under the condition that safeguards for this study would not allow them to use sexual innuendos and gang language in their music. Despite these safeguards, some of these young men still recorded music that contained these inappropriate constructs. To honor that agreement, I have made a decision not to print their lyrics verbatim, but rather, to provide an overview of the types of ideas they conveyed.

- Lyrics about types of guns (e.g., glocks)
- Lyrics about types of alcoholic drinks
- Lyrics about types of weeds
- Lyrics about women as sexual property and love conquests
- Lyrics about violence to other gang members
- Lyrics about the disdain of law enforcement

*Creating as a Tool for Resistance*

Jermaine, Reggie, and Damonté believed that creating rap music afforded them personal empowerment and resistance against the authority. Jermaine, for instance, highlighted that creating rap music gave him a way to take back the individual control he felt was lost while being detained in the facility. When asked what having an opportunity to create rap music during his detainment meant for him, Jermaine acknowledged the following:

‘Cause in this type of environment you’re constantly being controlled all the time. They tell you what to do, basically. So it’s nice to listen to something you want to listen to or create what you want to create. Nobody is telling you what you should create so you can express yourself like you feel.

Jermaine, Interview #1, 7/20/14

Although a subtle resistance, Jermaine views his ability to make decisions about his compositional output and what he listens to in the lab as a way to resist the control the staff have over him in other parts of the detention center:

They say we ain’t suppose to listen to certain kinds of music but I listen to a lot of stuff while I’m in my room on the pod. Nobody says anything to me or try to stop me. I just laugh to myself cause I’m doing what I want to do even if they say I’m not suppose to.

Jermaine, Interview #1, 7/20/14

Youth participants come to the music session with notebooks that the mental health staff provides to them. The youths also indicate that the notebooks can be purchased for \$2 at the commissary. During the focus group interview conducted at the beginning of the study, the participants specified that they use these notebooks to pen lyrics so they won’t forget them. They bring these notebooks filled with countless pages of lyrics to the music session each week. Many participants indicated that they wrote lyrics everyday in their rooms because writing was one way to pass time during detainment. Since writing lyrics was so common in the facility, I was curious about the content of their writing. During the focus group interview, I attempted to dig

deeper into the narrative themes found in the music they chose to write themselves. However, their responses were a bit indirect:

JT: What kinds of things do young men in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center typically write about?

Enrique: Whatever is in their mind.

[The young men were silent for a moment, appearing almost hesitant to answer]

Gutiérrez: Sometimes they just don't wanna share.

Trenton: I feel like you know the answer to that question. [he laughs]

JT: No, I don't, Trenton.

Trenton: I'm talking about what people write about when they write lyrics.

JT: Yeah, I'm just curious about whether there are certain topics that people write about, you know?

[Trenton just looked at me like we both understood some secret code, although I did not know any secret code shared among us.]

Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14

I did not fully understand in that moment any secret code, but later remembered that I had informed these guys during the assent process that occurred moments before the interview not to talk about gang culture or threats. In addition, the guard charged to their care sat in the back of the room while the guys interviewed with me and while they composed their music. I did not know this guard personally and wasn't as familiar with him as I was other staff members whom I'd met during my time at the facility. I wondered if perhaps the young men did not feel as comfortable talking about their music because of distrust with the guard.

This silence about narrative themes found in their lyrics was common among participants. Youths did not readily talk about their lyrics in any deep way, at least, beyond their peer groups. For many youths, these lyrics were sacred because they reflected their artistry, identities, desires, and follies. Sharing their lyrics with outsiders risked exposure of the inward

parts of these young men, a part that many youths guarded intentionally in detention, as evidenced in the following field note I recorded after an interaction with Reggie. Reggie had been writing lyrics for most of the class. He was so focused on writing lyrics that he didn't talk as much as he'd done in previous sessions. He also wasn't his usually jovial self. I walked over to Reggie to get a peek at the text of his writing out of curiosity about his lyrics and their subject matter. As soon as Reggie saw me near his computer station, he used his arms to cover his music. He also gave me a look that suggested that I dared not try to view his writing. When I told him that I simply was interested in what he was writing about he responded, "You'll hear it later when we save it." (Researcher field notes, 6/29/14). Reggie did not record those lyrics and took the paper with him. I got the impression that he simply wanted to get his writing to a certain level of personal satisfaction, and wasn't quite ready for me to push back and encourage him to go deeper, as I had done before.

The members of the focus group were a bit hesitant to discuss the narrative themes in their rap compositions. Reggie, however, was more forthcoming about the topics found in his music during a one-on-one interview we conducted:

- JT: Are there messages in the rap music you create?  
Reggie: Yeah.  
JT: Can you tell me what those messages are?  
Reggie: It's all gang-related, man.  
JT: Are those gang messages a part of a particular rap music style that you listen to?  
Reggie: Not really a particular style. Just about shooting and stuff.

Reggie Interview #1, 7/20/14

Reggie never mentioned the names of the victims of these shootings in his music nor did I ask Reggie to expound on the topic of shootings because staff members were in the room with us during the interview and having this conversation could be incriminating.

