

Research Journal

British on the Break – Documentary

Finlay Carter 2205209

Independent Project

ADPA6000

Hip Hop Culture – Evolution of Breaking from its birth to today

“Hip hop is a subculture and an art movement that emerged from the Bronx in New York City during the early 1970s. Its development reflected the negative effects of post-industrial decline, political discourse, and a rapidly changing economy.” - <https://www.iconcollective.edu/hip-hop-history>

“Looking back to New York City during this era, we see an economic collapse. The city’s economy was falling apart due to the decline of the manufacturing industry and construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway. Much of the white middle class moved to the suburbs to escape the social and economic challenges. The migration shifted demographics and segregated communities. Conditions worsened in neighborhoods prominently populated by African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Caribbean immigrants. Urban despair also brought rising crime, gang violence, and poverty.” - <https://www.iconcollective.edu/hip-hop-history>



DJ Kool Herc

DJ Kool Herc’s parties birthed Hip Hop as a culture. An underground subculture of DJ’s, Rappers, Dancers and Graffiti Artists. DJ Kool Herc has been dubbed the Godfather of Hip Hop. He is widely known as the one that began looping the breaks within the music. This was because he noticed the dancers went most excited during these moments in the music. This gave birth to ‘breaking’ and gave the name Break Boys/Girls (Bboys/Bgirls) to the dancers. He used two turn tables to play two copies of the same song, to switch between and therefore extend the break. This is called the ‘Merry-Go-Round’ technique. It is thought this idea was greatly inspired by the Disco DJs that he looked up to.



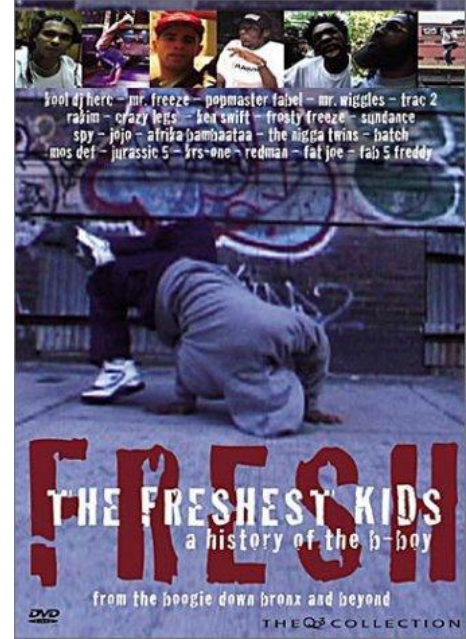
Interview with DJ Kool Herc

Breaking through documentary filmmaking

Breaking struggles to be truly documented via literature. It is an art form that can only be truly expressed by visually (dance) and audibly (music). Documentary filmmaking perfectly allows us to document such an art form. Only Graffiti, out of all the elements of Hip Hop (Breaking, Mcing/ Rapping, Djing and Graffiti), is able to be expressed on a piece of paper.



Brief history and short stories of multiple bboys



The Freshest Kids is a documentary on YouTube that explains the history of breaking and its conception in New York. This film has been recommended by so many breakers that I have spoken to and is held in high regard by the whole scene.



Research into Hip Hop, through Benvenga's study: **Hip-hop, identity, and conflict: Practices and transformations of a metropolitan culture**

'Like a graffiti artist makes use of his name to build an identity, at the same way the breaker uses his body—outlines Martha Cooper. "Break dance is a genuine celebration of flexibility and sensuality of the male teenager body." The speed of movements and the smoothness of drawings are essential both in breaking and in graffiti art. What matters is mostly the degree of difficulty. For this reason, like in graffiti and rap music, breaking is an ever-changing form of art. The purpose is, in fact, the development of new techniques and styles to overcome the others and affirm one's supremacy. What is at stake is the social position in the community, which often represents for the young inhabitant of the ghetto everything he owns. (ivi, p. 141)'

'lthough breaking is the newest part of hip-hop culture, it's the part that has made hip-hop, a media obsession. Then, 5 years ago, the only people who had ever heard of breaking were the kids in New York's ghettos who did it. They didn't even have a definite name for the form—they sometimes called it "breaking," but they also referred to it as "rocking down," "b-boy," or just "that kind of dancing you do to rap music." By 1980—when the form had already been around for a few years—they weren't even very interested in it anymore. This kind of dancing was a passing fad, they felt, that would soon be replaced by roller disco. But history was to prove them wrong. Not since the twist, in the early sixties, has a dance craze so captured the attention of the media (Banes, 2004, p. 13).'

