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DJs, Playlists, and Community: Imagining Communication Design through Hip Hop

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ABSTRACT

This article argues for the inclusion of Hip Hop communities in technical communication research. Through Hip Hop, technical communicators can address the recent call for TPC work to expand the field through culturally sensitive and diverse studies that honor communities and their practices. Using a Hip Hop community in Houston as a case study, this article discusses the way DJs operate as technical communicators within their communities. Furthermore, Hip Hop DJs build complex relationships with communities to create localized and accessible content. As technical communicators, Hip Hop practitioners can teach us to create community-based communication design for more diverse contexts.

CCS Concepts

- **Social and professional topics~Cultural characteristics**

Keywords

Hip Hop, accessibility, localization, community

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INTRODUCTION

Recent work in Technical/Professional Communication has made calls for expanding the field by turning to social justice through culturally sensitive and diverse studies that honor communities and their practices (Agboka, 2013; Haas, 2012; Maylath et al., 2013). While this work pushes our field toward important ethical responsibilities, it also helps build rigorous research and methods that help meet the needs of already globalized and complex communication praxis (Walton, Zraly, & Mugengana, 2015). In addition, conversations about cross-cultural design and globalization are increasingly being highlighted in technical and professional communication scholarship, emphasizing the role that global users play in the design and dissemination of effective technologies (Agboka, 2013; Sun, 2012). By merging conversations about globalization and localization with social-justice driven methods and methodologies, technical and professional communication scholarship continues to account for the ways that everyday users transform information across media, languages, spaces, and physical locations, often simultaneously.

Absent from this discussion, yet historically intertwined with all these issues, is Hip Hop Culture and its practitioners. Over the past 40 years, Hip Hop has globalized across diverse populations, using the same principles that technical and professional communication would identify as the user-localization (Sun, 2012) of digital and communicative technologies. In her groundbreaking text, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994), Tricia Rose first theorized the complex work of Hip Hop artists as a “black sonic force” that grew out of “black cultural traditions, the postindustrial transformation of urban life, and the contemporary technological terrain” (p. 63). Rose’s descriptions of where Hip Hop music comes from further emphasizes Hip Hop’s use of local contexts and cultures. Based in this praxis, DJs and rappers have made some of the most efficient and revolutionary interventions in communication while expanding its inclusion by design. Rose identifies these innovations in communication as Hip Hop artists’ ability to construct from deconstructions:

The arrangement and selection of sounds rap musicians

have invented via samples, turntables, tape machines, and sound systems are at once destructive (in that they actually take apart recorded musical compositions) and recuperative (because they recontextualize these elements to creating new meanings for cultural sounds that have been relegated to commercial waste bins). Rap music revises black cultural priorities via new and sophisticated technological means. “Noise” on the one hand and communal countermemory on the other. (p. 65)

By communicating through a variety of practices and leveraging a “communal countermemory,” Hip Hop has learned to engage across communities through the recognition of similar nodes of meaning making interpreted through local expressions known as translational styles (Alim, 2009). These styles range from the recognition of black linguistic expressions like “yo” and “dope” across globalized linguistic communities (Alim & Pennycook, 2007) to the various styles of music production like sampling or record scratching (Brewster & Broughton, 2000; Banks, 2010; Ball, 2011). Hip Hop’s inclusiveness and accessibility is based in the development of rhetorical tools for meaning making understood as style that allows for the revision that Rose describes across all forms of communication and mediums.

In this article, I present Hip Hop as a site of study for technical and professional communication. To do so, I examine a Hip Hop community in Houston and a mixtape series (Screw Tapes) as examples of the complex relationships that digital and written texts have in Hip Hop communication. Looking specifically at the workflow of creating new mixtapes, I articulate the roles that Hip Hop DJs play in creating, curating, and maintaining the flow of information within Hip Hop. With an emphasis on building community to create effective communication, Hip Hop DJs draw on localization and accessibility as the staples for creating and sustaining the transfer of knowledge. Through this project, I articulate how further analysis and implementation of Hip Hop culture within technical and professional communication can help the field design and enact culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) socially-just methods for adapting and disseminating global information.

HIP HOP’S WORLDWIDE RECEPTION AND WHY *WE* SHOULD BE TALKING ABOUT IT

The founding, development, and eventual growth of Hip Hop as a cultural movement was and continues to be built on the triumph of users (Sun, 2006) who manipulate communication technologies to create discourse communities (Banks, 2010). Hip Hop culture is made up of a set of practices—DJing, break dancing, graffiti writing, and emceeing/rapping—all of which are known as the elements of Hip Hop (Chang, 2005; Hill, 2009; TEDx, 2012). Each element carries its own set of practices and techniques, but what defines them as part of Hip Hop culture is a relationship to community. Each element can and does exist outside of the context of Hip Hop; however, without a specific tie to community, an element on its own does not represent Hip Hop. By representing or responding to a community, Hip Hop practitioners provide a model for technical communication that works toward both preserving and extending community practices through their contributions. The catalyst for Hip Hop culture and its ties to community was the Hip Hop DJ (Hager, 1982). Steven Hager describes the DJ in his 1984 profile

of Hip Hop elder Afrika Bambaataa as an “entrepreneur armed with a portable sound system and extensive record collection, the DJ emerged as a new cultural hero in the Bronx in 1975” (Hager, 1982, N. pag). In the formative days of Hip Hop, crews known as Sound Systems formed around DJs who put together the best and loudest configurations of audio equipment including speakers, two turntables, audio mixers, record collections, and a microphone (Chang, 2005; Forman, 2000). Through Sound Systems, DJs led the Hip Hop cultural revolution by throwing parties and hosting block parties that established spaces for what would eventually establish the Hip Hop community.

Hip Hop came about in the early 1970s in the South Bronx of New York City as a response to the lack of community resources in the city, including education, housing, representation, and employment (Rose, 1994; Chang, 2005; Hager, 1982). Before a name was given to Hip Hop culture, youth across the South Bronx were simultaneously engaging in graffiti writing and attending parties in public spaces to try and dance over the break beat loops of popular funk and disco records. DJs were eventually credited as the founders of Hip Hop because they had the ability to create and hold space.