### Creating Music's Role as Connection

#### *Connection to Peers and Communities*

The extra-musical themes that the youths ascribed to their music helped them to connect to their families and their communities:

JT: So, what is it exactly about rap music that helps people while in jail?  
 Jermaine: You get to feel like you're a 'lil bit part of the outside when you can hear it or make it. It's one of the few ways to stay connected.

Jermaine, Interview #1, 7/20/14

Reggie created an instrumental composition using the premade loops of music that are part of the Garageband software. While listening to the composition with Reggie, I noticed that the sound of the music reflected characteristics of the funk music genre, and I was curious about how a youth of his age became aware of these earlier musical styles:

JT: Reggie, you kind of have some old soul in your bones, eh? This piece sounds a bit like funk music to me. Where does your reference for this type of music come from? How do you know about these older music styles?  
 Reggie: My grandma.  
 JT: Oh really? How so?  
 Reggie: She be listening to a lot of old music. I listen to it with her sometimes, and some of it I be liking.

*[Reggie and I share a brief laugh at the thought of him liking something other than the music of his generation.]*

- JT: Do you get to see your grandma during the family visits?  
 Reggie: Nah. She don't come visit me cause she can't. Only parents are able to come.  
 JT: So, were you thinking about your grandma when you created this piece?  
 Reggie: Yeah. Was just inspired by my grandma and all the old music she be listening to.  
 JT: What would you say that music does for people?  
 Reggie: It connects them.

*[Reggie informed me that he was 16 years old. His grandmother was 66 years old.]*

- JT: Interesting. You and your grandma are in two different generations but you're making music that sounds like the type heard in her generation.  
 Reggie: I guess the music she listens to stays in my mind even though I don't like some of it. It just inspires me to do stuff.  
 JT: I wonder what your grandma would think if she heard your music?  
 Reggie: She'd probably say the music sounds like one of them songs she listens to. Then, we'd both start dancing.

*[Reggie and I both share a big laugh at the mental image of he and his grandma]*

Reggie, Interview #2, 8/10/14

The majority of detained youths in this study made reference to the potential rap music may have in connecting them to their families. Jermaine, however, felt that music-making was a way to connect him to his friends and peer group. Jermaine wrote lyrics for the majority of the music session but still managed to record two music compositions titled, "FreeMyNiggas" and "Squad." Squad refers to a group of individuals (e.g, friends, peer group, gang members) who share a common identity or sense of solidarity. During one conversation, we talked about Drill Music, a sub-genre of rap music that highlights the grittiness of Chicago's Southside. It's the kind of music that parents forbid their children to listen to because they fear the music will be detrimental. Jermaine mentioned during a conversation that those outside the culture can easily misunderstand the hardcore message and harsh instrumental sound of Drill Music. However,

Jermaine gets the music because it says it reflects his community and the interests that he and his peer group shares (Researcher field notes, 6/29/14).

### *Connection through Collaboration with Peers*

Participants in this study used music as a way to connect through collaborative efforts. This collaboration often included joint music-making—taking turns to rap on the same instrumental—and as a system for internal review of the music for peer residents. For many youth participants, having their peers listen to their music in progress and offer feedback on various aspects of the music served as a litmus test against which to determine the credibility of their music compositions:

Reggie asked Damonté to listen to the beat that he was using as a foundation to his rap. Damonté connected his headphones into the splitter at Reggie's music station so the two young men could listen to the music simultaneously. Damonté listened for a few seconds and then started making hand motions as if he's rapping to the music in his head. "You like that, don't ya?" asked Reggie. Damonté then asked Reggie, "Let me jump on that with you?" "Nah," replied Reggie, "I got some ideas I wanna try out by myself." Reggie puts his own earphones on and begins to bop his head to the beat. His smile suggests that he's on the right track with his composition, and Damonté few comments were his needed proof.

Researcher field notes, 6/29/14

### Creating Music's Role in Behavior Modification

Participants in this study affirmed how the opportunity to create music and be in the lab had an effect on the behavioral actions and moods. In many cases, participants expressed how much better they felt at the end of a music session as compared to their feelings and moods before coming to the lab. The following qualitative descriptions from the Daily Reflection Sheet

highlight participants' beliefs about the influence creating music had on their moods and behaviors:

“It made my day better.”

Trenton, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14

“I was mad when I first came in here, but I am feeling a lot better now than before.”

Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 8/10/14

“‘Cause it makes me feel so happy that I don't have to be up there [the pod] all day.”

Damonté, Daily Reflection Sheet, 7/13/14

Reggie reported that participating in the music class gave him the incentive to exhibit positive behaviors in the facility. He said that being a part of the class kept him on “level 4,” the highest level awarded for positive behavior in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. I asked Reggie what happened to his behavior when he was no longer a part of the music class, to which he responded that his behavior wasn't as good and put him back down to level 1 (Reggie, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). Reggie also provided a description of how being in the lab affected his mood when back on his living pod:

JT: So, earlier you told me that your time in jail can be boring and sometimes stressful. How does coming to the lab affect those feelings, if any?

Reggie: Better...you be all obsessive with the music. Then, you got something to do or think about when you back upstairs. You won't feel like you're bugging or tweaking on the staff as much. You'll just be cool. You had a decent day.

