Rocking the Beat: B-boys' and B-girls' Reflections on Identity and the Cultural History of the Hip Hop Dance B-boying

Wesley S.T. Nixon[1]

Marysia Galbraith, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Anthropology and New College

Jim Bindon, Ph.D.
Professor of Anthropology

Much less scholarly literature has been published on B-boying than the other elements of Hip Hop. The current research addresses this understudied topic and increases the anthropological literature on dance. The research method employed was interviews of dancers in two south-eastern states, Alabama and Georgia. The people who B-boy (or B-girl) are specialists in their own regard; they conduct complex sequences in their dance that may seem strange to an uninformed audience but have meaning to those who participate in the dance (Turner 1982, 18).

Anthropological Framework

Dance, rhythmic movement done for some purpose transcending utility, has become a major area of study in anthropology only recently. Being relatively new, the field is not developed to the same extent as other sub-disciplines in cultural anthropology. According to Anya Peterson Royce, a noted anthropologist of dance:

> One of the major reasons that anthropological study of dance lags behind the discipline of anthropology itself must surely be the attitude of most anthropologists. They have defended their neglect of the dance by shrouding it

---

[1] Wesley S.T. Nixon, a B-boy and investigator, may be contacted at wesleystnixon@yahoo.com

> in mystery, by relegating it to the category of esoteric—about which it is nice to know something but which is not really essential .... (1977, 38)

There are many ways to approach dance. One way is as a performer who may enjoy the dance for reasons such as the opportunity to master mind and body or as a physical release and source of well being; some performers also enjoy the presence of other performers or audiences. Another way to approach dance is as a spectator who may enjoy dance because of its ability to entertain, move, dismiss anxiety, or reaffirm unity in a community. Anthropologists can approach dance as performers and/or spectators, but they should also approach it as students of humankind. That is, an anthropological approach to dance would be to study it as an aspect of human behavior that is united by culture (Royce 1977, 17-18). An anthropological investigation should produce an analysis that is consistent with the actual behavior, the performers' interpretations of the dance, and the analyst's interpretation (Royce 1977, 32-35).

In the anthropological approach to dance one should observe, illustrate, and analyze the subject. When humans observe a foreign or unfamiliar culture, they categorize by making what is strange, not strange and making the unfamiliar, familiar. This process is done by bridging commonalities between both cultures—which may distort what is observed, for example, by making non-existent parallels and categorizing superficial characteristics. A description of a dance may contain faults because in observing, one may not be able to discern what is significant from what is trivial. In an analysis of dance, the observer should consider her or his descriptions and the interpretations from the perspective of the performer's culture (Royce 1977, 32-33).

Muchongolo

Niehaus and Stadler's 2004 analysis of Muchongolo dance, in *Muchongolo Dance Contest: Deep Play in the South African Lowveld*, provides an example of how anthropologists study dance. The Muchongolo article stresses that cultural performances such as the stories people tell themselves about themselves are a focus of anthropological theory. The stories the dancers tell are emic views, that is, the cultural meanings people give to themselves (Geertz 1973, 14). The Muchongolo dancing contest takes place in the Bushbuckridge municipality of South Africa and serves as a commentary on the life and everyday struggles in the form of a competition. Dealing with topics such as violence, witchcraft, and sexual desires that are usually suppressed in other non-dance social interactions,

the dance is comprised of different body movements, and its participants interact with its spectators through songs. Dancers act out confrontation, which is between *xintu* (the past, tradition) and *xilungu* (the present, ways of Caucasians) (Niehaus and Stadler 2004, 363-364).

The Muchongolo dance is a marker of Shangaan identity that has influences from Zulu, Pondo, and Swazi choral dances and was originally performed at weddings to celebrate the completion of bridewealth payments. Fighting would often occur at these events when the male dancers from the bride's village expressed anger that she was leaving for the groom's household, which insulted men from his village. Deaths of dancers sometimes occurred when rival dancers fought. A drastic political event, however, led to change in Muchongolo dance culture (Niehaus and Stadler 2004, 365).

In 1948 apartheid took hold in South Africa, which transformed Bushbuckridge into a Native Reserve for Africans. Also, deforestation and mechanization projects on Caucasians' farms displaced people and resulted in their relocation to Bushbuckridge. The relocations led to overcrowding in Bushbuckridge and a decline in Muchongolo dance. The people's self-sustaining agriculture was mostly destroyed and the stocks of cattle were reduced tremendously. These events prevented parents from assisting their sons with bridewealth, which led to their sons paying and placing themselves greater in debt. Brides began to move into their husbands' households and ignore the Muchongolo dance ritual. Consequently, Muchongolo dancing began to change from mostly weddings to the homes or stores of wealthy households and business people, respectively.

Later, in 1983, the *Mhala* Traditional Dance Association became a governing institution for all Muchongolo teams; this resulted in rules to prevent violence and unwanted behavior at dances. Also during this time, Muchongolo dances were performed in stadiums; the dancing was unconventional because the dance was changed from its original form (Niehaus and Stadler 2004, 367). Niehaus and Stadler look at the ways of the Shangaan ancestors and the ways of Caucasians as they relate to Muchongolo. The dance is popular because it articulates tension between local traditions and modern concepts such as agricultural practices (2004, 370-372).

A similarity between Muchongolo and B-boying is that once they are observed by non-dancing spectators, the dances are performed in new ways and in new locations. B-boying (as addressed later) went from being performed at residential parties, night clubs, and in public parks in its beginning in the South Bronx to being seen on television, movies, and competitions throughout the world. As with the Muchongolo being impacted by the outside influences of deforestation and mechanization projects, when the media focused on B-boying, the dancers would perform at

new locations, such as traveling on Hip Hop tours, stage performances (for Ronald Reagan), and the 1984 Olympics closing ceremony (Niehaus and Stadler 2004, 366).

