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Empowerment in Context: Lessons from Hip-Hop Culture for Social Work Practice

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Hip-hop culture can be used as a conduit to enhanced cultural competence and practice skills through the individual and community empowerment framework. This framework is introduced as a tool for direct practice that allows social workers to understand the competing messages within hip-hop culture and how they may impact youths by promoting or inhibiting positive youth development. The individual and community empowerment framework can inform direct practice skills for improved communication and relationships by providing a structure for collaborative development of goals and change strategies. The individual and community empowerment assessment tool and a sample music index are included.

KEYWORDS empowerment, hip-hop, cultural competency, positive youth development

INTRODUCTION

Within the field of social work, practitioners, educators, and researchers have made a sustained commitment to the goals of cultural competency, self-determination, and empowerment in practice, teaching, and research with individuals and communities. In this article, it is argued that hip-hop culture can be used effectively as a conduit to these goals in working with

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youths through the theoretical framework presented. The framework will enable social workers to understand the competing messages within hip-hop culture and how these messages may impact youths by promoting or inhibiting positive youth development. Grounded in positive youth development (Damon, 2004), the framework presented extends prior models integrating hip-hop culture into direct practice with youth (Hicks Harper, Rhodes, Thomas, Leary, & Quinton, 2007; Tyson, 2003; Kobin & Tyson, 2006).

The proposed framework introduces hip-hop culture as a lens for increased cultural competence and enhanced practice skills, central competency standards within the social work profession (NASW, 2007). Cultural competence can be enhanced through greater self-awareness of potential biases against hip-hop and knowledge-building about youth culture in general, high-risk environments, and ethnic minority cultures. This framework will enable social workers to better understand the ways in which youths can embrace contradictory messages within hip-hop while still finding pathways to positive youth development. In addition, this framework informs direct practice skills for improved communication, enhanced empathic relationships, and a structure for collaborative development of goals and change strategies within a social work generalist practice perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Positive Youth Development

The positive youth development perspective promotes the ideas that development can be enhanced for *all* youths and that youths can be agents for improving their own development and society as a whole in partnership with environmental assets. For this article, positive youth development is discussed primarily as an ongoing (outcome) goal of the helping relationship. Positive youth development is optimal physical, social, emotional, and cognitive/intellectual well-being with the potential for "thriving" over time. Specific behavioral instances of positive youth development are measured by *competence*, *character*, *caring/compassion*, *connection*, and *confidence* (also known as the 5 Cs of positive youth development). A sixth C, *contribution*, which is the cornerstone of linking youth as a community-integrated resource to their multiple environments, has been predicted by higher levels of *competence*, *character*, *caring/compassion*, *connection*, and *confidence* (Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007). Our model references *contribution* through examples of "commitment to a concern with existence that transcends the self" (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002, p. 22), where "mentorship and modeling" (Travis, 2010, p. 454) occurs on a one-to-one level and can also be a precursor to broader community engagement.

In this article we introduce a framework to examine the ways hip-hop culture interacts with the growth or inhibition of well-being and

empowerment outcomes for youths and the broader community with attention to high-risk environments and youths of color. Specifically, self-esteem, resilience, positive youth development, community, and social change are discussed within the context of hip-hop culture and music. We extend arguments made by Tyson (2003) of the potential value of hip-hop culture in social work, by integrating cross-disciplinary research exploring hip-hop's relationships with pro-social and risky behavior.

Hip-Hop Culture

Hip-hop music and culture have a large and growing appeal to youth in the United States and internationally. In the United States, hip-hop and rap music have been cited as extraordinarily popular music genres among seventh- through twelfth-graders; in a study drawing from a national sample, 65% of youths of all races who listened to recorded music in a typical day listen to hip-hop or rap (Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2005). When youths were aggregated according to race, hip-hop or rap music was still the most popular genre among whites, African Americans, and Latinos, with whites at 60%, African Americans at 81%, and Latinos at 70%. Hip-hop music and culture is popular outside of the United States; it is now a global movement from Australia to Africa, including Ghana (Shipley, 2009) and South Africa (Watkins, 2001).

Hip-hop *culture* can be distinguished from hip-hop and rap *music* in that it encompasses a variety of art forms beyond simply music, including emceeing (rapping), deejaying, b-boying (break dancing) and mural arts (graffiti) (Chang, 2004). Hip-hop culture has been embraced by youths globally as a form of storytelling, political critique, resistance to power, and entertainment. In the United States, hip-hop culture and music speak especially to youths of color, "who find representations of themselves and their community within the lyrics, style, and presentation of their culture" (Clay, 2006, p. 107). Proponents and critics of hip-hop culture have highlighted how the hyper-commercialization of hip-hop has packaged high-risk attitudes and behaviors as a product to be consumed, at the expense of more redeeming elements of the art form (Rose, 2008; Iwamoto, Creswell, & Caldwell, 2007). Within social work and counseling practice with individuals, the empowering aspects of hip-hop culture have been successfully integrated, while the high-risk aspects have been consistently critiqued for their negative impacts. Both will be discussed as context for understanding the potential role for hip-hop in social work practice.

Practice implications

Hip-hop culture has been embraced as a strategy for enhancing health and well-being within a variety of U.S.-based and international practice

settings from prevention to intervention, along the spectrum of generalist practice. These strategies have shown promise in therapeutic modalities to improve individual, group, and family mental and behavioral health and as a mobilizing tool for broader social change and community well-being.