Among the founders of Hip Hop, Clive Campbell (known by his DJ name of Kool Herc), is credited for throwing the first parties that would become the foundation for Hip Hop. Along with the help of his sister Cynthia Campbell, Kool Herc would throw parties in apartment complex basements and community rooms (Chang, 2005). Kool Herc is also responsible for developing the practice of looping. As Steven Hager notes, “Herc was the first DJ to buy records for a fifteen-second instrumental solo, which he would often play over and over” (1982). This was a formative moment for Hip Hop as it started to distinguish the unique practices that would eventually develop into the more widely recognized concept of sampling. Looping was developed by Kool Herc when he noticed that break dancers at his parties waited to dance during the instrumental breaks in the records. By using two turntables and a cross fader to switch between the records, Kool Herc was able to extend the break beat for as long as he wanted, giving the break dancers more time to show off. Kool Herc’s breakthrough catalyzed a whole repertoire of DJ practices developed by other DJs with the same goal of manipulating records for new uses. The manipulation of these records is one of the first places we see Hip Hop practitioners convert texts for better accessibility and usability for local users.

The development of looping was a formative moment for Hip Hop, representing the growth of a culture that is based in community through accessibility and localization. Along with his peers Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash, Kool Herc DJ’d in public spaces because black and brown youth had limited options for how to spend their time and limited outlets to express themselves. As Hip Hop parties became more popular, youth found themselves with a place to go and with practices to engage in. The same kids that were writing graffiti were aspiring DJs and break dancers, eventually combining these practices to fill out Hip Hop as a culture and community. Underlying this community were practices like looping that were engaged in a perpetual call and response (Smitherman, 1986), because Kool Herc was continuing to respond to his audience and make his performance accessible within this space. Within the localized context of the South Bronx, Hip Hop was born and organized around a group of practices that centered community voices and spaces. Unique to their position in Hip Hop,

DJs operated in a space that was most connected to their community and that allowed them to constantly localize their practices for better accessibility.

If the value of a technical communicator is their ability to make information more useable and accessible (Society for Technical Communication, 2018), then within a Hip Hop context, the DJ is almost entirely responsible for being the technical communicators of their culture. Furthermore, by using and designing with technology, the DJ's role as a mediator of communication for Hip Hop mirrors that of a technical communicator in their respective organizations. Drawing from Hip Hop's historical precedence, the Hip Hop DJ represents a model for a technical and professional communication that through a community focused praxis can work towards more inclusive, accessible and ultimately social justice oriented communication. In the following section, I will further discuss the connection between technical communicators and Hip Hop DJs, in order to argue for more social justice and community-oriented examples of technical communication.

THE DJ AND THE TECHNICAL COMMUNICATOR

In her 2016 article, Natasha N. Jones argued for the importance of integrating a social justice perspective into technical communication, calling for an acknowledgment of how "technical communicators must be aware of the ways that texts and technologies that they create and critique reinforce certain ideologies, and question how communication shaped by certain ideologies affect individuals" (2016, p. 4). Jones situates the technical communicator as an important actor navigating between the information that needs to be communicated and the information that is actually being communicated and consumed. Furthermore, Jones (2016) calls for technical communicators to actively be conscious of how their practices and productions are impacting and perpetuating certain ideologies, histories, and perspectives, acknowledging how these decisions are impacting individuals and communities. Adam J. Banks (2010) draws on similar ideals when stating that DJs are more than "ventriloquist[s], playing other people's stories for us; rather [DJs] are arranging, layering, sampling, and remixing... keeping the culture, telling stories and binding time as they move the crowd and create and maintain community" (2010, p.24). Banks (2010) rejects any notion of DJ practices as passive, positioning the work of DJs instead as proactive in the preservation and perpetuation of histories and ideologies.

Technical communicators work to preserve histories and make revisions or interventions in communication whenever necessary (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016). Within their organizations and communities, technical communicators navigate the space of constantly consuming texts while simultaneously producing texts that are catered for new audiences. This in-between space parallels the role of the Hip Hop DJ within their community. As someone who plays other people's music, DJs are constantly consuming records. At the same time, however, DJ performances are productions of texts for consumption, because DJ audiences consume not only the records being played, but also the decisions of which records are showcased and the style of the DJ's performance. Thus, DJs hold a distinct position in Hip Hop culture, always operating in the in-between space among consumers and producers of communication (Brewster & Broughton, 2000).

Furthermore, stemming from the lineage of African American

DJing, the Hip Hop DJ focuses on the curation of stories and tradition while they compose, thus influencing the community around them (Banks, 2010). Taking into account Jones' call for more awareness of the roles that technical communicators play in communities and thinking about a DJ's active role in the curation of stories and traditions, bringing a Hip Hop DJ's perspective to technical communication can help us better understand how the work of contemporary technical communication is actively participating in the preservation and curation of ideologies and histories. By acknowledging the work of the DJ as technical communication, our field can also continue to move toward building social justice frameworks that "destabilize and unravel aspects of the tightly woven dominant narrative about who we are as a field, what we do, where our work occurs, and what we value" (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016, p. 212). In addition to the Hip Hop DJ's role in Hip Hop as simultaneously consuming and producing, DJs leverage their own positionality and skills with the relationship they have to their audiences. As DJs take live feedback from audience members, their performances aim to rhetorically present information that reflects and represents community histories and perspectives. Through these moments of call and response, the DJ makes decisions on when and how to preserve and expand. The DJ could play a song by a local artist and then follow it up with a song by an out of town artist with a similar style or speaking on a similar topic. In this way, the call and response relationship between a DJ and audience is perpetual and reciprocal. This relationship provides technical communication with a model for balancing the needs of users while also acting as an agent for social change through an added attention to curation. In addition to Hip Hop's social justice history, the lineage of DJ practices provides models for when and how to rhetorically be effective when making decision on when to preserve and when to make changes. As we advocate for a social justice intervention (Jones, 2016; Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016), having models on how to insert or shift discourses are incredibly valuable and reliant on our ability to engage and connect with our audiences.

To further demonstrate the Hip Hop DJ as a model for a social justice-oriented technical communicator, I will introduce the example of DJ Screw and his impact on the Houston Hip Hop community. DJ Screw represents an example of how the practices and responsibilities of a Hip Hop DJ were adapted away from the founding of Hip Hop across time and space. DJ Screw represents a case study for the ways that Hip Hop's commitment to community through accessibility and localization continue to be the foundation for Hip Hop. Furthermore, DJ Screw's legacy provides technical communicators with a model for how we might leverage community to transfer accessible and localized information across both local and global spaces.