'By 1984, only a hermit could not have known about breaking. It had arrived, not only in the United States but also in Canada, Europe, and Japan. Breaking had been featured in the 1983 Hollywood film Flashdance, the independent hip-hop musical film Wild Style, and the documentary Style Wars (which aired on PBS), served as the inspiration for the 1984 films Breakin' and Beat Street, and was rumored to be the subject of fifteen forthcoming Hollywood movies. Countless how to books and videos had hit the market. Breaking had been spotlighted on national news shows, talk shows, and ads for Burger King, Levi's, Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola, and Panasonic. In total, one hundred break dancers heated up the closing ceremonies of the 1984 summer Olympics in Los Angeles. In addition, Michael Jackson had given the form national currency. Breaking made the cover of Newsweek in 1984. Newspapers all over the country regularly carried stories on its latest ups and downs. The paradox emerged, as you flipped the pages of the Washington Post or the Los Angeles Times, that break dancers who would come up in the ghetto were banned from city streets and shopping malls for causing disturbances and attracting undesirable crowds, while at the same time, middle-class housewives and executives could learn to break dance in their spare time at classes proliferating throughout the suburbs. Doctors added to the form's acceptability by giving medical advice on how to survive it unbruised. In addition, the New York Times began using breaking as a metaphor even in articles that had nothing to do with hip-hop (Banes, 2004, p. 13).'

African Roots of Hip Hop



‘Dating back to the 13th century, storytellers called “griots” existed in West African kingdoms and empires. Historically, griots have been highly skilled orators, poets, musicians, praise singers, and satirists who traveled around reciting the history of the empire with rhythm and repetition. This widely recognized oral tradition, some argue, could be considered the earliest manifestation of rap, laying the groundwork for the development of hip-hop.

“Rap is fundamentally based on vocal styling, based on call-and-response, which is the foundation of all Black music,” said Obi Asika, a Nigerian entrepreneur and record executive who was instrumental in growing the country’s music industry.

Call-and-response, where one phrase answers another either vocally or instrumentally, was popularized through artists such as James Brown (himself inspired by gospel music). It was brought to the forefront of hip-hop in the history-making 1980 Kurtis Blow track, “The Breaks” – with a foundation that can be found throughout African history.’

- <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/15/africa/africa-hip-hop-50th-anniversary-history-spc/index.html>

Diary Entry #1 - Training

I've trained in Hip Hop, through cypher-based training as well as traditionally structured classes. Stepping into a breaking cypher deemed a big challenge for me. I struggled with the ability to jump in and just 'play'. That's how my lecturer described it. Play in your freestyle is a huge part of Hip Hop dance styles, in particular breaking, as it allows you reach the limits of your creativity and surpass it; creating new unique movement patterns. The mindset of experimenting and playing creates a level of comfort in a cypher. I feel that in dance circles without this mindset become too restricted to what movement dancers believe they are good at.

My lecturer wanted me to take note of the feeling of training with breakers. The old school way of just throwing down and experimenting.

Roughly 40 breakers, ranging from all abilities, gathered in a small basketball hall in Bristol. There was an overwhelmingly friendly atmosphere, where everyone wanted to know anyone.

My lecturer stressed the importance of understanding the culture on a deep level; 'you need even know the smell of training'. By the end of training the mirrors were misted, and the floor began to slip. Overall, an incredibly insightful experience.