Early B-boying

In 1981 B-boy Doze said "Breaking, otherwise known as B-boying, is a competitive, warlike dance making the opponent look bad" (Cooper 2004, 93). People who participate in B-boying are known as B-boys or B-girls. African American, Afro Caribbean American, and Puerto Rican American youth were at the forefront of B-boying's creation. Kevie Kev, one of the MCs for the group the Fantastic Five, said, "B-boying was a Black [Afro Caribbean American and African American] thing—I saw no Puerto Ricans around this time." B-boy JoJo, who helped start the Rock Steady Crew with Jimmy D, described some of his B-boying experiences. He remembered that around 1976 the Puerto Ricans in the Bronx were not "catching too much rep" (receiving exposure), that B-boying was mostly dominated by Afro Caribbean Americans and African Americans (Fricke 2002, 112).

The time was the early '70s. B-boying was seen as "the thing to do" from the beginning of the dance, late 1960s to the early 1970s, which appealed to the interests of these South Bronx youth (Fricke 2002, 41). The date when B-boying started in the South Bronx is debatable in that some early B-boys have said it began at Kool DJ Herc's parties, while others have claimed that singer James Brown's "Get on the Good Foot" dance of 1969 was the origin of B-boying. Some of B-boying's pioneers have said that the origin of the dance can be traced to early street gangs of New York City who performed a dance known as Uprocking. B-boying most likely came from a combination of these three sources. That is, B-boys and B-girls probably performed the "Get on the Good Foot" and gang dances at Kool DJ Herc's parties.

Gang culture and Uprocking. The street gangs that rose up in New York City in the late '50s and '60s greatly expanded by 1970 in the city's boroughs of the Bronx and Brooklyn. Some aspects of street gang culture, such as territorialism and battling, gave rise to the B-boying culture. The gang dances were not alternatives to violence, but usually a prelude to it, in that the dance would lead to fighting (Fricke 2002, 3). Parallels can be made with the Yąnomamö of southern Venezuela and the adjacent portions of northern Brazil because certain aspects of violence in their culture serve similar functions to violence in early B-boying. The Yąnomamö have feasts and alliances to establish positive relationships between their

many sovereign villages. Sometimes these activities are not successful, and often indifference about people's relations lead to ignorance or suspicion, which produces accusations of sorcery in villages that are usually within walking distance of each other. When there is a death in a village, for example, the people assign blame to shamans in another village—one in close proximity; usually, a raid will then take place between the villages (Chagnon 1968, 118).

Anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon (1968) has said that war is one form of violence in a graded series of aggressive activities. Alternative forms of fighting for the Yąnomamö, such as chest-pounding duels, can be seen as the antithesis of war because they provide an alternative to killing. These duels are formally regulated by rules about the proper way to deliver and receive blows so that villagers do not have to resort to drastic means to resolve disputes (Chagnon 1968). Similarly, today, when there are "organized" B-boying competitions, promoters and judges of the competitions instruct dancers to not have any physical contact with opposing crews, "to keep the moves clean," and to adhere to time limits for dancing. These contemporary rules for many B-boying competitions have changed the dance from how it was performed in its beginning.

In Yąnomamö culture, differences usually lead to violence, just as with some of the early B-boy battles in New York City. On August 15, 1981 the Dynamic Rockers of Queens battled (danced) against the Rock Steady Crew from the Bronx. The battle took place in downtown Manhattan with hundreds of seats for spectators. Both crews brought their entire group of comrades from both boroughs. The battle was so heightened that the circle of people around the dancers became a dome that blocked all audience view. Tempers at the battle escalated into fights and disagreements about who really won. Photographer Henry Chalfant said, "And it ended in a kind of mini-wilding spree" (Chang 2005, 159). At the end of the battle hotdog stands were kicked over and windows were punched out of nearby subway trains (Chang 2005, 159). Television show host Michael Holman of the show *Graffiti Rock* gave his view of the battle:

> It was wild. It was so exciting because it was at Lincoln Center. All of a sudden, it became mainstream! The battle was really an amazing event, pretty chaotic though. It was raw and difficult to judge. It did not have enough order to be judged. Of course, they could not agree on who won and there was a big fight afterwards. What I did see in the Dynamic Rockers was that they had an athleticism that Rock Steady Crew did not have. Rock Steady were

> better dancers though and I would have to say that, overall, the Rock Steady Crew won. It was history though. It was historic. (Cooper 2004, 97)

That is one episode in B-boying where the dance led to fighting.

Burn, a dancer who joined the Rock Steady Crew in the early eighties, depicted dancers at his high school. He said that the term for B-boying was rocking, burning, or jerking. He said that the dancing did not take the place of fighting because all the dancers were in gangs that also fought (Fricke 2002, 8). Many of the B-boys' styles had their roots in the gang dances from the Bronx, uptown Manhattan, and Brooklyn. Regarding the dance as a prelude to fighting, B-boy Trac 2 said, "They would have get-togethers between the rival gangs for specific turf and the two [gang] warlords would go at it, and the winner to that dance actually decides where the rumble's going to be held" (Chang 2005, 116). Fighting was expected.

Most New York gangs in the 1960s performed Uprocking, which preceded and influenced B-boying. Also around this time, MC Rahiem from the Furious Five said that B-boys at the time were not doing floor moves, that the dance was Uprocking (Fricke 2002, 41). The numerous works on Uprocking include the website of King Uprock and the book *Yes Yes Y'all*, by Jim Fricke. Uprocker Break Easy has defined Uprocking in this way:

> Uprock is a soulful, competitive street dance. It was developed in the Bushwick area of Brooklyn between 1967 and 1968 by two men, Rubberband Man and Apache. Uprock is danced in synchronization to the rhythms of Soul and Funk music and certain Rock songs. The dance consists of foot shuffles, spins, turns, freestyle movements, sudden body movements called "jerks", and hand gestures called "burns." The "Uprock" dance involves two or more dancers, single or as a team, dancing alternatively or simultaneously, performing what is called a dance battle. Uprockers battle throughout the duration of a complete song ... in a line formation called the "Apache Line." The Apache Line allows two opposing dancers or crews to face each other and execute their "burn" gestures towards one another. Although Uprockers sometimes emulate fight moves with their "burns," physical contact is never allowed. Physical contact is usually a sign of inexperience. If an Uprocker is experienced he or she will not make any physical contact in order to "burn" his or her opponent.