METHODS: HIPHOPOGRAPHY AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

This study follows the research paradigm of Hiphopography. James G. Spady (1991) coined the term hiphopography as a paradigm for research that correlates multiple methods to ensure that Hip Hop practitioners would be included in the telling of their culture. H. Samy Alim cites Spady and describes hiphopography as a "paradigm [that] integrates the varied approaches of ethnography, biography, and social, cultural, and oral history to arrive at an emic view of Hip Hop culture" (2006, p. 8) Alim argues that hiphopography insists on the direct engagement with the "cultural creators" in Hip

Hop like the rappers, DJs, break dancers, and graffiti writers. As a project that has an emphasis on place, hiphopography has guided this project to seek ways of re-inserting the voices of Houston in my analysis. Furthermore, two factors impact this project: the death of DJ Screw in 2001, and that Screw Tapes were recorded live performances. Even in death, DJ Screw continues to speak through his performances on Screw Tapes by verbally speaking throughout the tapes and through his turntablism. Hiphopography in this context asks us to consider both of these expressions as a part of the emic view of Houston Hip Hop culture.

This project focuses on DJ Screw, Screw Tapes, and the Screwed and Chopped style. Each one of these variables in my study have the potential to not only inform the data collection but also inform how the data is analyzed. Given the context of Screw Tapes as a product of a previous time, I expanded upon hiphopography's methods by including archival research in my data collection. The Houston Hip Hop Archive at the University of Houston Libraries features the DJ Screw Papers that are open and available to the public in person as well as digitally. A majority of the physical artifacts in the DJ Screw Papers are available online. I visited the archive three times in person, spending a total of 25 hours looking at all the artifacts in the collection as well as having meetings with the collections curator Julie Grob (whom I keep regular contact with through Skype and email). Furthermore, to include Houston Hip Hop voices in this project, as a part of my data collection I listened to Screw Tape mixtapes and consulted Hip Hop journalism. I have purchased two physical CD versions of Screw Tapes from the Screwed Up Records shop and have accessed 10 other mixtapes online. Supplemental research required reading about Hip Hop's history and searching on various online resources like Genius.com (formerly RapGenius.com), music streaming service Tidal, and YouTube.

Listening to mixtapes was the central catalyst to this research project because it provided starting points as well as provided context for other types of data. Because DJ Screw's mixtapes were recorded as live performances, they represent complex pieces of data. Their interpretation as art can be based in a historical analysis or as part of a contemporary discussion. In this way, Hip Hop artifacts are alive and open to interpretation no matter when they were produced. Given this tension of temporality, Screw Tapes offer ethnographic opportunities for study because they are sonic distillations of the recording process for a Screw Tape. Based on the information available on Screw Tapes, like relevant places, people, and cultural signifiers, the archival materials in the DJ Screw papers could better analyzed and contextualized. Artifacts like the playlist written on the back of a flyer, analyzed in this article, represent a deeper significance to the communication of the community around DJ Screw. The centrality of Screw Tapes represents the core of hiphopography as a research paradigm because it seeks to build knowledge from a Hip Hop site of knowledge-making. The archival aspects of this project serve as helpful examples to continue the conversation but are limited without the world that Screw Tapes constructs. By valuing the complex transfer of information that occurs from listening to Screw Tapes, technical and professional communication research enables us to study Hip Hop communities from the perspective of identifying the effective transfer of communication.

Based on materials from the University of Houston Libraries Houston Hip Hop Archive, I was able to trace the interactions between DJ Screw and the Houston Hip Hop community. Through

this analysis, I was able to see how various practitioners engage with Hip Hop and rely on figures like the DJ to make information accessible and localized. In the sections that follow, I'll expand on my analysis of a DJ's localization practices, specifically by showcasing how DJ Screw used available tools and technologies to build community through accessible sound communication. In this way, I argue that further acknowledging the localization practices of Hip Hop DJs can help technical communicators to create and disseminate community-driven information technologies.

HOUSTON HIP HOP AND DJ SCREW: A CASE STUDY IN HIP HOP COMMUNICATION

Originally from Smithville, TX, Robert E. Davis, better known by his stage name DJ Screw, moved to Houston in the late 1980s and went on to develop the Screwed and Chopped style of Hip Hop. Drawing from influences in Houston, Screwed and Chopped music has since become synonymous with and has defined how Houston is represented within the global Hip Hop community. While Hip Hop culture existed in Houston prior to DJ Screw's arrival, it was his Screwed and Chopped style that catalyzed a localized Hip Hop culture that became distinct to Houston, making space for a wide range of local artists to get their start or expand their careers. DJ Screw went on to create over 300 officially released tapes for distribution, now catalogued by The Screw Shop. Recorded from 1990 – 2001, this mixtape series shaped the sound of Houston Hip Hop and influenced southern Hip Hop, causing it to maintain a slower tempo along with a more melodic style of rapping.

In the "Afterward" of Maco Faniel's *Hip-Hop in Houston: The Origin & Legacy*, Julie Grob describes DJ Screw's technique by stating:

[DJ Screw] used the technology of the time—vinyl records, turntables, a mixer and multiple cassette decks—to create cassette mixes of strangely slow, murky versions of existing songs punctuated with repeated words or phrases...To create the sound, DJ Screw used the pitch controls on his turntables to slow down the records, or "screw" them. He also played two copies of the same record, one beat behind the other, and used his mixer to switch back and forth in order to repeat certain sounds, or "chop." (Faniel, 2013, p. 131)

Grob's description gives important insight into what Screwed and Chopped sounded like and the work behind making this style possible. DJ Screw leveraged the technologies available to him to transform existing texts into new ones. Through these technologies, he was able to develop techniques or practices based on his knowledge of DJing to produce the slow murky sounds on his mixtapes.

Between 1991 and 2000, DJ Screw developed this style of recording mixtapes in order to make music more accessible for the Houston community. According to DJ Screw, he made "tapes with songs that people can relax to," slowing down the tempos "to feel the music... so you can hear what the rapper is saying" (Screwed Up Records, 2010). By employing this version of making mixtapes, DJ Screw was localizing Hip Hop music to be better suited to the listening practices of his community. These listening practices included long drives across Houston's vast highway system, where a majority of listeners not only had cassette players but also had plenty of time

to listen while sitting in Houston's humid, hot, and slow-moving traffic.

DJ Screw initially sold the mixtapes from his front door in the house where he kept his recording studio. Eventually moving to a store front, DJ Screw's home became a hub for the Houston Hip Hop community to get new tapes, make requests, and for rappers to record verses for upcoming mixtapes. The reach and impact of DJ Screw over the course of his career was so significant that despite his use of copyrighted material, record companies began sending DJ Screw their artists' music in hopes of being included on upcoming mixtapes. Currently, record companies continue to release chopped and screwed versions of their artists' music in U.S. southern markets (Sarig, 2007). The success of DJ Screw and his style of DJing mirrors the success of Hip Hop founders like DJ Kool Herc and others, who connected and adapted to a community through their DJ practices.