Reggie, Interview #1, 7/20/14

Some participants believed that creating music in the lab was helpful in redirecting their worries about life outside of the facility, to which they had no control. Take, for instance, that Enrique suggested that creating music and listening to it “is good because it's something to do to keep your mind off things that's happening on the outside that you can't control” (Enrique,

Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14). In several conversations (mostly before this current study), Enrique anecdotally affirmed that keeping his mind on music was helpful for him since he often thought about the care of his child since detainment had limited Enrique 's paternal presence in the home.

### **Summary of Research Question 2**

Findings revealed that participants held positive feelings about their experience of creating music during detainment. This positivity was seen in how they rated creating music and the qualitative descriptions they provided as explanation of these ratings. The average rating assigned to creating rap music during incarceration (*Mean: 1.34*) was consistently higher than the average rating given to being detained (*Mean: 2.43*) during the rating period of the study. Several themes emerged from multiple data sources.

First, participants viewed creating music as an enjoyable experience. Second, participants viewed creating music during detainment as an outlet for creative expression. The ability to make choices about their music allowed them the autonomy to express both their concerns and desires, hone their skills as future rap artists. Third, creating rap music seemed to provide for these young men a means to connect to their families, friends, and communities. Composing music and lyrics that were representative of the types found in their communities provided a way for these young men to connect with life outside of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center.

Finally, creating music seemed to have a role in behavior modification. Many participants affirmed that creating music increased their mood in positive ways, especially when the conditions of incarceration affected them in negative ways. For some participants, creating music and listening to it provided a tool to alter their attitudes and to redirect their attitudes to more positive actions.

#### **Summary of Chapter 4**

In this chapter I have provided details about the outcomes obtained from this study. These outcomes were related to participants' experiences of being detained and their experiences of creating music during incarceration. In addition, this chapter also uncovered findings unaccounted for in the first two research questions set for the study. In chapter 5, I will provide a brief summary of the study, a discussion of the research findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and suggest possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER 5  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter I provide a brief summary of the study, a discussion of the research findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and suggest possible directions for future research.

**Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore views of incarceration held among detained youth and the possible roles creating rap music may have on how detained youth experience their incarceration. Two research questions guided my inquiry:

1. How do detained youth perceive their experience of incarceration?
2. What role, if any, does creating rap music have in how detained youth experience incarceration?

The sample population consisted of youth [n=6] detained in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago, IL. For 10 weeks of music sessions, 6 participants used Garageband software and Apple Macintosh computers with attached 66-key piano keyboards to create rap music, primarily, and other forms of music. Additionally, all participants participated in a focus group interview designed to address the research questions, and three participants were purposefully selected for three individual interviews during the study period to gain more in-depth knowledge about the study's purpose. Multiple data sources were collected including field notes, interview transcriptions, music composition files, and participants' weekly reflections about their incarceration and their views about creating rap music in this context.

## **Conclusions of this Research and Discussion of Findings**

### *Conclusions*

The following conclusions were drawn from results of the current study:

1. The contexts of incarceration, which may include the actual conditions of the facility, the staff members working within it, and the monotony of daily schedules, may influence the experience of incarceration for detained youth in negative ways. Within this daunting conclusion, positive moments within detention such as family visitations, positive changes in behavior codes levels to which youth offenders are assigned, and a positive outlook on their overall detainment may help detained youth to counter negative experiences related to juvenile detention.
2. Detained youth may benefit from involvement with music making during detention because they view opportunities to create music and to listen to it as contributors to a positive experience during their detainment. Creating music and listening to it served to counter the negative aspects of being detained. Specifically for the participants in this study, being involved in the music sessions was a coping mechanism to counter the lack of autonomy related to daily regimented schedules, the effects of boredom, and as a way to channel negative behaviors into positive actions.
3. Societal perceptions of both the rap music genre and youth offenders may be negative, these perceptions may place detained youth in a double bind as they seek to remain involved in music making and move beyond how society may view their status as juvenile offenders once detainments are completed. Despite this knowledge and

awareness, participants in this study expressed that these societal views did not discourage them from being active participants in the rap music with which they identified.

### *Discussion of Findings*

Findings in this current study revealed that youth participants held negative feelings about their experience of incarceration. These outcomes support previous research findings about the negative perceptions detained individuals hold about the contexts of incarceration (Ashkar & Kenny, 2008; Beck, Cantor, Hartge, & Smith, 2013; Bernstein, 2014; Kysel, 2012;). Although not a surprising finding, participants in this current study attributed the imposed structure, boredom, and diminished self worth and personal value as result of their incarcerated status as major reasons for their negatives views of their experience of incarceration.

First, youth participants viewed the context of incarceration as a place of imposed structure. The routines that staff implemented were designed as a primary way to keep safe, to structure their daily schedules, and a means by which to maintain order and organization in the facility. Despite these positive reasons for structure within this context, participants believed that the routines limited the basic rights and personal freedoms they had enjoyed before being imprisoned. In addition, participants believed the imposed structure within the facility contributed to their perceived lack of autonomy to make decisions. This imposed structure ran counter to the freedom that these young men experienced as freed individuals before their arrests. As result, the adjustment to the rules and regulations of prison life was challenging for the detained youth in this study, adding to the negative perceptions of juvenile detention. Such

was the case for Reggie who believed that the incessant corrections from the staff contributed to his negative perceptions. These findings mirror previous research that affirms that an inmate's adjustment to prison life may be due to his or her perceptions of what these environments may be like (Kupchik & Snyder, 2009; Moos, 1997; Wright, 1991).