> Experienced Uprockers are also familiar with the songs that they dance to, and they use the lyrics and sounds of the music to out-do their opponents. (Uprock 2005)

Uprocking seen from this perspective is similar to Yąnomamö chest-pounding duels in that "burning" an opponent was sometimes an alternative to physically fighting them. Burn had a different view. Burn said:

> All the gangs would fuckin' rock [dance]. They would hustle and they would rock. You're a gang member and you go to somebody's neighborhood to dance and you got fifteen people lined up behind you ready to kick ass. Much tension. If I go in there and dis you, your friends are going to jump me. Some get mad 'cause they got burned [lost], but the real ones, they got respect. They [gangs] used to dance and smoke weed. The term was rock, burning and jerking. That's bullshit about how dancing took the place of fighting—they were gangs, they always fought. Gangs had their dancers, their writers, and their stick-up kids! (Fricke 2002, 8-12)

B-boy Alien Ness argued that B-boying did not start at DJ Kool Herc parties but, rather, could be witnessed in the outlaw gangs of the late '60s and '70s; B-boying was part of their war dances (Fricke 2002, 9). Author Jeff Chang draws parallels between New York's B-boys and some gangs of Louisiana, saying that the B-boy had tapped into the same spirit that gave rise to New Orleans' Mardi Gras Indian gangs—segregated African Americans who, from the early 1900s, came out on Mardi Gras Day to meet and confront other gangs through dance (Chang 2005, 116). B-boying became a means to settle disputes ritually on the streets, so crews developed who practiced, performed, and created new moves together (Fricke 2002, 12).

Finally, Street dancer Rennie Harris said this about the actual and symbolic violence in B-boying:

> If you really look at Hip-Hop dance, it's really a rites-of-passage thing. You never see the arms release down. They're always up in fighting position. It's going to war ... what we say you're going to battle. You go out there to fight. (Chang 2005, 115)

[2] Some of Graffiti's participants uphold that Graffiti should not be classified under Hip Hop.

Kool DJ Herc and the language of B-boying. Besides B-boying, the other elements of Hip Hop include (but are not limited to) DJing, MCing, Beatboxin and Writing (also known as Graffiti)[2]. Many authors of "Hip Hop" books focus more attention on MCing than the other elements because it is deemed more important. For example, in many of those books, DJing, B-boying, and Graffiti are briefly mentioned in an introductory chapter, while MCing is usually a synonymous term for Hip Hop. As discussed later, after MCing gained mainstream appeal, B-boying lost its top spot of being the subject of countless magazine articles and television appearances, a change that placed B-boying back into its "underground" status. MCs' audible poetry, being easily accessible, were eventually recorded and sold, making the art marketable. However, there are many Hip Hop websites created by some of Hip Hop's founders that contain well-documented information about all elements of the culture. The relationship between B-boying and Kool DJ Herc deserves explanation.

Kool DJ Herc, known as Clive Campbell, came to the United States from Jamaica in 1967. He is known as the "Father of Hip Hop." Herc popularized the use of Jamaican sound systems at parties (also known as jams) in the South Bronx. At his parties Herc relied mostly on funk music's records and emphasized the breaks of the songs, meaning the point in a song when the rhythmic patterns created by the instruments are emphasized over the melodic and harmonic components. Steve Clemente, better known as Mr. Wiggles, a dancer in the groups Rock Steady Crew, Magnificent Force, GhettOriginal, and Electric Boogaloos, described a breakbeat as based on a style of drumming called funk, the drum solo on a funk, soul, R&B, rock, jazz fusion, or other type of song that features funk drummers (Clemente 2005). Hip Hop DJ Grandmaster Flash recalled that for every great record there was a great part. He and others referred to this part as "the get down part," which lasted around five seconds and was later called "the break" (Fricke 2002, 58). Another Hip Hop pioneer, DJ Breakout, gave information on breaks:

> Say there's a lotta singin' on the record, and then the singin' stops and the beat comes on. You gotta make the beat last for a long time to keep the B-boy keep dancin', 'cause once the words come on, he stops dancin'. So you gotta be able to catch that same beat, hit it, hit it, again and again. (Fricke 2002, 96)

Boys (and later on girls) would "go down" (dance) when DJ Herc applied these methods at his parties (Rivera 2003, 56). Herc coined the term "B-boy" and was the first DJ to extend the breakbeat on a record (Fricke

2002, 7). DJ DXT said that many people have a misconception of B-boys (Fricke 2002, 12). "B-boy" can mean several things. The "B" in B-boy usually means "break," "beat," "boogie," or "Bronx" (Driver 2001, 231). He said that the "B" also stands for breaking, people who would show up for parties to fight (Fricke 2002, 12).

James Brown. The belief that B-boying came from James Brown is due to the singer's stage performance of "Get on the Good Foot." The Good Foot involved a step in which he raised one leg high at the knee, simultaneously holding it there for a beat, and then dropping it and raising the other leg at the same time; he also incorporated spins and drops. This dance was imitated by many youth in the South Bronx, especially the dancers who attended Kool DJ Herc's jams. The B-boys would later include more moves,[3] such as dropping to the floor and jumping up on a beat (break beat), and balancing on their hands to free the legs to "shuffle" and "sweep." These moves, which have an athletic nature, attracted young kids and gangs in the South Bronx, where dance battles existed (Don't Blink Media, 2005).

Decline of B-boying among Afro Caribbean Americans and African Americans

Around the late 1970s, Afro Caribbean Americans and African Americans began to lose interest in B-boying. In particular, in 1977 the "Freak" dance craze attracted the attention of the Afro Caribbean American and African American communities (Driver 2001, 231). New York Puerto Rican B-boy Crazy Legs said:

> In '79 I was getting dissed. I would go into a dance and I would get dissed by a lot of brothas [Afro-Caribbean American/African American] who would ask 'Why y'all still doing that dance? That's played out'. By '79, there were very few African American brothas that was doing this. (Davey D 2005)

B-boy and Graffiti Writer BOM5 recalled in 1976 that the Afro Caribbean Americans and African Americans started to "slow down" and that the Puerto Rican Americans started to take over (Fricke 2002, 113).