Bristol Breaking Sessions Instagram Content



Diary Entry #2 – Bboy Flexton and my first interview

Filmmaking is a difficult skill, as a lot can go wrong. This interview is a perfect representation of such. Fluorescent lighting was terrible on camera as it began to strobe. I had nothing prepared to light Jamie from the front, so indoor filming was unaesthetic. The camera grain in the low light was immense. The sound quality was awful, as I could not pinpoint Jamie's voice over people past talking.

We devised a new plan to film a week after, outside in the sun, with better sound and lighting. This taught me to be aware of these things when filming future interviews.

Second/ Successful interview



Bboy Flexton	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyErHokScWU
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Diary Entry #2 - Cardiff scene

After introduction to the breaking scene in Cardiff, I have trained regularly with Bboys such as Tommy Boost, Bboy Kai and El Camino. This scene is incredibly small; being able to count the Bboys on your hands. Community is small so breakers often travel out of Cardiff to train. There is a very skill-based mindset in Cardiff, focused on achieving moves and an overall higher level. There is not much on the communal level, but this is very much due to the lack of breakers.

I have trained in this scene, working towards achieving windmills, back spins and head spins. We have trained both indoors and outdoors. The 'Unit' =, an unsold shop that has been opened up to the Hip Hop community in Cardiff was an amazing place to train as it encompassed many aspects of Hip Hop. It had the art and graffiti along the window. Where I was able to tag it myself, joining the dozens of others to do so also. There was a community art gallery, DJ Decks and a floor to break on. It was a place to create, with Hip Hop culture at its core.

We have also trained outside, taking a foam mat and speaker to the park, and trained in a 'old school' way.

Bboy/ Bgirl	YouTube Link
Tommy Boost	https://youtu.be/6KH1wcFQX9M
Bboy Kai	https://youtu.be/3AfDu2_3dis



Main takeaways

- Personal story of growing up bboying and family ties
- Explanation of Hip Hop elements
- Debate about the negatives of 'Super Crews'
- Pioneers and inspirations of UK Breaking

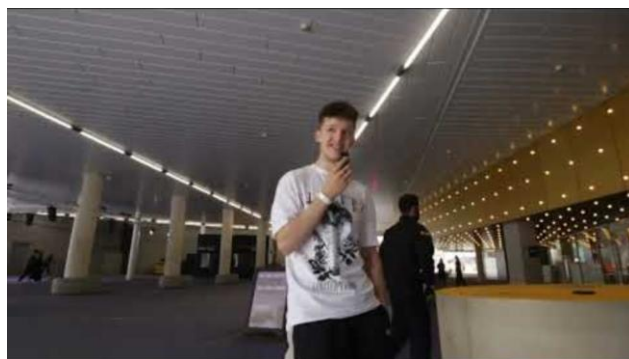
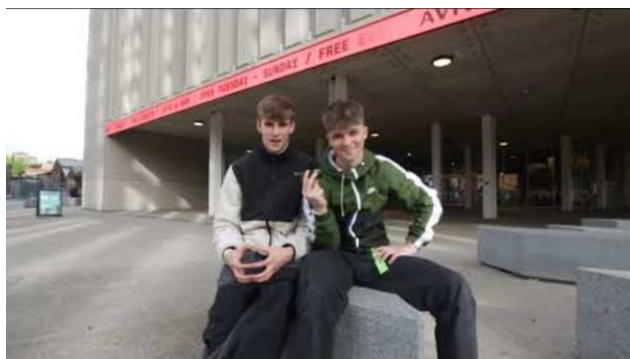
Main takeaways

- Personal story of bboying
- Hip Hop described as 'Art that brings people together'
- Hip seen as a religion
- Pioneers and inspirations of UK Breaking

Diary Entry #4 – Battles (Groovenometry)

Groovenometry – Manchester, was a deep dive into the world of competing and battles. Here I interviewed three young breakers and got footage of dozens more. This is content for the documentary as well as important research. I would fact check the research by comparing it to information online, as well as information given to me by other breakers. I would only incorporate an interview segment if it matched up exactly with what other breakers were saying.

Bboy/ Bgirl	YouTube Link
Joenormous + Barney Trouble	https://youtu.be/D42-yEp53G8
Riordan	https://youtu.be/tTPphdY6buE



Main takeaways from both

- Bboying when relatively new to the scene
- Inspirations from movies and people around them
 - Pioneers of UK Breaking
 - What is Hip Hop culture?