COMMUNITY BUILDING: LOCATING TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION IN HIP HOP

Building a connection to community and involving community members in the process of knowledge-making has been an ongoing practice in technical communication. To that end, technical communication scholars have not only been calling for community involvement in communication design but have also been developing and sharing direct strategies for making sure community stakeholders are participating in the design of systems and technologies that impact their community (Simmons & Grabill, 2007; Shivers-McNair & San Diego, 2017). In addition, technical communication researchers and practitioners advocate for the importance of honoring and leveraging community expertise to localize information (Gonzales & Zantjer, 2015; Batova & Clark, 2015; Sun, 2006, 2012). For example, Simmons and Grabill (2007) argued for a community's participation in complex issues, giving community members the chance to be informed and contribute while also being conscious of indirect exclusions. For Simmons and Grabill, most of the places where public deliberation takes place are "either institutionally complex or technically and scientifically complex," thus putting "extraordinary burden on non-experts ('citizens') to develop knowledge that might be persuaded in these settings" (2007, p. 423). Thus, when seeking to communicate and engage communities, in addition to wanting to include stakeholder voices, there have to be broader efforts to ensure accessible participation. In Hip Hop, this is remedied by the foundational African American rhetorical practices known as call and response. Hip Hop practitioners are consistently in conversation with their community and responding to their needs.

To better understand Hip Hop as a site of Technical and Professional Communication research, we have to identify what Hip Hop information looks like, where the information is located, and how that information is communication for a specific community. For a DJ and their listeners (users), communication occurs through listening but is mediated by turntables, mixtapes, sound systems, the call and response in performances, headphones, and any other technology (both technological and material) that impacts the occurrence of Hip Hop musical events. The information being communicated in Hip Hop is complex because of the various possible layers that are incorporated into Hip Hop praxis. As DJs aim to curate and preserve traditions and narratives, the information

they are curating and preserving spans specific artists, musical styles and traditions, lyrical content, moments in time, popular references, obscure references, and place-based signifiers, just to name a few possibilities. Through their performances of this information, DJs have the opportunity to create dense texts for audiences to interface with in ways that the audience is interested in engaging with. DJs are not only communicating curated information, but they are also localizing this information for and building community with their users.

One reason that DJ Screw's mixtape series resonated so much with the local community in Houston was due to the relationship that DJ Screw had with his listeners. According to close friend and Screwed Up Click (S.U.C.) member Big Demo, "every Screw tape is somebody's personal tape" (Walker, 2013, p. 152). This means that every one of the mixtapes produced by DJ Screw was in some way the product of a relationship, one developed either through personal friendships or through a requested tape (Walker, 2013). Because relationships were central to mixtape production, the songs selected to be on the play-lists for each tape represent a set of rhetorical decisions that were informed by ongoing participation in both the Hip Hop community at large and the local community in Houston Hip Hop. As a part of the Screw Tape making process, these lists are examples of community-made technical documents that community members made to make music they were listening to more accessible and localized through the help of DJ Screw. As such, the information held in the playlists made by community members and the mixtapes that DJ Screw made serve as examples of what information is being valued and transferred.

Screw Tape users were listening, engaging, supporting, and relying on DJ Screw's mixtapes as their preferred method of participating in Hip Hop. As they generated new lists for DJ Screw to transform into Screw Tapes, they were also interfacing with a wider Hip Hop community. The significance of this simultaneous engagement is that community members continued to go through DJ Screw for mixtapes made through his DJing style. In Figure 1 below, the Screw Tape workflow is represented as a cycle that has no particular starting point but is instead a series of links representing the various stages that the information (i.e., the music) passes through. Through this workflow, we see information flowing in various forms, sometimes represented as the listening process and at other times as physical objects. Regardless of the medium, information is passing seamlessly through the cycle in its various formats.

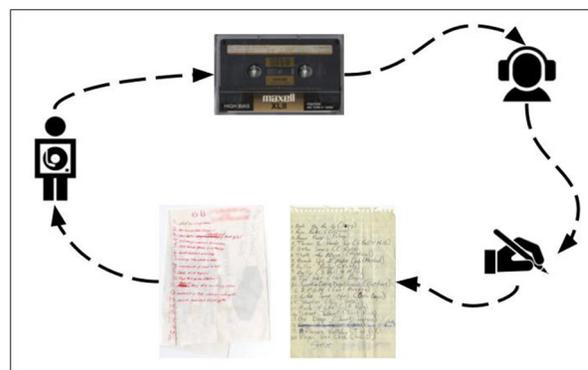


Figure 1: Screw Tape Workflow 1. This figure represents the exchange of information within Hip Hop in various mediums.

Figure 1 is a representation of the Screw Tapes Workflow

represented by icons, images from the Houston Hip Hop Archive, and arrows. The icon in the upper right side of the figure of a person with headphones is meant to represent a Houston community member listening, the icon at the bottom right side of the figure of a hand writing is meant to represent the invention process for a new mixtape list after a community member has practiced some listening, and the icon on the left side of the figure of a person with a turntable is meant to represent DJ Screw. The images at the bottom of the figure are written lists from the Houston Hip Hop archive, and the image of a cassette tape at the top of the figure is an image of one of the original Screw Tapes. This figure is meant to depict the flow of information being transferred within the Screw Tape community and the various stages or states that information takes. At times it is a static artifact like the written lists or cassette tape. At other times it is a practice of listening, writing, or DJing. The information is constantly flowing and being localized because of the input by community members and DJ Screw. There is also no original starting point, as the workflow can manifest and emerge from any of these points depending on the user's or practitioner's orientation.

The various parts of the Screw Tape workflow that allowed for community members' input not only ensured that DJ Screw was fulfilling his user's needs, but was also able to amplify his own ability to listen to Hip Hop's wider community outside of Houston. The flow of information manifests as various forms of participation. More importantly, each form of participation helped contribute to the formation of the local community. Every new tape represented new opportunities for new and old participants to continue to reify the community. As new tapes and playlists were developed, a whole new set of information was also being introduced. This workflow represents an example of a public deliberation in communication design, one that incorporates built-in ways for the community to participate in the construction of knowledge-making within Hip Hop. In Figure 2 below, the inclusion of the wider Hip Hop community is introduced to show its influence on the workflow represented in Figure 1 continuing to demonstrate how public deliberation and knowledge-making occurred in this community.