JoJo also said that the Zulu Kings, African American B-boys affiliated with Hip Hop DJ Afrika Bambaata, were B-boying infrequently. He

---

[3] For more information about specific B-boying moves, go to http://www.b-boys.com.

quoted some of the Zulu Kings, “I ain’t going to dirty my sneaks no more. I ain’t going to chump my hands no more.” Afro Caribbean American and African American teens always wanted to keep the B-boy art going, but to simultaneously keep their clothes clean. The whole idea was to “hit the floor” (dance) and finish with one’s clothes still clean (Fricke 2002, 112-117). Nelson George, in *Hip Hop America* (1998), writes that for African American (and Afro Caribbean American) teenagers, breaking was just another way to dance at the time, not a lifestyle expression, and breaking would have been forgotten altogether had it not been for the dance zeal of New York’s Puerto Rican teenagers (p. 15).

Revival of B-boying among Puerto Rican Americans

The Puerto Rican community in the Bronx made sure that the dance continued to evolve. The key here is revival, not growing interest in a new ethnic community, because Puerto Rican Americans have always been part of B-boy even though they were smaller in number during the dance’s beginning. Implying that Afro Caribbean American and African American Bronx youth viewed the dance as a fad, Crazy Legs said:

> I think the difference is when the brothas [Afro Caribbean American and African Americans] first started doing and it was at its infancy they weren’t doing acrobatic moves. That didn’t come into play until more Puerto Ricans got involved in the mid 70s. We then took the dance, evolved it and kept it alive ... I want to say one other thing. We [New York’s Puerto Ricans] always maintained the “flava.” It was like a changing of the guard and all we did was add more “flava” to something that already existed. We use to refer to it as Moreno style or Cocola style. That was just the slang back then. There were certain Top Rocks called Latin Rock. (Davey D 2005)

Puerto Rican American teens were especially influenced by the Kung Fu films of the 1970s, so they incorporated martial arts and power spins into B-boying. The predominantly Puerto Rican American Rock Steady Crew was well known for pushing the limits of what could be done with B-boying with moves such as headspins, handglides, and windmills. The dance caught the media’s attention during the late 1970s because of its “powermoves” such as head, back, and hand spins. The latter acrobatic moves pushed B-Boying into the international spotlight (Driver 2001, 231).

Impact of Media Attention on B-boying

The media took much notice of B-boying from the late 1970s to early 1980s (Driver 2001, 232). In April of 1981 *The Village Voice* newspaper ran a front page article by Sally Banes, *Physical Graffiti: Breaking is Hard To Do*. This article was the first on B-boying. In June 1981, the ABC television show 20/20 filmed B-boys in Manhattan. The media invented the name "Breakdancing," which was given to B-boying when the dance gained mass appeal in the early 1980s—focusing on such elements as the dance's later addition of acrobatic moves. The media focused on "flashy" or "trick" moves rather than the dancer's ability to dance on beat, a major difference between Break-dancing and B-boying. Breakdancers are non-B-boying dancers who attempt to imitate B-boying while overlooking B-boying's "foundation" that includes moves such as toprock and footwork. B-girls and B-boys try to have "flava" and "finesse" when they dance (Driver 2001, 231).

In the early '80s B-boying became a media phenomenon as filmmakers documented different aspects of Hip Hop culture (Fricke 2002, 275). The documentary *Style Wars* by Tony Silver and Henry Chalfant featured Graffiti and B-boying; the film was shot in New York City from 1981 through 1982. Other movies that featured B-boying included *Wild Style* (1982), *Beat Street* (1984), and *Breakin* (1984). B-boy Alien Ness, a member of Rock Steady Crew, New York City Breakers, and Boogie Down Productions, gave his description of B-boying making a comeback in New York:

> By 1979 B-boyin' was already passé, it was played. Nobody was doing it, nobody wanted to see it. And if it wasn't for Crazy Legs going around New York City and searching for people who still danced and asking the original leaders of the Rock Steady Crew—JoJo, Jimmy Dee, Jimmy Lee—if he could continue using the name ... that's how the B-boy was kept alive. (Fricke 2002, 197)

Crazy Legs is known for reviving the dying art of B-boying and spreading its popularity nationally and internationally (Fricke 2002, 197). Due largely to Crazy Legs and others' efforts in the early 80s, B-boying appeared in documentaries, movies, televisions, and magazines. One movie from the early '80s that popularized B-boying was *Flashdance*. Alien Ness recalled his *Flashdance* experience:

> When *Flashdance* came out, it was just like the next level. It was like, "Okay, I see this being done everyday on the

> block, but now I'm seeing it on a big screen." It was like everybody in the neighborhood, you had fifty, sixty, seventy-five kids at a time going to the movies and paying $2.50, which was expensive at that time for us, to watch thirty seconds of film—that one little scene with the Rock Steady Crew. That's really what set it [B-boying] off ... For a lot of B-Boys nationwide. (Fricke 2002, 302)

The audiences that saw this movie in the Bronx most likely consisted of many B-boys and B-girls, and there is no doubt they enjoyed seeing the dance they helped create performed by other dancers. Most likely for them, as spectators of the dance, the movie reaffirmed unity within a community. Many early B-girls and B-boys, who had stopped dancing, decided to get together and resume dancing when they saw *Flashdance* (Fricke 2002, 302).