Watching hours of battles on YouTube, to get an insight into the UK styles of breaking, the etiquette and methods of battling. Battles from the past and battles from the present:



2001 UK Breaking Championships



2004 UK Red Bull Cypher

Zoom Interviews

Bboy/ Bgirl	YouTube Link
Natasha Lee	https://youtu.be/cEZGz8nxEAA
Kahn Fu	https://youtu.be/3y0tbVW2yZM
Omar	https://youtu.be/X62sAbj4XE8
Silence	https://youtu.be/blThPTByeck
Katsumi	https://youtu.be/kmurfxdy4qA
Mouse	https://youtu.be/cflPouwGB_w

Through these I deeply researched the Hip Hop and Breaking scene. Interviewing both Breakers and DJs to get their personal insight. I have also conducted interviews in person to get both styles of interview, with differing comfortability level of the interviewee from in person to zoom, I may get a varied answer, that would add more variety to the documentary.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with loosely planned questions

What is your name, and bboy/ bgirl name?

- What is the story behind it?
- Does it reflect your style?

How long have you been breaking for? Where did you start and what made you start dancing?

- How has the scene changed since you joined it?
- How did you train? How do you train now?

What does Hip Hop mean to you?

- Has your definition of Hip Hop changed over time?
- How does breaking fall under Hip Hop culture?

Who inspired you? Who are the pioneers of UK breaking to you?

- How have they shaped the scene?

Have you ever trained outside of the UK?

- What was it like?
- What does the UK do better or worse?

How could the UK elevate to the next level?

- How close is the UK to your definition of true Hip Hop?
- What do you think the future of UK breaking holds?

How do think you will leave this culture better than when you received it?

- Are you building anything?
- What values should be passed on to the next generation?



- Comparison to Japan
- Training in Bristol



- Hip Hop was niche in the UK in the past
- History of breaking – the journey from the underground to the Olympics



- Difference between breaking and breakdancing
- Culture is everything within the clothes you wear to the food you eat



- Breaking from a university student perspective
- Breaking from a bgirl
- Community aspects of Hip Hop



- Values of Hip Hop: Peace, Love, Unity and Having Fun
- Giving back



- Hip Hop culture from a DJ
- Retired breaker perspective

Contacting UK Breakdancers

Through trial and error, I have found breakers are most responsive through social media, so Instagram became my most useful tool. I had been given a list of breakers by my lecturer and also by breakers in the Cardiff scene. Below is a screenshot of the process of organising these interviews.

Name	Interview Location	Date and Time	Completion	Sign + Release
Jamie Berry	Barry/ Wrexham	Tues 29 th April - 3pm	Complete	No
Tommy Boost	Cardiff	N/A	Complete	Yes
Barnaby and Joe	Groovenometry	N/A	Complete	Yes
Riordan	Groovenometry	N/A	Complete	Yes
Mouse	(Manchester) Zoom	N/A	Complete	No
Kai	Cardiff	Wed 30 th April - 4pm	Complete	Yes
Callum	Newport	...	Incomplete	No
Natasha Lee	Zoom	Wed 30 th April - 11am	Complete	No
Kahn Fu	Zoom	Wednesday 7 th May	Incomplete	No
Omar	Zoom	Thursday 1 st May - 12:30pm	Complete	No
Silence	Zoom	Tuesday 6 th May – 12pm	Complete	No
Katsumi	Zoom	Wednesday 7 th May – 6pm	Incomplete	No
Jamie Berry (History of Hip Hop focus)	Zoom	Thursday 8 th May	Incomplete	N/A
Fidget	Text	N/A send questions via message	Complete	N/A

Why a documentary?

Breaking can only be truly expressed visually and audibly. No one is inspired to break by reading about it. No one can truly grasp Hip Hop culture from a text. They must see it.