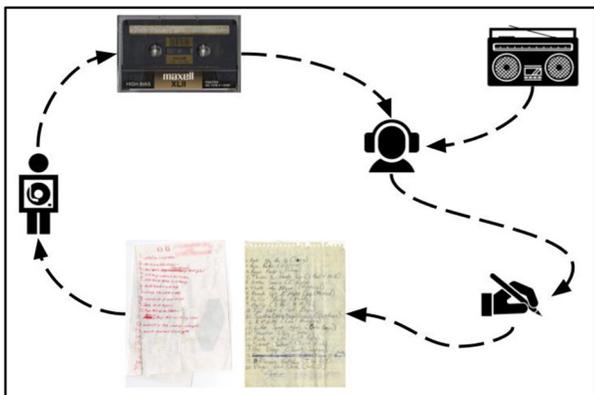


Figure 2: Screw Tape Workflow 2. This figure represents an new addition to the exchange of information within a Hip Hop community.

In this figure all the icons and images from Figure 1 are repeated but with the addition of an icon of a boombox on the upper right corner. Figure 2 features an additional boom box to represent the wider Hip Hop community's influence. Again, this boom box helps illustrate that despite having access to Hip Hop music independent of DJ

Screw and his mixtapes, Houston audiences continued to engage with the Screwed and Chopped version of Hip Hop. These new additions for future Screw Tapes represent moments where new information was being brought in, thus expanding the information available within the Screw Tape community.

Through these diagrams, we are able to visually account for a transfer of knowledge through various forms of communication. However, what exactly is transferred is often subjective. Depending on the participant, the transfer of information could vary from specific song lyrics and the stories they tell to embedded samples within the particular song. Regardless, any piece of information that is transferred helps bolster the community because it forms a shared knowledge base. This direct participation in the workflow of Screw Tapes helps community members feel connected to the community while valuing and depending on their continued participation. A major factor in this type of knowledge-making being so inclusive is the role that listening, as a vital practice, takes in all phases of the workflow.

In a 1999 interview, DJ Screw described his purpose and DJ style by stating, "I'm just bringin' it to you in a different style where you can hear everything and feel everything. Give you something to ride to" (Bray, 1999, N. pag). The "different style" that DJ Screw was referring to was the Screwed and Chopped style of making mixtapes. Within this description, DJ Screw is also connecting his style to accessibility, specifically by stating that this style allows you to "hear *everything*" and "feel *everything*" (emphasis added). From this statement, we can infer that there are at least two ways to receive Hip Hop music, including listening for content/data and embracing a more phenomenological connection. For DJ Screw, being able to "hear everything" references being able to hear every lyric as well as every sample or musical component. As listeners work toward deciphering lyrics and sound sources, DJ Screw is also hoping that audiences "feel everything," which refers to listeners making a connection to tracks that appear on his mixtape. "Feeling" in Hip Hop, in this context, is the moment where audiences decide whether they want to continue to engage an artist/style/message and create a dialogue. DJ Screw also includes a reference to listening to these mixtapes while driving and making that connection to localized listening practices in Houston.

The workflow of a Screw Tape represents a relationship between DJ Screw and his community. The relationship is mediated by his DJ performance, stemming from his style of DJing which was developed from local influences that aims to make information more accessible. DJ Screw provides an example of the way that rhetorical communication design in Hip Hop builds from the relationship a DJ has with their community as well as their skills as a DJ. Furthermore, the success of a DJ is directly tied to their ability to connect to their audience. Maintaining a connection to a community requires that a DJ balances making decisions that reflect local needs that not only spans the actual information being transferred but how that information is delivered. DJ Screw utilized a unique style of DJing to attract an audience and then supplemented that practice with the inclusion of community voices in the Screw Tape workflow. The success of Screw Tapes was used to create even more inclusive communication design. Even though DJ Screw might have been seen as an "expert" in Hip Hop praxis because of his status as a DJ (one of the foundations of Hip Hop), DJ Screw ultimately knew what mattered was the flow of information within his community and not his individual performance. This reflects the community oriented core of Hip Hop and its ability to be successful

across diverse contexts.

In the following section, I will discuss how the Houston Hip Hop community worked together to create accessible and localized Hip Hop music. Specifically, I will analyze the differences between the various stages of the workflow and how language practices within Hip Hop impact both efficiency and accessibility.

SCREW TAPES AND PLAYLISTS: ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATION IN PRACTICE

During DJ Screw's reign in Houston Hip Hop, audiences would line up outside his home and down the block to purchase the newest Screw Tape in the form of a grey Maxwell cassette tape. Unlike record company-produced cassette tapes and CDs, original Screw Tapes came with minimal text on the packaging. Later, when Screw Tapes were converted into CDs and sold from the Screw Shop, track-listings accompanied the packaging. Figure 3 and Figure 4 below provide an example of original Screw Tapes and their minimalist packaging. Aside from the title of the Screw Tape and DJ Screw's name, the packaging for the tapes contained no other identifying information for the contents of the tape. Presumably, this means that the listener of Screw Tapes had minimal information prior to listening, but knew that the tape was going to be from DJ Screw and made in the Screwed and Chopped style.



Figure 3: “99 Live Screw Tape-Front.” Courtesy of the U of H Library. This figure is an image of the front side of a Screw Tape titled “99 Live.” The tape is Maxwell brand and appears to be inside of a case. Across the top label is hand written information including “DJ Screw,” “99 Live,” and other text that is not identifiable.

During live Hip Hop DJ performances, the audience typically has no idea what the DJ will select to play. Thus, as the audiences experience the DJ's performance they have to rely completely on their own knowledge of music and their listening to take in the information of the DJ performance. As they work to “hear” and “feel” everything, the audience member is working to decipher what the DJ is giving them. Similar to listening to a live DJ performance, the original listening experience of a Screw Tape was also unpredictable (for everyone beside the author of the playlist) as far as what songs appeared, leaving the user to use only their audible senses to gather the data on Screw Tapes. The data on Screw Tapes could be lyrical content as well as knowing the original artist of any given song and the song title. All this information was used to “hear” and “feel” the information in Hip Hop that could lead to influence future playlists.



Figure 4: “99 Live Screw Tape-Back.” Courtesy of the U of H Library. This figure is an image of the back side of a cassette case that is holding the “99 Live” Screw Tape. Inside of the case is a card that allows for someone to include identifying information for the tape. The card is left blank.

The spontaneity of a live DJ performance and the minimal information on a Screw Tape would lead us to believe that knowledge production and transfer in Hip Hop is unpredictable. At worst, we might assume that Hip Hop praxis is not purposeful or grounded in any kind of knowledge-base. However, based on the track-listings that appear on the written lists from the Houston Hip Hop archive (Figure 5 and 6), we do know that the mixtapes had some kind of invention process even if the final product expanded past the written list. Regardless, the information passed on through the mixtapes had purposeful intention in what was preserved and passed on. Analyzing each of these three examples of Screw Tape playlists, the differences in notation style represent subtle reminders that as information passes through each person or artifact, their own perspective and experiences are reflected in how they convey and/or read the information.