B-Boy Frosty Freeze recalled when B-boying began to spread by way of tours. His crew, the Rock Steady Crew, along with other acts from Hip Hop culture, went on the United States tour of Hip Hop, called the Kitchen Tour, and the Europe One tour. Crazy Legs depicted some of his B-boying experiences in Europe:

> B-Boying, it's the thing that blew up the whole Hip Hop industry. People took to the visual aspect of Hip Hop before they took to the spoken word. When we went to Europe ... they didn't understand English in France, but the beat was slammin, and the dance and graffiti, that all opened the door for rap. We all helped each other. (Fricke 2002, 307)

Some B-boys would change their dance style when they would perform in front of people, for example, while on tour, at conferences, or at community centers where senior citizens were in attendance. B-boy Ken Swift said:

> I never ever felt like b-boying deserved to be on stage. I never felt like it deserved to be anywhere other than where it came from. I perform on stage. I like to get in front of people, but it's not built for stage. If I grab my private parts in front of you, that's not for the Olympics, that's not for Broadway. (Cooper 2004, 97)

Second Decline of B-boying

After the media stopped reporting on B-boying, the dance immediately began to lose its popularity among many dancers. Because of "too much" media coverage, when the media stopped showing B-boying on TV, many people thought that B-boying had been a fad, so many dancers stopped dancing (Okumura 2005). The new sound of Hip Hop music around the late 1980s aided in B-boying's replacement by what came to be known as "Hip Hop dance." B-boying was in its "winter period" from the mid- to late 1980s. During this winter period many people say that B-boying went "underground" (out of the mainstream) to places in Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, and Central and South America.

Second Revival of B-boying

A resurgence of B-boying began in the early 1990s because of the efforts of some B-boys and B-girls who did not stop dancing during the late 1980s (Driver 2001, 232). The dancers began to make public appearances around 1990 in places such as California, Texas, Japan, and the European countries of England, France, and Germany. Also many B-boy crews such as the Rock Steady Crew began to organize annual festivals around this time. In the southeastern United States, B-boying has expanded greatly since its world resurgence in the early 90s and now includes annual events such as Evolution in Florida and Breaklanta in Georgia.

Research Questions

The previous discussion of dance, B-boying culture, and aspects of B-boying culture in other societies aided the researcher in conceptualizing his motivations for doing the research and his research questions. He wanted to know why people today participate in the dance and to apprehend their answers to different topics associated with the dance, such as its history and styles. The investigator predicted that dancers would report similar answers for questions regarding B-boying and Hip Hop's history. Conversely, the investigator believed the participants would give differing views pertaining to topics such as dance style, reasons for B-boying, and personal definition of B-boying. Finally, it was believed the participants would discuss topics that the researcher did not suggest, such as ethnicity.

Methodology

The research methodology was semi-structured qualitative interviews. Participants consisted of one B-girl and seventeen B-boys, who were recruited at locations where they dance in Alabama and Georgia. Dancers were interviewed in Tuscaloosa, at the University of Alabama's Ferguson Center Student Union, and in Birmingham, Alabama in the Five Points Southside neighborhood, at "The Fountain." The remaining dancers were contacted at two night clubs in Athens, Georgia, and a school gymnasium in Jonesboro, Georgia. Dancers at these locations were chosen as a sample of convenience. Once the first few participants were interviewed, snowball sampling was used to identify other dancers for interviews. Snowball sampling includes locating at least one individual and then asking that person to list other people who would be participants for the research (Bernard 2002, 185). The only incentive participants received was the ability to help contribute to knowledge about B-boying.

Discussions with participants began with a debriefing process, during which the researcher reviewed informed consent information with participants; all participants gave consent to be identified by their dance name. Next, the participants were interviewed six to eight minutes each while being voice recorded. Additional time was allowed if the participants needed more than eight minutes to elaborate or ask questions. The following questions were asked: How old are you? What is your B-boy/B-girl name? How long have you been B-boying and how did you start? How often do you practice? What is the scene like where you are from? What is your style? What do you know about B-boying's and Hip Hop's history? What were/are your influences for B-boying? Why do you B-boy? Do you know if the dance has changed from its beginning? What is your definition(s) of B-boying? What are your future plans in B-boying? Is there anything you would like to elaborate on?

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Interviews

Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed in the University of Alabama's Qualitative Research Lab in the College of Education. Dr. Marysia Galbraith helped code the interview transcriptions to identify themes such as identity, style, and B-boying and/or Hip Hop history. The dancers' ages, which ranged from 18 to the mid-twenties, did not have a noticeable relationship to their answers to the questions.

History of B-boying and/or Hip Hop

Many of the participants gave similar historical accounts of B-boying and/or Hip Hop, with versions consistent with the history of B-boying presented in the literature review. All of the dancers knew that the dance started in New York. Many participants gave specific names, such as DJ Kool Herc and James Brown, and B-boying's gang dance influence, Up-rocking. For instance, one dancer said that DJ Kool Herc would have a beat and "chop it up" and "make a loop" (i.e., extend the breakbeat). Some participants said that B-boying was influenced by different dances throughout the world, such as dances from Brazil (most likely *Capoeira*) and Africa. Commenting on how the dance started, a dancer called Bugze said "There were certain kids basically, like thought of it, saw videos, started taking things from different types of dancing, brought it together, they started in the clubs." Bugze is probably referring to the dancers who witnessed James Brown's performance of "Get on the Good Foot" and adapted it to DJ Kool Herc's breakbeats. Bugze also said:

> People still make fun of you, you go to a club, like they playing rock [music] and you try to B-boy you know, people still look at you like you're stupid, like you're different. So when it started, everybody was looking at it like it was something different.

This reasonably was (and is) the reaction of an audience seeing B-boying for the first time. In Bugze's comment, the people are reacting to the B-boying in that way because they never saw the dance or never saw it performed to rock music, even though many breakbeats come from British rock groups such as The Rolling Stones and Babe Ruth.

Participants used terms such as "cats" and "fathers" when referring to the pioneers of Hip Hop culture. The word "cats" was also used to identify other B-boys; another dancer, Papa Smurf said, "I came out here into the Southside and I met these cats [B-girls/ B-boys] out here, y'know." Participants referred to someone who was very informed about the history of the culture as a "head", such as participant Y: "I mean, when I started, I'm just one of those heads that's big about history and junk like that so ... like, if I pick up anything [about Hip Hop's history] I will go back and find out what's all going on."

The sources for the dancers' histories of B-boying were books, the internet, videos, and contact with some of its pioneers. Some participants mentioned that the dance was created by Puerto Rican American and Afro Caribbean/African American teenagers in New York City. When giv-

ing the history, some dancers did not focus solely on B-boying but also acknowledged that B-boying is part of the Hip Hop culture along with other elements such as Graffiti, DJing, and MCing. Some participants acknowledged the famous B-boy crew Rock Steady and mentioned the female presence in early B-boying. Few dancers said that early B-boying consisted of toprocking and footwork, which are part of the foundations. When participants were talking about the history of B-boying, they sometimes talked about the evolution of the dance up to the present. So the early history and subsequent development of B-boying were both discussed; people who knew more of the dance's origin usually also recognized more of its evolution. Participants who had been dancing longer, relative to other participants, also tended to know more about B-boying's history.