Amid the negative feelings of incarceration were promising findings that music may serve as an intervention in these contexts. Findings revealed that participants held positive feelings about their experience of the activity of creating rap music during detainment. These positive experiences were found in the ratings they assigned to the activity of creating rap music during their detainment and the qualitative descriptions they provided as explanations for these ratings. The average rating assigned to creating rap music during incarceration (*Mean*: 1.34, a positive experience rating) was consistently higher than the average rating for being detained (*Mean*: 2.43, a moderately negative rating).

Youth participants' favorable views of music making during their detainment is not surprising. This finding mirrors previous research outcomes that report positive experiences of creating music for detained populations (Daykin et al., 2011; Shieh, 2010). For the participants in the current study, the opportunity to create music may have been viewed as a favorable activity among other activities whose appeal had waned for these detained youth. For instance, youth participants found that social activities such as playing cards and watching television were not as appealing due to their monotonous nature. Some participants—in the same way that they had come to view other activities in which they were involved—may have viewed the repetitive nature of making music toward the end of the study period as monotonous, causing a lackluster for creating music toward the study's end.

I initially speculated whether a response bias might have contributed to participants' positive ratings for creating music across all data sources; that is to ask whether a social desirability effect—the tendency for survey respondents to answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others—may have compromised the quantitative ratings on the Daily Reflection Sheet. A few possible reasons may help to lessen concerns about participants providing answers they believed were simply social acceptable. First, the participants and I had previously established a positive relationship before this current study because participants had taken part in an after-school music composition program. As result of this good relationship, participants were comfortable sharing a range of beliefs about their experiences, rather than providing answers that seemed to reflect what they hoped I was looking for. Second, not every response about creating music was positive. In several cases, particularly in the last two weeks of the study period, participants provided a rating of a 2 for their experience of creating music and not a 1 as they had assigned in previous weeks. However, the qualitative responses participants provided to explain their rating of 2 suggested that the experiences of creating music remained an enjoyable experience for participants.

In this current study, participants viewed the use of rap music as a primary reason for their enjoyment. The opportunity to use and engage with the genre of rap music seems to have been a contributing factor in participants' enjoyment of creating music during their detainment. Previous scholarship has affirmed that rap music and hip-hop styles are undeniable parts of youth cultures, particularly juvenile offenders (Tyson, 2003). Some researchers have suggested that detained youth populations may respond positively to rap music and hip-hop styles because these song forms reflect their cultural backgrounds and constitute what they view as *their* music

(Daykin et al., 2011; Tyson, 2002). Participants in the current study affirmed their preferences for the rap music genre, which provided for them a sense of identity within the youth culture. These preferences reflect findings from previous research reporting positive results for rap music used with music programs in correctional contexts.

For many participants, creative output using rap music included the use of curse words. Despite the benefits for using rap music and hip hop styles in music programs with youth offenders, some researchers have noted a few negative effects of rap music used with offenders (Baker & Homan, 2007). Similar to Baker and Homan's (2007) findings, participants in this current study found the rules about not swearing or negative references in their lyrics to be problematic. Participants considered their filtered versions less authentic representations of their feelings and experiences.

Participants viewed creating music during their detainment as an outlet to be expressive and provided them a tool for "mental escape." The ability to make choices about their music provided to them the autonomy to express both their concerns and desires and hone their skills as future rap artists where applicable. For these participants, this autonomy to decide instrumentals, samples, music timbres, to name a few examples, increased their abilities to be expressive. These outcomes reflect prior research by Baker and Homan (2007) that reported that engaging in rap music could offer youth a way to express their creativity in connection with their existing music and cultural interests. Such was the case with participants who used music as a type of "mental escape" from the physical structure of the institution. This escapism was extremely viable for youth participants who viewed their experience of incarceration as a place of extreme boredom, as Bernstein (2014) notes in her recent work. This boredom is set against the backdrop

of an array of educational, social, recreational, and general activities that participants were involved in daily. Despite their involvement in these activities, participants expressed dissatisfaction that the recurring nature of these activities had limited appeal and caused the interest that participants may have had with these activities to wane.

A smaller though important theme for the experience of incarceration was that many participants in this study hinted at the idea that the experience of incarceration—which included both the physical structure and nature of being detained and the staff working within these environments—had diminished their sense of self-worth and personal value as individuals. Youth interactions with the guards and other staff, for example, were generally positive and I observed staff working hard at a tough job to ensure the well-being of the young men charged to their care. Despite these observations, some youth attributed staff treatment to their feelings of being devalued during incarceration. This decline seemed to be the result of the denial of basic rights and privileges with which participants' statuses as detainees were associated. To this end, because some participants viewed incarceration negatively, they ultimately viewed themselves as deserving of the negative conditions in which they lived.