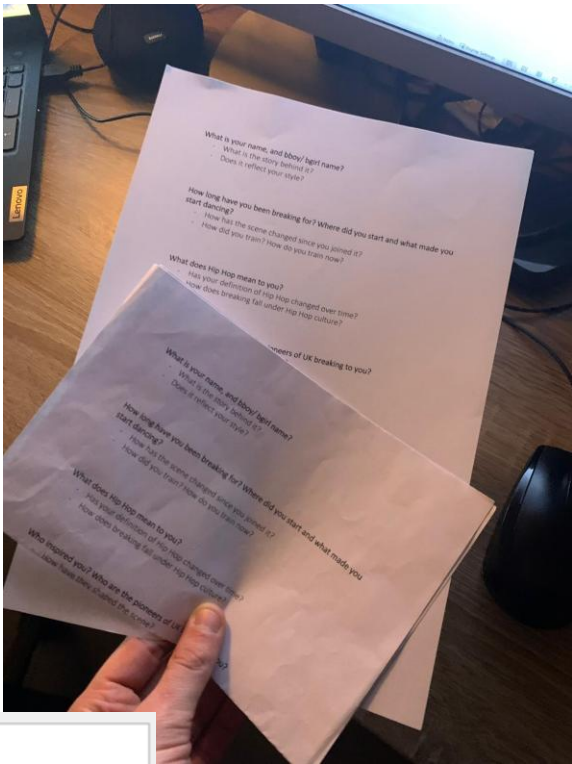
Experience it.

Performance vs Film

Performance	Film
- Genuinely authentic experience of Hip Hop and Breaking. Could even be performed in the round, as if a cypher - Will struggle with performers. As Cardiff breaking scene is small, people are incredibly busy. - No breakers in university. So cannot perform with students. - One time performance. Will not be able to	- Can travel, interview people from across the UK. - Encompasses many elements of Hip Hop, having Breaking footage, Hip Hop music, interview overlays, graffiti-like transitions and graphics. - Can be posted online, to the breaking community. Encourage discourse and add to the culture. - If posted online, may reach people outside of the culture, introducing new people to breaking and the other elements.

Scene list Structure

- Opening Montage
- Hip Hop defined
- Breaking as a part of Hip Hop
- UK Pioneers of Breaking
- The next steps for UK Breaking/ Hip Hop
- Closing statements



Screenplay for Introduction

SCENE	VIDEO	AUDIO
1	BLACK. SUDDEN CUT. A-ROLL - INT. HALL Dancers perform rounds battling against one another. The room is humid, sweat clouds the mirrors and drenches the floor. BLACK. TEXT: "Finlay Carter Presents" A-ROLL - INT. HALL Dancers, out of breath, rest, talking, sharing feedback. They jump straight back into it. BLACK.	WHITE NOISE. MUSIC: 'THE POWER - SNAP!'
50s	TEXT: 'WORKING TITLE' CUT TO:	MUSIC CUTS. BOOMBOX TURNS OFF. CUT TO:
2	Interviews commence. Intertwined with battle B-Roll.	Breakers speak, switching from diegetic to non-diegetic seamlessly.

Structuring the documentary

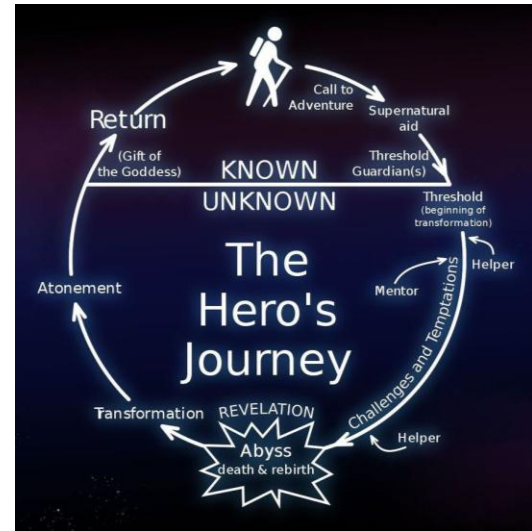
Research into Joseph Campbell Story Structure – All stories that capture the human mind, are those that follow the hero's journey. His book 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' explores this.