Along with giving their version of B-boying's history, all participants stated that the dance had changed over time. Many participants said that the change was from its main focus on foundations in the 1970s, to powermoves and tricks in the 1980s, and now being in a transition with both trends being performed. Participant Y said that transformation came because people did not want to repeat the same dance moves: "Basically people got bored of the same ole shit, so they started figuring out new stuff, I mean there's a whole lot of biters and stuff like that and once three or four people bite a move, it becomes a common move." Biting refers to one person copying another person's move and not changing the move to look different. One participant said that in the 1970s B-boying was strictly battling different people and having fun and not becoming a stage (exhibition) with choreography. Some participants stated that B-boying in the 1970s was all about "rocking the beat," which is dancing on beat. Participant Revolve said, "Now, there's small technical steps, like techs—small intricate movements and powermoves." These moves differ from place to place, especially in the United States. A few participants said that in New York City, dance styles focus more on Uprocking and B-boying's foundation and footwork. In Texas and Florida, the style is more powermoves, while California has a mix of every B-boying style.

Involvement and Influences

Most dancers seemed to have gotten into B-boying in one of five different ways. Some participants happened to be at a place where B-boying was being performed. For other dancers, initial involvement in B-boying was through a media outlet such television. Participant involvement in B-boying also came from other dances, other elements of Hip Hop culture, or meeting with other B-girls and/or B-boys. Some of the participants happened to be "at the right place at the right time," such as participant Codak

who saw the dance being performed in a night club. Another participant who went to Birmingham's Southside at night and happened to see other people dancing said, "I came out here into the Southside and met these cats out here y'know ... I felt the vibe." Media exposure was another starting point for some of the dancers; some said that they saw video clips of the dance on video tapes and the internet, while others first saw it on television. Some dancers were "into" another dance called Rave, which led them into B-boying. Dancer Y said:

> Basically just started Rave dancing ... stuff like that y'know ... and they were all getting down on the ground and then ... I thought they were starting to get kinda wack, cause they all did the same moves over and over again. So I was like, let me elevate this ... I mean take it to the next level ... B-boying.

Participant Y seemed to know about B-boying before he got into it and was probably no longer enjoying Rave dancing.

Other elements of Hip Hop culture, particularly DJing, prompted some participants to start B-boying. Some participants are DJs or knew people who DJ; they liked the music they were playing, so B-boying was a logical step for them. A few dancers started to B-boy because they knew other dancers. One participant said, "When I got here to the University of Georgia a boy got me into it, I just loved it, man." Some participants had multiple reasons for starting B-boying, such as an interest in music and witnessing other dancers. Also, some participants who were college students attended colleges or universities that had a B-boying club.

It seemed that participants from places where the scene (community with B-girls/ B-boys) was larger (Birmingham and Jonesboro) usually had an interest in the dance because they saw dancers that they already knew. Conversely, participants from places where the scene was smaller (Athens and Tuscaloosa) usually became interested in B-boying because of chance contact with a dance scene or through some media outlet. This meant that, predictably, larger cities usually had more B-girls and B-boys than smaller cities.

Influences on their styles of dance identified by participants fall into five categories: media, other B-girls/B-boys, Rave dancing, drugs, and music. The media influence consisted mostly of videos of B-boying's pioneers. When participants said that other dancers influenced them, they usually referred to B-boying pioneers (e.g., Ken Swift, Crazy Legs) and to people with whom they usually dance or who know about Hip Hop's history. A dancer said, "My brother is a big influence to me cause he knows

a lot of the history." Another dancer simply stated that "staying off drugs" was the main reason for his interest in B-boying. Rave dance was an influence for another. Y's influence came from everybody who dances:

> I mean ... everybody's basically influences, if they're, y'know, cool, if they're an asshole ... it still motivates you to get better. I mean ... there are a lot of people, especially in Atlanta who ... like Breakdance for four or five years or whatever and they quit learning shit and you don't wanna be like them, so they're a good influence too ... y'know, everybody's an influence in some sort of way.

There are patterns related to location; dancers from smaller scenes derived a lot of their influences from media outlets, while participants from larger scenes were usually influenced more from being around other dancers.

Style

B-boying can be performed in different styles, for example, with toprock and footwork being performed differently. The participants were asked about their dance style, and some of the participants' dance names alluded to their style. One participant said that he did not know if he had a name for it, so he just called it Berlin Style because that was his B-boy name (and refers to his home); he also said that he loves rocking the beat, footwork, and big moves. Berlin's dance style is probably influenced by dancers in Germany, or the fact that he is from Germany. Some participants performed other dances, e.g., Papa Smurf does Uprocking, Locking, Popping, and Boogaloo, the latter three being Funk dances that came from California. Some participants said that their styles came from different sources such as videos, other dancers, and even themselves. One dancer said:

> I don't watch videos ... I think if somebody watches videos too much they end up biting other people's style ... So, basically in all honesty ... if you really want to know the truth where my creativity comes from. I sit down, I smoke, I meditate, and just come up with any kind of original move that I've never seen before; and if I think that it even closely/remotely resembles anything else that anybody else has got, then I go ahead and change it off the top.

Many of the participants emphasized that their styles focused on dancing to the beat “more or less than just doing moves.” Bugze described his style:

> My style is more of freeflowing. I don’t have to memorize stuff like everybody else does. It’s just freeflowing. Whatever I got in my head to do, I do when I’m on the floor, I’ll do it. I don’t go and practice all day long and practice one certain way.