Despite their enjoyment for making music, I noticed that participants' interest in the activity of creating music waned toward the end of the study. Several considerations may help to explain the decrease in enjoyment as evident in their quantitative ratings of creating music throughout the duration of the study period. One consideration may be that the scheduled research timeline to conduct the study was interrupted several times during the study period due to the limited staffing at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. Due to staff shortages, three weeks of the study period were canceled. In week 11, however, I canceled the

music class to attend a conference. In some cases, participants were absent from a scheduled music session. The combination of the canceled music classes and absent participants may have contributed to some participants' decrease ratings for creating music during the last two weeks of the study period. Because music cancelations were beyond my personal control, I tried to keep participants encouraged about creating music by extending the original 10-week study over a period of 14 weeks. Another consideration for why participants' ratings for creating music might have decreased is that they were not responsible for producing and presenting a final project. Unlike their previous musical experiences with extra-curricular music composition programs that ended with a listening party to share their final projects and celebrate their musical achievement, having no outcome or final project for the current study might have lessened their momentum for and experience of creating music throughout the study period, as reflected in their numeric ratings during the final two weeks of the study period.

A final consideration to explain decrease in ratings for creating music during the final two weeks of the study may be due to their motivations for creating music being more researcher-directed rather than driven by the interests of the participants themselves. For example, I informed participants that I would not provide for them compact discs of the music they created nor would I place their compositions in an online repository as was customary in the previous music project in which they participated. Rather, because the only benefit to them was the opportunity to create music during the study period, some participants' enjoyment of creating music at the end of the study may have not been seen with the same amount of zeal as in the beginning and middle of the study period. Previous findings suggest that the impact of music making may be contingent upon the extent of 'ownership' felt by the young people taking part.

Several researchers contend the sense of ‘ownership’ may vary across contexts and can be influenced by a range of factors, including the skills and approaches of those leading music projects (Baker & Homan, 2007; Gann, 2010; Lashau, 2005; Tyson, 2002). In several field notes, I wrote about my own limited skills for music composition that were germane to hip hop production for the type of rap these participants preferred (e.g., gangsta rap).

The nature of incarceration disconnected youth from their families, permitting short family visitations either weekly or bi-weekly. These visitations are limited to parents only, with some special visitations being permitted to siblings of detained youth. It is within this context that creating rap music seemed to provide for these young men a means to connect to their families, friends, and the communities from which they come. Listening to music they would have had in their homes and with friends in their community provided a means to connect to life outside the facility. Composing music and writing lyrics that were representative of the types found in their communities provided a way for these young men to connect with life outside of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center.

Participants reported that engaging in music making had an effect on their behaviors, particularly as a means to alter their moods and redirect negative actions. These findings reflect previous research that affirms music’s use as a potential intervention with this population. Baker and Homan (2007), for instance, examined the use of rapping and music sequencing with youth participants and suggested that the arts and engaging in it provided youth offenders with an alternative view of themselves, a view that gave young people an opportunity to see themselves as creative individuals and not merely juvenile offenders. These researchers reported behavioral changes in how detained youth viewed themselves and their peers, an undeniable pride in the

musical work they created, and an overall enjoyment of the music making process. The extent to which music might be an intervention for behavioral changes may require collaboration with other professionals.

Participants in this study were aware of societal beliefs about rap music and the artists who created and performed this music. Because they expressed that society often lumped all rap music together under the label of negative or inappropriate music, participants' statuses as youth offenders may further complicate their interests in rap music. For some youth, rap music told stories and narratives about the conditions that greatly affected their communities. For many youth participants, rap music was a genre that many youth cultures preferred to listen to and create. Youths in this study were keenly aware of negative societal views about the rap music with which they identified and created. Youths felt that society often opposed some subgenres of rap music because the content was often considered inappropriate for social mores. During the focus group interview, youth believed that society might be unable to fully understand the music's themes. Topics such as hatred for cops and authority figures, promoting the use of drugs and violence within communities were legitimate and real concerns for youths, particularly detained youths who believed that the cops and other authority figures always had the upper hand. As Gutiérrez noted, rap music "promotes violence and people don't often like that. It happens though." (Gutiérrez, Focus Group Interview, 6/8/14).

Reggie detailed multiple aspects of rap music to how he considered the genre to have both positive and negative traits. Despite his love for the genre, Reggie said that he understood how some people in society might feel about misguided beliefs that rap music causes violence, and was a bit ambivalent about these perceptions. While he understood that rap music could

help listeners to “turn up...you know, to have fun and party; It’s even good when you’re listening to some good rap music while driving” (Reggie, Interview #1, 7/20/14), he equally asserted the following view when asked why some people see rap as a bad genre:

Reggie: It’s bad cause some rap music creates violence.  
 JT: Oh really?  
 Reggie: Yeah. Cause the beats of the rap music can edge the violence on.

*[Reggie pauses for a moment as if he’s thinking about the implications of what he just said.]*

Reggie: Well, violence is gonna happen regardless of the music.  
 JT: So, do you think all rap music causes violence or just certain styles?  
 Reggie: It’s the particular type of rap music with the dissing others and stuff in it, but even without it, folks will still be at war. But, with music, it’s not rap that started that dissing...that’s the streets!  
 JT: What do you mean?  
 Reggie: So, it ain’t always the music. The music is just a way to let the violence be known.