'The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there is something lacking in the normal experience available or permitted to the members of society. The person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It's usually a cycle, a coming and a returning.' (A Hero with a Thousand Faces – Joseph Campbell)

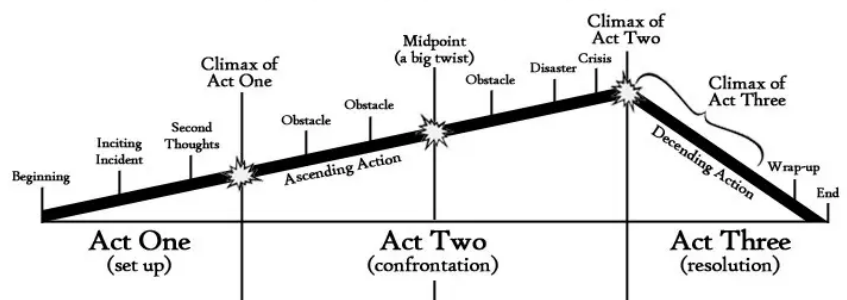
A side note: It stood out to me, especially during the interviewing process, that this is a great representation many bboys/bgirls story of getting into breaking.

My documentary does not follow a central character but the stories of many. So structurally I would place all characters as the archetypal 'hero'.

I studied modern interpretations of film structure:



Three-Act Structure



The traditional three act structure seen in much narrative filmmaking is also a practical guide to structuring a documentary.

Three Act Structure plan of my documentary

Inciting incident – Text at the beginning stating the intention of the documentary

Mid point – The change in atmosphere from positive notes on UK Breaking to the steps to take it to the next level.

Climax – Breakers come to many conclusions of the practical next steps in UK Breaking

Titling the Documentary

‘British to the bone’ – Very traditional patriotic British saying

The art of breaking evolved from dancers that danced particularly ‘on the break’ of the music. The wording of being ‘on the break’ gives a greater connection to the music than saying ‘to the break’.

My intention with this documentary was to explore UK Hip Hop through the lens of breaking. I felt the title spoke perfectly to this.

I want to explore Hip Hop as a community, Breaking as a community, and the values that held tight to it.

Equipment

Research into gear for dance filmmaking. This research is what persuaded me to buy both a wide-angle lens and a gimbal.



DJI Ronin RS3 Mini Gimbal – Stable shots, able to track dancers’ movement quickly and smoothly



Canon EOS 600d

70-200 mm lens – close ups

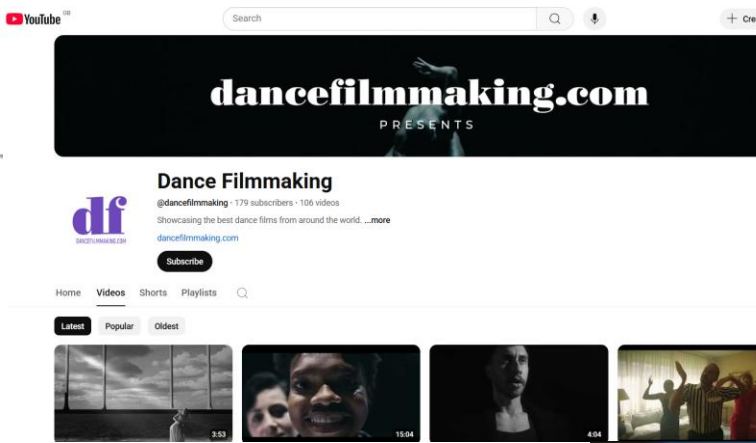
10-18 mm lens – wide shots

18-55mm lens

Rode VideoMic Pro – Audio

Sony LCD – Second Audio

Dance filmmaking



Capturing fast action,
moving with the gimbal and
creating cinematic shots



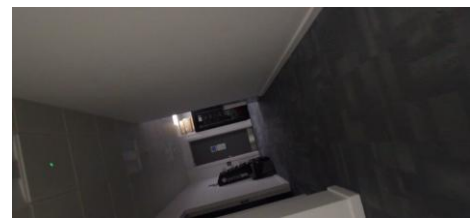
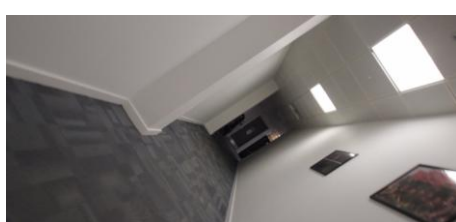
Practice interview