When asked about style, one participant bluntly said, “I am style.” The dancers’ styles seemed to be associated with their identity. Participant Revolve said that since he is Irish, he usually incorporated Riverdance while B-boying. Dancer Blonde, who is also a martial artist, said he does Capoeira moves while B-boying. Many people think Capoeira is related to B-boying. However, B-boying pioneer Crazy Legs said:

> We didn’t know what the fuck no Capoeira was, man. We were in the ghetto! There were no dance school, nothing. If there was a dance school it was tap and jazz and ballet. I only saw one dance school in my life in the ghetto during that time ... . Our immediate influence in B-boying was James Brown, point blank. (Change 2005, 116-117)

Scene

The scene is the location where the B-girls and B-boys usually dance. Some participants gave information on other scenes when asked about theirs; they compared the scenes. Participant Berlin said:

> It’s funny, the scenes everywhere ... it’s the same, but it’s different. Everybody’s got different styles. Umm ... up north [New York City] it’s all foundation, Texas is known for all power [powermoves,] y’ know, all big moves and crowd pleasing moves. Umm ... Germany is something different altogether ... actually once a year the biggest competition in the world, is called Battle of the Year, it’s held in Germany. But it’s awesome and everybody’s got different styles, you just respect anything that ... you know, anything that you see that looks hot, that’s what you respect, that’s how it’s different.

At the competition in Germany, called Battle of the Year (BOTY), different B-boy/B-girl crews come from around the world to compete (Mambo Open Source 2005).

For some participants, dance style was a recurring theme in their scene descriptions. Many participants said their scene was growing, with more people starting to B-boy. In smaller scenes, participants said that they wanted to expand the scene. Participant Papa Smurf said, "We wanna spread this culture here in Birmingham, hopefully ... It's gonna take some years, it's gonna take some work." Participant Revolve talked about B-boying's influence on gangs:

> In Chicago, it's a lot different, y'know. Umm ... I mean there's a lot more gangbanging going on. I guess with that ... y'know ... that gives them something positive to do. Different places [are] different. Y'know what I'm saying, whether it's gangbanging or B-boying or going to the club or frats [fraternity parties] or however it may be. B-boying is definitely a society and is definitely a language that we can speak on the street that people will not understand. Y'know, it's like we have our own language, our own style, and only certain people would know, and if y'know, then y'know, and if y'don't know, then ya probably don't need to know ... It's just kind of like that.

A few participants said that when they moved from a larger city to a smaller one, the B-boying scene in the smaller city was usually not as big as the one in the larger city, and when some participants moved from a smaller city to a larger city, the larger city usually has a larger scene.

Identity

To better understand the participants' identity as expressed in B-boying, the researcher asked specific questions such as why they B-boy and what B-boying means to them. Their answers included topics such as expression, physical fitness, and ethnicity. Music and culture were mentioned many times. For the participants who had a dance name, that name was essential to their identity. Many participants did not have dance names, so they created one briefly before the interview. When asked why he B-boys, Codak said:

> I express myself through the art, but the same time I get more peace of mind and understanding of myself. A lot of

> times people, it's hard for them to find themselves ... their self determination in life. I just feel like it's a form of self expression and a way I can get peace of mind with myself. It's my way of getting away from it all.

His name identified him as a dancer people could remember:

> I was looking for name that pretty much I could relate to, but I never could find one. So one day I walked in CVS [a pharmacy] and I found Codak was a clever name, so it has meaning of an image, so I thought that would be a good representation to go by, that I can place some people ahead as an image.

When Codak said that he could place some people ahead with his name, he probably means that when others hear his name, they associate it with an image of his dancing ability. Participant Blonde created a dance name for the interview. His reason for B-boying is similar to other participants' reasons:

> Cause it's fun, y'know, you get out there and you do different moves. You go out there and have fun. Also you get exercise, you stay in good shape and you get stronger just from being able to lift yourself and do different moves and freezes.

Many of the pioneers of B-boying were also MCs, DJs, writers (Graffiti artists), and former gang members. Participant Revolve alluded to this:

> There is no reason why, it's what I am. It's either you are or you not. I look at it ... you have breakers, y'know people that break and that are talented, very, very, very good, but B-boying is a state of mind, a state of ... tranquility. It's very hard to explain honestly because ... it's just in you, you live it. You could be a DJ and still be a B-boy in my perspective, y' know what I'm saying. You could be a skateboarder, but still be a B-boy. It's a way of life, it's an attitude.

Berlin's definition of B-boying consisted of many different topics:

> My definition of B-boying is ... diversity. Diversity, style, funk, fun ... release, man. You get out there, you don't

> think of anything else, you get so stressed out all day long, you get on the floor, like today, two and a half hours straight just sweating ... getting tired, hurting yourself ... it don't even matter, man.

Berlin saw B-boying as a way to recuperate, at the same time if he gets hurt, he is still enjoying the dance. Some participants B-boy because other dances did not seem appealing to them:

> I just don't think dancing [non-B-boying dancing] is interesting enough. I mean Pop-Locking's cool, and y'know Krumping [a dance from Los Angeles] and all that stuff, that's cool but, but I just can't express the amount of energy. Plus I'm [a] rather big man, you can't really see me like flipping my arms around and shaking my whole body to Pop-Locking, plus ... if I'm gonna spend a lot of time on something, I might as well be getting multiple benefits out of it. (Y)

Participant Killer Tim said:

> It's like a relaxation, a hobby. Something to keep me relaxed. All the other stuff in the world ... it's like freedom man, it's a culture. Come out here [Southside, Birmingham] and do your thing ... the only thing on your mind is B-boying, nothing else be on your mind when you're out here, nothing else but this.

Dancer Killer Tim enjoys B-boying; it is relaxing to him and he focuses solely on the dance when performing. The multiple benefits could include exercise. Attitude and motivation were important for some. Participant N said:

> It's more about attitude man, cause, I mean, you got to have like ... y' know, some kind of motive to come out here and just like practice like all the dadgum time. Umm ... everything come out when, like, you B-boy; it's all about attitude and how you feel, you feeling the music, y' know what I'm saying? You actually loving what you do so.