Reggie, Interview #1, 7/20/14

Many youth participants believed that while rap music was a street version of media outlets such as a syndicated news outlet or a printed newspaper. These youths, however, also understood that many people painted all rap music with the same brush, and as result, all rap artists and composers as a reflection of the music. These participants believed that many individuals in society would not view rap music as a legitimate art form and often could not see beyond a few curse words. These divergent perspectives mirror previous research that affirms how participating in rap music and music sequencing software could help provide to youth offenders an alternative view of themselves (Barker & Homan, 2007).

Finally, for three of these youth participants—Jermaine, Reggie, and Tyrek, composing music in the lab became an opportunity to “try out” the success of music as a potential career. While Reggie and Jermaine expressed desires to be rap artists, Tyrek hinted at the possibility of

being involved in the production side of music as a side job. The act of creating music and the peer feedback served as litmus tests to participants' success as eventual artists. This finding has not fully been explored in previous research and may be an area for future inquiry.

### **Implications for Practice**

Several implications for practice are drawn from the outcomes of this study. The first is that music teachers must be sensitive to and knowledgeable about how their own heritage, background, and experiences may affect their perceptions of student musical interests, outputs, and abilities. For example, differences between music teachers' preferences for music and value system for music making must be thoroughly investigated before and during music teaching with detained populations. Doing so is essential to moving beyond simply acknowledging these distinctions but fully attempting to understand how these differences might influence music teaching and learning in these settings. This type of reflection is vital to the success and effectiveness of music teachers working with populations detained in correctional facilities. For instance, the extent to which university training in Western classical music and the prominence some professionals may place on this genre as the norm against which to judge other styles requires that music teachers carefully interrogate their values, beliefs, and the foundations of their teaching practices.

Previous researchers assert that young people's attachment to specific genres may not be fixed (Daykin et al, 2011). Although many youth cultures identify and prefer rap music styles, findings from this current study suggest that not all detained youth are attached to rap music. As Tyrek's case exemplified, detained youth populations may prefer a variety of musical styles and may not want to be limited to the rap music genre solely.

Music teachers who are interested in using rap music as content in prison music programs may need to consider how they will address and handle the use of themes that may fall be considered inappropriate for the prison facility or the music profession to which they belong. Encouraging detained populations to create “radio ready” versions of their music when those themes address highlight gangster living, male-dominated power, and the objectification of women, as a few examples. Undoubtedly these themes among others may be considered inappropriate as content for use in many educational environments, including correctional facilities. Doing so may be a powerful tool that can honor each participant’s creative voice while pushing him or her to create versions of their music similar to versions that local radio stations use for mass audiences.

The ideological conflict between the musical cultures of detained populations and music teachers’ professional obligation for determining appropriateness for the musical content used in these settings must be fully thought through before the onset of this work. This discord in professional obligation in the current study mirrors similar conclusions that I drew from a previous study (Thompson, 2015), where I admitted to being “torn between my need, on the one hand, to legitimate these young men’s ideas about music composition without imposing my values upon them and, on the other hand, my role in getting them to think about music as an agent of social change” (p. 13).

### **Research Limitations**

#### *Limitations of the Daily Reflection Sheet (Initial and Updated)*

The initial Daily Reflection Sheet sought to gather descriptive information about participant’s music compositions, their compositional plans, and any technical issues they may

have encountered with the software program while creating the music. Despite these questions and my appeals that they provide full answers, the participants' responses were minimal and became more generic each week. For example, when asked what their compositional plans might be for the next week, many participants gave a response along the lines of "[I want to] do more with my music." I surmised that the participants might not have had concrete plans for the next music class and in general only focused on their projects once they were in class. For some participants, completing the form became pro forma and, as result, their responses became standard and perfunctory, providing little in the way of information, data, or insights to me as a teacher or researcher.

I updated the Daily Reflection Sheet on 7/13/14 to better gauge how the data generated across multiple source may help to answer the first two research questions of the current study: (1) How do detained youth perceive their experience of incarceration? (2) What role, if any, does creating rap music have in how detained youth experience incarceration? However, since this update occurred in week 6 of the proposed project timeline, it did not account for possible perceptions detained youth may have had before that time.

#### *Limitations of the Interviews*

Participant interviews yielded a variety of data for this study. However, across participant interviews—the focus group interview and the individual interviews of three participants—the responses were limited in length and content. From my experience working with these youth and in this setting, detained youth do not generally provide long answers in interview settings, and typically provide short answers in interviews. In the current study, youth were more interested in creating music and listening to it than talking about their perceptions of music. I tried to strike a

delicate balance between interview length and their time composing music in the lab. However, I was able to ask follow up questions to clarify participant's responses in most cases during the actual interview. When I was unable to gain the clarification that I needed, I attempted to fill in the gaps in participant meaning through non-interview related conversations each music session. I recorded these ideas in my researcher field notes where applicable and added to this subtext to the interview transcripts in brackets.