Below are multiple figures that depict the various versions of playlists or track-listings. Table 1 represents a track-listing that was made after the Screw Tape had been released. The purpose of this list was to accompany the retail sales of Screw Tapes in their CD version. In Figures 5 and 6 are images of handwritten playlists that were made prior to their corresponding Screw Tape being recorded. These lists were given to DJ Screw as requests for a future mixtape.

In a neutral setting—devoid of context—these lists might be considered incomplete or bad examples of track listings/technical documents because they neither follow a uniform style nor encompass all the necessary information needed. However, across the different kinds of lists, the most common trait across notation styles is incomplete information, implying that this type of omission is a purposeful act. It is not the intention of the playlist authors to leave out information, rather, this approach to writing lists represents community-specific practices that illustrate the list writers' own experiences and style(s). It is also important to acknowledge that the list in Table 1 is presumably from after the mixtape was made, while the list in Figures 5 and 6 are from prior to the recording of the mixtape.

Table 1: Transcription of the back cover of the CD version of 3 In Da Mornin' Screw Tape

Disc 1	Disc 2
1. Intro	1. Rock the Bell (LL Cool J) [sic]
2. High Powered (Dre, BX, Daz, Rage)	2. Skit
3. City Street (Spice 1)	3. A Nigga with a Motherfucking Gun (Dre)
4. Too Short (Too Short)	4. It's a Compton Thing (Comptons Most Wanted) [sic]
5. Today was a Good Day (Ice Cube)	5. Sugar Free
6. They Call Me Big Dick	6. Dead in a Year (Street Military)
7. Dre & Snoop	7. In the Ally (Dre)
8. Street Military	8. Everlasting Bass (Rodney O, Joe Cooley)
9. White Horse	
10. Let Me Ride (Parliament) [sic]	
11. We Want to Play for You	

The difference between these lists represents distinct writing styles that indicate markers of relationships to language, Hip Hop, and DJ Screw. A comparative analysis between the lists shown in Table 1 and Figures 5 and 6 suggests each list is written differently, representing each author's style of notating playlists. Despite their differences, as technical documents, they all accomplish the same goal as playlists to be turned into Screw Tapes. Most importantly, as Hip Hop technical writing examples, the various versions of track-lists/playlists all show how one can have their own style while participating in a larger discourse. The lists in Figures 5 and 6 are a part of the DJ Screw Collection at the Houston Hip Hop Archive, meaning that they were in his possession for the purpose of eventually being turned into tapes. Thus, DJ Screw's relationship to these lists (and those submitting them) solidifies that these lists, regardless of how they were written, are two examples of many in the Screw Tape workflow process. Even though both of these lists are different, as a part of the invention process, they are able to communicate the correct information to DJ Screw because within each style they contain enough information respectively.

The importance of these lists for Hip Hop technical communication is how these texts represent the importance of relationships and their impact on accessible and localized communication within the Hip Hop community. For example, on the list for Figure 5, the first track reads "Back tha Ass Up (Juvy)." The list in Figure 5 appears to be the most "complete" of the three lists because each track has an artist name and song title. Yet, in looking at the first track the song is credited to Juvy instead of the official name of the artist, Juvenile. Like many rappers, the New Orleans rapper goes by a shortened and stylized version of his name, including Juvy and Juvie. Additionally, the title of the song as it would appear on the official album released by the record company is "Back that Azz Up featuring Mannie Fresh & Lil Wayne." The inconsistencies in notation styles and their ability to effectively communicate harken back to the role that listening plays in the Screw Tape workflow. At

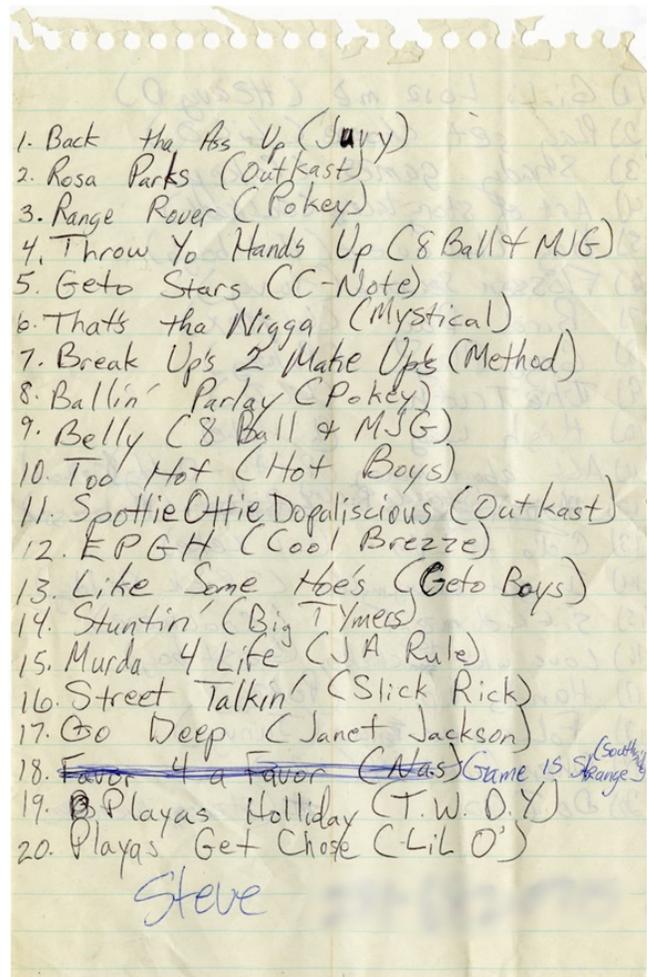


Figure 5: "Screw tape list for Steve," Courtesy of the U of H Library. This is an image of a worn piece of paper that has been ripped out of notebook. Written on the paper is a playlist of 20 songs in black ink. In blue ink there is a correction to track 18 and the name "Steve" is written at the bottom of the paper.

some point, the author of the list in Figure 5 and DJ Screw listened to the track by the rapper Juvenile. Because they both had access to the information on the track, there are multiple potential configurations of artist name and song title that could yield the same result.

Within the community, "Juvy" and "Back that Ass Up" are linked because the actual song features the lyrics and the song is credited to Juvenile. All participants involved in making the Screw Tape list in Figure 5 would be aware of this context, otherwise it would not have been written in this way. In addition to all participants having done the listening beforehand, Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL)—based in African American Language—is a shared language that is also part of the information transmitted across Hip Hop. As a shared language across Hip Hop communities, HHNL is able to convey essential information through efficient uses of writing like those demonstrated in the playlists. Because HHNL is "suitable and functional for all communicative needs" (Alim, 2004, p. 533), these playlists serve as important examples of how Hip Hop exchanges technical information.