Participant Y said:

> The thing that be getting me lately ... is guys who don't wanna elevate themselves, y'know. I mean, I'm 25 and I'm just starting ... y'know, and I didn't come in when there was almost no B-boys or whatever, but I figure if more B-boys come in, they're trying very hard and stuff ... and other B-boys, they don't ... you know they been here for a long time, but they were getting by off of like a windmill and the K-kick or something like that, y'know. Like, I think they should quit bitching and like elevate their stuff instead of jumping in your face all the damn time talking about how much older they are in the game than you are.

Analyses of the relationships between dance and identity suggested B-boying was used in some instances for self-determination and as an outlet from negative situations in the dancers' lives. Many of the participants took part in other elements of Hip Hop culture, just as many of the founders did. It is also evident from many of the dancers' responses that when they B-boy, they become relaxed and do not agonize over certain things, like stress from everyday life.

Ethnicity

Humans are of a single species and are capable of creating and adopting cultural traits. When considering race, it is unlikely that physical characteristics of groups are related to their language and customs because anyone can learn any language or culture regardless of their biological origins. However, ethnic groups are distinguished on the basis of attributes such as shared language, shared religion, shared customs, and shared history (Lavenda and Schultz 2003, 15, 94, 96), and ethnicity was raised as an issue by some participants. When participants elaborated on a topic of choice at the end of their interview, the topics usually centered on ethnicity. Participant Berlin said:

> I just wish people would be more open minded you' know. Respect the Hip Hop community. This is Athens, Georgia, it's a real big Rock [music] town, like REM [music band], and stuff are from here ... And, umm ... like the university here, sadly, is not very diverse, it's mostly Caucasian people, and fraternities and sororities, they're just

> so close-minded, so people need to just open up, man, and see that anything you can't do, you gotta respect anything that somebody's got that you don't got, you just need to pay attention and learn. It's all about respect, y' know.

Berlin mentioned Caucasians in Athens, Georgia because they make up the majority of the University of Georgia's student population. His comments suggest that if his school were more ethnically diverse, there would be more B-boys and B-girls.

Two dancers saw B-boying as being a way to connect with their ethnic group. Revolve acknowledged aspects of his ethnicity and culture and explained how he took movements from one dance and used them in another. As mentioned earlier, participant Revolve said, "I'm, y' know, Irish and my family ... they know to Riverdance, y' know what I'm saying. I incorporate some of that and just twerk it to make look like this. I put stomping in it, like stepping."

Participant Codak said:

> I wanna grow more with B-boying and learn more moves and become a better dancer. Everything I do in life, I wanna incorporate the culture of Hip Hop, it's my form, it's my heritage. I thought about it, I always wondered where our culture was. You have people from China that go back to China, you have people from Japan that go back to Japan. Where the Afro Americans go to? So that's the way I feel like we can get back to our heritage ... through the art form of Hip Hop, real Hip Hop. Not commercialized, just real, pure, unadulterated Hip Hop.

Codak is referring to many African Americans who do not know in what part of Africa their ancestors lived, which he contrasts with other Americans who may know where their ancestors came from. He also sees B-boying as a possible link to answering his question.

Conclusion

B-boying is a dance that started in the South Bronx in the late 1960s to early 1970s and today can be seen all over the world. This research aimed to see B-boying from the perspective of dancers in two southeastern states, Alabama and Georgia, as expressed in semi-structured interviews. Before the research began, reviews of literature on B-boying and cultural

anthropology provided the background for this study. The participants in the study, who were mostly male, spoke on subjects such as dance style, identity, and, of course, their introduction to B-boying. Many participants gave similar accounts of B-boying's and/or Hip Hop's history, with participants who had been dancing longer than other participants usually knowing more of the history. The participants were asked about their influences and interests with B-boying. Some participants were influenced to participate in B-boying by seeing or participating in other dances. Participants from places with a larger scene usually had an interest in B-boying because of the presence of other dancers; participants from places with a smaller scene usually had an interest in the dance because of media influences or seeing other dancers by chance. These findings led to the conclusion that larger cities usually have more B-girls and B-boys than smaller cities.

At least three findings from the participants are related to the anthropological observations of the Yąnomamö and Shangaan cultures. Participants did not engage in any violence as some early B-boys and B-girls did. B-boying is an expression of the dancers' sense of identity and culture that specifically identified them as B-girls and B-boys. Finally, the dancers used B-boying as an expression to signify that they are part of Hip Hop culture—hence B-boying cannot be separated from this culture. For future research, it is recommended that more participants be included from other states, including more females, and that a possible link between contemporary dancers and gangs be explored.

Bibliography

Bernard, H. Russell. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 3rd ed. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002.

Chagnon, Napoleon. *Yąnomamö*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968.

Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005.

Clemente, Steffan. "Mr. Wiggles Hip Hop." Hip Hop resources. http://www.mrwiggles hiphop.net (accessed April 13, 2004).

Cooper, Martha. *Hip Hop Files*. Berlin: Here to Fame Publishing, 2004.

Davey D. "Davey D." Hip Hop resources, politics, interviews and news. http://www. daveyd.com (accessed May 3, 2005).

Don't Blink Media. "Theory." Hip Hop resources with links to other Hip Hop websites. http://www.b-boys.com (accessed April 13, 2004).

Driver, Ian. *A Century of Dance*. New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001.

Fricke, Jim. *Yes Yes Y'all: Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973.

George, Nelson. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Viking Press, 1998.

Lavenda, Robert, and Emily Schultz. *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*. 2nded. St. Cloud, MN: McGraw-Hill, 2003.

Mambo Open Source. "Battle of the Year." International B-boying Crew Contest. http://www.battleoftheyear.net (accessed June 29, 2005).

Niehaus, Isak, and Jonathan Stadler. "Muchongolo Dance: Deep Play in the South African Lowveld," *Ethnology* 43 (2004): 363-80.

Okumura, Kozo. "Global Darkness." Artists' biographies and information on different cultures. http://www.globaldarkness.com (accessed April 13, 2005).

Rivera, Raquel Z. *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

Royce, Anya Peterson. *The Anthropology of Dance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977.

Turner, Victor. *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982.

___________*The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1986.

Uprock, King. "*Dynasty Rockers*." Brooklyn Rock Dance and Uprock history. http://www. dynastyrockers.com (accessed April 10, 2005).