I conducted three in-depth interviews with Reggie and Tyrek about their perceptions of detainment and creating music while being detained in this environment. Because time prevented a second and third interview for Jermaine before he was transferred out of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, only one interview was conducted with him. As result, the study is limited by data lost by not being able to conduct additional interviews with Jermaine. However, I began the study with the knowledge the transient nature of residents detained in the juvenile temporary detention center may limit them to complete the full length of the study period. Certainly, juvenile detention centers contain extreme cases of resident transience as detained youth move through the legal system in varying rates (Young, Phillips, & Nasir, 2010).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Although previous studies have been conducted to explore the music making occurring in correctional facilities, research exploring how creating rap music influences the experience of incarceration for detained youth populations is limited. Further investigations are needed to

determine the extent to which specific types of rap subgenres, and possibly other musical genres, influence the experiences for detained youth.

Given that music making across multiple contexts is an area of interests for many music educators, professional understanding of music's place in the lives of multiple youth populations is essential to a holistic understanding of music. However, some music professionals fail to see the value that music making in detention centers may have on professional knowledge about music in cultural contexts. The increased interests in music making with detained populations and the push toward using culturally specific music such as rap music to reach youth populations may provide a more realistic perception that the musical experience may have across contexts. Considering the educational benefits to which music making with detained populations is attributed, the current study sought to clarify whether music making in one criminal court system influenced the ways in which detained youth experienced their incarceration.

Although the findings obtained from the current study are not transferrable to other contexts, the findings may help to build the increasing wealth of knowledge about music making occurring with detained populations. Similar studies may seek more prolonged engagement in juvenile detention facilities. Finally, future studies should investigate the perceived influence music making may have for juvenile offenders whose racial, ethnic, and gender groupings are beyond the participants in this current study.

There is need for continued exploration of the factors that may influence the role music may play in how youth populations detained in the criminal court system experience their incarceration. Future research may help to clarify exactly how creating rap music may contribute to the improvement of music education occurring in prison contexts. Doing so may

add to the improvement of knowledge and pedagogies used within these contexts and the detained youth populations housed within these settings. As result, the educational value of music making in the contexts of juvenile detention may be enhanced.

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APPENDIX A

*NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY  
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT FORM*

**NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY****ASSENT FORM**

**Project Title:** The Role of Rap Music Composition in the Experience of Incarceration for African American Youth

**Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Maud Hickey, Music Studies/Bienen School of Music

**Co-Investigator:** Jason D. Thompson, Music Education Doctoral Candidate

**Supported by:** Northwestern University

**WHY AM I HERE?**

I want to tell you about a research study I am doing. A research study is done to find a better way to treat people or to understand how things work. In this study, I hope to learn more about your experience of being detained and whether creating rap music influences how you experience incarceration. You are being asked to participate because you have been in the after-school music project before and because you enjoy creating music. You also are able to speak about yourself and the music that you create. In a research study, only people who want to take part are allowed to do so. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to do so.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

You will come to the music lab for 10 weeks to compose music. The music that you compose must be “radio-ready.” This means that the music will be appropriate for all audiences. Also, the music should not contain any lyrics that could be used against you in your court case. I will help you so your music is “radio-ready” just like I did in our music class in the past. You will also write down any information and plans about your music so that I can better understand your music and help you to create it. I will collect these activities reports and music compositions from all participants in this study and use them to provide feedback about the music.

I will observe you composing music and interview you as a group, and interview a few of you individually. There will be one focus group interview with all participants. This focus group interview will last between 45-60 minutes. I will purposely select three of you to be interviewed individually three times during this study. Those individual interviews will also last between 45-60 minutes.

I will record these interviews on my computer. You have the right to review and edit the recordings to delete any material that you do not want recorded. You may also ask me to turn off

the recorder at any point during our conversation. I will delete these recordings at the end of this research study. Recording each interview is necessary for my study. So, if you do not want to be recorded then you may not participate in the study.

### **HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY?**

The research study will last for 10 weeks. Each session where you record music will last for an hour and a half. The focus group interview that will include all participants will last about 45-60 minutes. If purposely selected, I will interview you individually three times during this research study. These interviews will last about 45-60 minutes each.

### **CAN ANYTHING BAD HAPPEN TO ME?**

Your participation does not involve any risks other than what you would encounter in daily life.

### **CAN ANYTHING GOOD HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

You are not likely to have any direct benefit from being in this research study.

### **WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?**

If you choose to be in this study, you have the right to be treated with respect. This includes respect for your decision to stop being in the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

You do not have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say no now or you can even change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me. No one will be mad at you if you change your mind. Also, this study will not affect your legal case, court proceedings, or terms of probation. If you want to withdraw from the study, you can simply tell me or ask your Team Leader to inform me that you wish to withdraw.

If you have questions about your rights in this study or to speak with somebody who is not involved in this research, you can contact the Northwestern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office.” They can be reached at (312) 503-9338. I will supply your Team Leaders with this contact information.

### **WHAT ABOUT MY CONFIDENTIALITY?**

All of your answers to my questions and your writing in the activities sheets will remain anonymous.