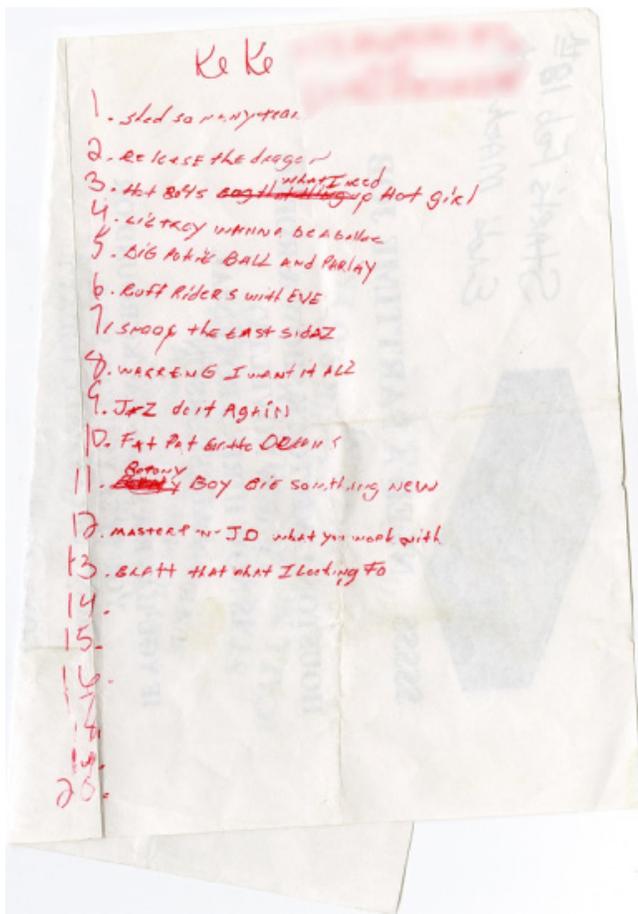


Figure 6: “Screw tape list for Keke,” Courtesy of the U of H Library. This image is of the back side of an old flyer folded approximately in half. On this paper, in red ink, at the top of the paper is the name “Keke,” a numbered list from one to 20, and songs appearing next to the first thirteen numbers on the list.

Various forms of technical writing in Hip Hop use HHNL, allowing for broader accessibility for its users due to wider linguistic possibilities across time and space. Local variations of HHNL are recognizable and adaptable to elements of HHNL that are used more broadly. In turn, even when studying historical moments like the DJ Screw era, the HHNL used in this time becomes important for not only communication but also for being able to find the distinctions that demonstrate how language was being localized. Moreover, written lists are incomplete proxies for what ultimately appears on the tape because they cannot truly represent the same depth of information. While writing down an artist’s name and song title helps convey part of the information, the sound recording and the playlist are different modes of communication and operate under the limitations or affordances of those modes. In Figure 7, a side by side comparison of a written playlist and cassette tape appear to remind us that they are different parts of the communication process. Although they could have the exact same songs contained within each technical document, their individual interfaces create distinct experiences for the information being transferred.

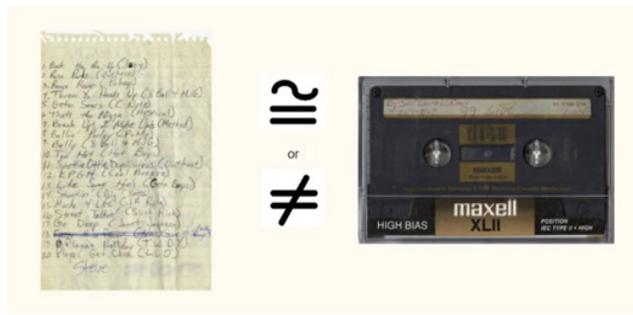


Figure 7: Playlists and Tapes are not the same. In this image the same playlist from Figure 2 appears next to an image of a cassette tape from the Houston Hip Hop Archive. Between them from top to bottom appears the mathematical symbol for “approximately equal to,” the word “or,” and the mathematical symbol for “not equal to.” The arrangement of these images and symbols suggests that written lists are similar but not equal to their digital counterparts.

As illustrated in the image above, written lists and cassette tapes are not the same thing, but they maintain a working relationship. As part of the Screw Tape workflow process, written playlists are part of the invention process that act as placeholders or bookmarks for DJ Screw to help him transform the information on paper into sonic mixtape. Like an outline, these written lists are not meant to be authoritative, but rather to aid the compositional process. This positions certain forms of communication, like alphabetic writing, as one part of the process in Hip Hop but hardly ever the end product. What we do learn from examples of alphabetic writing is the continued importance of how we mediate communication through our own skills and positionality. Within Hip Hop, H. Samy Alim (2009) would recognize this as style and we can apply it to both DJ practices as well as language.

HHNL as a style of using language allows for the deconstruction and construction of language that Rose (1994) identifies as a part of Hip Hop which is consistently preserved on the written playlists and on songs included on mixtapes. Similar to the way DJ styles and techniques are recognized widely, HHNL represents an accessible and inclusive use of language across communities and contexts with the ability to include localized stylizations. This shifts our understanding of technical communication in Hip Hop, including the potential and possibilities. Because you could not “hear everything and feel everything” as DJ Screw intends from a written playlist, we come to understand that within Hip Hop communication is a layered transfer of information mediated through style. As points of invention, the playlists also help us see that the layers are often based on each individual user’s style, yet still communicable within the community.

Style emerges and is representative of relationships and connections to community. Our ability to recognize and utilize the layers that exist in community spaces can lead to the recognition and inclusion of underrepresented and ignored communication design. Hip Hop has successfully been able to leverage the practices and assets of local communities to open up spaces for complex discourse and sharing of information. By always working to be inclusive of local voices, Hip Hop practitioners like DJs are able to sustain and push Hip Hop forward, reaching even more audiences.

Based on my analysis of the Screw Tape track-lists and the

connections I build between Hip Hop, technical communication, accessibility, and community building, I now move on to share implications for technical communicators who seek to further engage with Hip Hop practices in their work. Furthermore, I discuss the impact that technical communication work can have on Hip Hop culture because of its ability to recognize these complex communication practices.