Practiced with 4:3 Ratio
Not happy with light
Not happy with sound

Process gave me insight
that I would change
locations to outside, and
dial in the sound quality

Practicing gimbal shots through different motions



B-Roll

Smooth movement, that follows the dancers



Treading along the outside to give depth to shots, by using crowd in the foreground

Shots of the battles



Birds-eye-view shots taken from balcony

Research into ethical interviewing

My intention was to take a laid-back approach, encouraging conversation over sticking strictly questions. But I still had a list of the kind of questions I wanted, to keep structure and similarity between all interviews. This was to mirror the very laid-back atmosphere that I had learned breakers thrive in. There is so much competition but paradoxically breakers are some of the most relaxed people I know. I reckon this is because they have an outlet for their energy, not dissimilar from other athletes.

‘Avoiding leading questions is crucial for ethical interviewing. Leading questions can unfairly influence the responses of the participants, potentially skewing the results. Instead, open-ended questions should be used to allow participants or candidates to provide their genuine answers. Ethical interviews must be free from manipulation and aim to gather authentic information based on the participant’s or candidate’s responses.

Respect for the participants is at the heart of ethical interviewing practices. This respect manifests in several ways, such as valuing their time, providing context for each question, and ensuring they feel comfortable throughout the process. In research interviews, this includes creating a safe and supportive environment where participants can express themselves without fear of judgment or repercussions.’ <https://atlasti.com/guides/interview-analysis-guide/ethics-of-interviews#:~:text=Avoiding%20leading%20questions%20is%20crucial,%2C%20trauma%2C%20or%20controversial%20topics.>

Sign and Release Forms

Permission to use footage and audio gathered from breakers – research into elements of a legal document.

Content and Release Form

Page 1

UWTSD Dissertation Project Content and Release Form

Working Title: An Insight into UK Breaking

Finlay Carter (2205209)

BA (Hons) Commercial Dance, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Participant Information

Full Name: Way Easter
Email Address: WayEaster@gmail.com
Signature: [Signature]

Intentions with the Project

This project is being created as the final project/ dissertation in a Commercial Dance degree at Wales Academy of Voice and Dramatic Arts (University of Wales Trinity Saint David). I am Finlay, a training dancer, with a huge passion for Breaking and Hip Hop. The intention is to create a documentary, with the goal to explore the UK Breaking scene, the history and culture, through the voices of the people who are living it today. In addition to the main documentary, I will also create social media material to support the project. At this stage, the specifics of the social media content are not fully planned out, but any material created will be in line with the aims of the documentary.

The final film and research portfolio will be submitted for an assessment and likely be shown at a university showing. The final film, as well as interview segments, will also be broadcasted online via various social platforms.

Consent and Release

By signing this form, you consent to the following:

1. You understand the nature and purpose of the project and have had the opportunity to ask any questions.
2. You agree to participate with the project.
3. You grant Finlay Carter and Wales Academy of Voice and Dramatic Arts/University of Wales Trinity Saint David permission to
 - a. Record, use and reproduce your voice, image, and contributions as part of the documentary and social media material.
 - b. Edit the material for clarity, length and context.
4. Consent to my footage being used in social media content related to this project.
5. Understand that participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw consent any point before 23rd April 2023.

Content and Release Form

Page 2

6. You agree that this material may be used as for academic purposes and stored in accordance to with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David guidelines.

Any specific requests:

Please tick one

- ☒ I agree to my full name being used in this documentary
☒ I agree to my bboy/bgirl nickname being used in this documentary
☐ I prefer to remain anonymous

Signature

Participant Signature: [Signature]
Date: 30/04/23

Researcher Signature

Date: _____

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