I will keep your information confidential. Results of this study may be used for research, publications, and presentations at professional meetings. If your individual results are discussed, I will use a pretend name rather than your real name to protect your identity.



APPENDIX B

*FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL*

Interviewer: Jason D. Thompson (JT)

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Location: \_\_\_\_\_

JT: Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I would like to talk with you because I am interested in learning more about your experience of being detained and how creating rap music may influence your experiences of incarceration. There will be two parts of the interview. The first set of questions asks about the role of rap music in your life. The second set of questions focuses on the role that creating rap music may have in your life. Some of those questions will also be based on the music that you have been creating. The interview will last between 45-60 minutes. As a reminder, you should not talk about illegal behavior, the use or sale of drugs or other statements that could be used against you by talking about your own situation. I am interested in the topics that are found in the rap music genre in general and creating rap music.

## INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **Role of Rap Music**

1. Tell me about what you like about rap music or what draws you to it?
2. Did you ever listen to or perform rap music before being detained?
  - a. Where did you listen to or perform rap music? (e.g., School? Home?)
3. What does it mean to you to have rap music in your life?
4. What would your life be like if you were unable to have rap music in your life?
5. Thank you for this valuable information. Is there anything that you want to add?

### **Role of Creating Rap Music**

1. Do you ever create music during the day?
  - a. What style of music do you create?
  - b. How often, if at all, do you write rap lyrics?
  - c. Where in the facility would you write these lyrics?
  - d. How do young men get the notebooks that they write their lyrics in?
  
2. Do you ever perform your rap music during the day? At special event? Tell me about those experiences?
  - a. How do you feel when you're performing/creating rap music?
  - b. How do you feel when you are creating rap music?
  - c. Do you think being able to create rap music is important or helpful in any way?  
  
Tell me how?
  
3. I'm going to play a piece of music that you've been working on. Will you tell me about this piece of music?

4. What message are you trying to send in this piece?
5. What/who influenced you to create a rap like this?
6. (if applicable) Which instrumental did you choose and why did you choose this particular instrumental from this artist?
7. How does being able to compose your own rap music feel?
  - a. How does creating your own rap music affect your experiences while being detained?
8. Thank you for this valuable information. Is there anything that you want to add?

APPENDIX C

*INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL*

Interviewer: Jason D. Thompson (JT)

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Location: \_\_\_\_\_

JT: Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. The reason I would like to talk with you is to learn more about the possible role that rap music and creating rap music may have on your experiences of incarceration. There will be two parts of the interview. The first set of questions asks about the role of rap music in your life. The second set of questions focuses on the role that creating rap music may have in your life. Some of those questions will also be based on the music that you have been creating. The interview will last between 45-60 minutes. As a reminder, you should not talk about illegal behavior, the use or sale of drugs or other statements that could be used against you by talking about your own situation. I am interested in the topics that are found in the rap music genre in general and creating rap music.

## INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **Role of Rap Music**

1. Tell me about what you like about rap music or what draws you to it?
2. Did you ever listen to or perform rap music before being detained?
  - a. Where did you listen to or perform rap music? (e.g., School? Home?)
3. What does it mean to you to have rap music in your life?
4. What would your life be like if you were unable to have rap music in your life?
5. Thank you for this valuable information. Is there anything that you want to add?

### **Role of Creating Rap Music**

1. Do you ever create music during the day?
  - a. What style of music do you create?
  - b. How often, if at all, do you write rap lyrics?
  - c. Where in the facility would you write these lyrics?
  - d. How do young men get the notebooks that they write their lyrics in?
  
2. Do you ever perform your rap music during the day? At special event? Tell me about those experiences?
  - a. How do you feel when you're performing/creating rap music?
  - b. How do you feel when you are creating rap music?
  - c. Do you think being able to create rap music is important or helpful in any way?  
  
Tell me how?
  
3. I'm going to play a piece of music that you've been working on. Will you tell me about this piece of music?

4. What message are you trying to send in this piece?
5. What/who influenced you to create a rap like this?
6. (if applicable) Which instrumental did you choose and why did you choose this particular instrumental from this artist?
7. How does being able to compose your own rap music feel?
  - a. How does creating your own rap music affect your experiences while being detained?
8. Thank you for this valuable information. Is there anything that you want to add?

APPENDIX D

*DAILY REFLECTION SHEET (INITIAL)*

The Role of Rap Music Composition in the Experience of Incarceration for African American Youth

(#STU00090735)

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Computer Station #/Pencil #: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did you accomplish in your music today? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What do want to accomplish in your music the next time? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What problems, if any, are you having composing your music? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What else do I need to know about your music? \_\_\_\_\_

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APPENDIX E  
DAILY REFLECTION SHEET (UPDATED)

The Role of Rap Music Composition in the Experience of Incarceration for  
African American Youth

(#STU00090735)

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Computer Station #/Pencil #: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How was your experience of detention this week?

Positive  
(good, fun, interesting)     Neutral  
(okay, alright)     Negative  
(bad, boring)

Explain your rating below:

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2. How was your experience of creating rap music today?

Positive  
(good, fun, interesting)     Neutral  
(okay, alright)     Negative  
(bad, boring)

Explain your rating below:

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