IMPLICATIONS

Hip Hop communities across the world continue to participate and engage in the conversations that sustain Hip Hop's existence. While many thought Hip Hop was just a fad, it has grown in various ways for various purposes. Hip Hop practitioners have consistently remained at the forefront of new and developing mass media technologies. The early days of Hip Hop saw innovations in sound manipulation through practices like scratching, break-beat looping, and sampling. Since then, Hip Hop practitioners have found ways to consistently utilize emerging technology to stay connected to their audiences through new apps like Bun B's "Trill Moji" (an emoji keyboard for smart phones) and open access mixtape repositories like Datpiff.com. Being able to communicate through practical, accessible, and localized means is vital to Hip Hop practitioners. As a culture that is known for not only being an outlet for disenfranchised youth, but also a place to tell stories from marginalized perspectives, what has sustained the growth of Hip Hop is the way the practices central to Hip Hop are transferred and localized both within and across communities.

By closely studying the Hip Hop practices of local communities, I was able to trace how Hip Hop communication is both shaped by, and localized for, local communities and practices. Furthermore, reading across Hip Hop texts with an attunement to community relationships helps us see how Hip Hop is shaped and designed to be supportive of the community it is situated within. In Hip Hop, we see an example of intentional accessibility with a potential for sustaining culture and building new meanings. The implications of this research are relevant to wider conversations in technical communication for broadening the scope of the field to more diverse populations. Hip Hop's ability to work globally across marginalized communities is an important asset. Inherent in this work is not only the valuing of diverse populations, but also the valuing of communication design strategies that offer efficient uses of language with a long history connected to digital innovation in local and global discourses. As I illustrate through my discussion of relationality through call and response, playlist making, and Hip Hop Nation Language and DJ localization practices, the communication design strategies of Hip Hop, otherwise known as "translocal styles," echo ongoing calls for a repositioning of technical communication histories and practices through social-justice frameworks (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016).

By analyzing Screw Tapes through a Technical Communication framework, I was able to account for the workflow that lead to a transfer and localization of knowledge and its impact on the community. This suggests that Hip Hop practitioners are constantly developing localization strategies with a conscious understanding of global discourses. The Screwed and Chopped style is an example of how localization by community members and DJs in close collaboration can balance accessibility, design, and content in Hip Hop use and dissemination. By developing his style through DJ techniques, DJ Screw demonstrates how his localization practices work within the globalized discourse of Hip Hop. Using the same

tools that other DJs use, DJ Screw performed a relational act that helps maintain a connection to Hip Hop. This relational act is what makes Hip Hop accessible across contexts and time. These outcomes are important practices and strategies to employ in our work as technical communicators and educators. By building accessible and localized relationships through culturally relevant and community-specific ideals, we have the potential to build better documents, systems, and general lines of communication with and for marginalized communities in local and global contexts.

The ability to layer meaning and communicate successfully within the community maximizes the use of texts. We can learn about the value of relationships among communicators for technical communication by utilizing the power that Hip Hop has in creating networks of communication and people because of the "universal language" that is built from the negotiation of mobile matrices of style known as translocal styles (Alim & Pennycook, 2007; Alim, 2009).

Based on my analysis of DJ Screw and the community around Screw Tapes as examples of community driven communication design, I offer the following suggestions and implications for including Hip Hop in technical communication:

- Hip Hop is an Important Site for Technical Communication Research and Practice.

Since the 1970s, as a space for creating and developing community-based communication, Hip Hop has grown globally through its ability to include local practitioners and practices. Furthermore, as evidenced in the work of DJ Screw, Hip Hop practitioners "know how to make use of a technology in [their] life spheres" (Sun, 2006) through innovative techniques that allow them to create localized, accessible, and inclusive communication. Hip Hop's long history of engaging diverse, often marginalized, communities in complex communication practices makes it an important and urgent place to study information design.

- The Hip Hop DJ is a Community-Engaged Technical Communicator

Communication design researchers can benefit from the development of strategies based in Hip Hop practices by understanding and utilizing the powerful potential of Hip Hop DJs' abilities to layer meaning. DJs are powerful technical communicators both in terms of their manipulation of tools and technologies to (re)create sound and also in their ability to engage their communities. Responding to Potts' (2009) call for "designers and researchers to listen and give more attention to participants by engaging them within these people-powered spaces where participants are making do with the tools available," Hip Hop practitioners like DJs have been successful in representing local communities and globalizing content through their innovations in technology. Thus, by researching the community building and design practices of Hip Hop DJs, technical communicators can continue to invent spaces for participatory design that is both created by and for local users.

- Community Should Play a Role in Designing Communication

Understanding the need to be more inclusive of communities when designing information systems (Simmons & Grabill,

2007) has helped technical communicators to develop a more social justice-oriented praxis. Whether through Hip Hop or other models, centering community promotes inclusivity through localization and accessibility. Furthermore, Jones' (2016) call for understanding the technical communicator's role in passing on ideologies, histories, and perspectives pushes the field towards being more conscious efforts on how our work is impacting communities in more systemic ways. By acknowledging the relationship a DJ has to their community in Hip Hop, technical communicators can seek to work with and for communities.

CONCLUSION

Imagining Hip Hop's inclusion in technical communication means that we might pay attention to the important work that local Hip Hop communities are doing in social justice work. Jones and Walton (forthcoming) describe social justice in technical communication as "a collaborative, respectful approach that moves past description and exploration of social justice issues to taking action to redress inequities." This practice of social justice is driven through community-building, commerce, and knowledge-making. As evidenced in the work of DJ Screw, we can continue to answer questions such as: How are Hip Hop practitioners already re-imagining technologies? What technologies are they re-vitalizing? How are Hip Hop communities re-imagining geo-political borders? Work by H. Samy Alim and Alistair Pennycook (2007) are already showing us how international communities interpret and deploy multiple languages. By continuing to answer these questions, technical communicators can draw from a wide range of Hip Hop practitioners to solve emerging problems in increasingly complex globalized communication spaces. Further, acknowledging the ways in which Hip Hop is grounded in community can help technical communicators to continue highlighting and engaging with the communicative practices of underrepresented voices in and beyond our field.

Building from this work, technical communication can continue benefit from the advances that Hip Hop has already made, using ethical analyses of Hip Hop to understand social-justice, community-driven frameworks for globalizing information. Finally, technical communication scholars and practitioners can be important allies in promoting Hip Hop because they are uniquely situated to identify and study the complex ways communication impacts communities. As technical communication continues to acknowledge the value of diverse representation, incorporating Hip Hop communities in our field's disciplinary understanding of communication design can help us continue to build and disseminate tools and technologies that are community-driven, localized, and accessible to a wide range of audiences.

NOTE

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