Elligan (2004) introduced Rap Therapy as a social learning–led strategy for individual and group change for youths in school counseling, and provided examples where positive evaluations of change were noted in areas such as depression (Gonzalez & Hayes, 2009). Tyson, another prominent advocate of hip-hop linked therapy, found success using a social work practice model built on strengths and empowerment approaches when working with "at-risk" youths, and found that participants favored this approach in comparison to other group formats. A different, but similarly named "RAP Therapy" approach used by DeCarlo and Hockman (2003) found that participants heavily favored this strategy in comparison to traditional modalities. Tillie Allen (2005) also used the term "Hip-Hop Therapy" to describe her individual and group work with youths, citing the importance of embracing youth culture while reframing unhealthy thinking and attitudes. Each of these models emphasizes "deconstructing negative attitudes and behaviors" (p. 33) to promote a healthier functioning.

Moving from individual growth and development to consciousness-raising and social change were youth-led strategies and youth-adult partnerships described by Clay (2006) and Flores-Gonzalez, Rodriguez, and Rodriguez-Muniz (2006). Clay highlighted how youths in the San Francisco Bay Area moved beyond consumption of hip-hop messages to use it as a tool to harness the energies of others toward the advancement of sociopolitical goals and positive change. The young people involved with Batey Urbano in Chicago similarly used hip-hop as an organizing tool for promoting social action and positive change (Flores-Gonzalez et al., 2006). These mobilizing energies exist beyond high-risk *urban* environments and include many types of high-risk environments; campaigns that integrate hip-hop culture with local cultures include low-income rural settings, informal settlements, shantytowns, barrios, and favelas across the globe (Mitchell, 2002).

While the use of hip-hop to enhance well-being has grown over time and across geographic settings, there are ongoing concerns about content that represents substance abuse, misogyny, and violence in some hip-hop and rap music lyrics and video imagery. Quantitative and qualitative researchers have examined content in hip-hop including visual and verbal messages about substance use (Herd, 2008), misogyny (Adams & Fuller, 2006), and violence (Kubrin, 2005). Some researchers have found links between these messages and risky behaviors and attitudes, such as higher risk of substance use (Verkooijen, de Vries, & Nielsen, 2007), aggression, and illicit drug use (Chen, Miller, Grube, & Waiters, 2006). Others have investigated links between visual and verbal messages in hip-hop and pro-social behaviors or attitudes (Squires, Kohn-Wood, Chavous, & Carter,

2006). Furthermore, considerable attention has also been given to the role of corporate forces in driving content, consumption, and innovation within hip-hop culture, suggesting that these forces actually increase the concentration of high-risk content (Rose, 2008). A grossly consolidated and profit-driven industry has been cited as the architect of current hip-hop culture as much as or even more than actual artists (Rose, 2008). Disproportionately, the resulting packaged hip-hop product of high-risk attitudes and behaviors are accompanied by the three main characters of the "gangsta," the "pimp," and the "ho" in the mythical setting of the 'hood, plying in the trade of common 'hood vices of sex, drugs, and violence (Tate, Prashad, Neal, & Cross, 2006, p. 46).

Examining Hip-Hop Culture for Themes of Empowerment and Risk

In reviewing the theoretical and empirical literature on hip-hop culture, three of the major themes of inquiry found were (1) empowerment themes, including issues of identity, resilience, growth, awareness, and solidarity, (2) exploration of how content and imagery may be associated with high-risk attitudes and behaviors, and (3) the use of hip-hop culture in prevention or intervention strategies to maximize health and well-being.

Empowerment

Within social work, empowerment is a key foundational concept and can be found in three domains: intrapsychic, interpersonal, and collective (Gutierrez, 1990) and move in any direction; that is, collective empowerment may lead to intrapsychic empowerment, or interpersonal empowerment can lead to collective empowerment. Each of these pathways can lead to the next, and all of these domains are related to another foundational concept of the profession, social justice.

In the hip-hop literature, themes of empowerment are common although the concept is discussed in different ways. Kubrin (2005) provides rich and substantive examples of empowerment themes, such as the avoidance of victimization and responding to challenges. At the broader community level, Flores-Gonzalez and colleagues (2006) offer examples of how hip-hop culture embedded within a rich social network can empower a segment of the community. In these instances, it was broadly defined as encompassing traditional notions of empowerment as a life-enhancing, positive developmental tool. But, empowerment could also occur in a less desirable or higher-risk manner as expressed by Orange (1996) in her discussion of "vicarious empowerment." It is our contention that empowerment can be understood as any attempt to gain power over decision making, opportunities, or the meaning ascribed to one's life. Using this understanding of empowerment, attitudes and behaviors that feel empowering to an

individual or community may be risky or pro-social, or contain elements of both. We are arguing that empowerment takes place in a historical, political, and social context which can explain both traditionally defined and vicarious empowerment.

Themes of economic transcendence, or "making it" regardless of means, are experienced by some listeners as a form of empowerment. Skold and Rehn (2007) found that respondents felt affirmed by lyrics and images of individual power and material success, consistent with themes in hip-hop that emphasize success. Within the context of pervasive structural racism, images of powerful African American, Latino, and other disenfranchised populations may be affirming to women and men despite content that may also include themes of violence, misogyny, and/or substance use. Differentiation between "makin' it" and "keepin' it real" was a distinction between hip-hop artists describing themselves as economically transcendent as compared to those describing that they remain contextually embedded within a disenfranchised social reality (Skold & Rehn, 2007). In contrast to the more vicarious empowerment listeners experienced in the songs focusing on "making it," songs that are considered "keeping it real" or "socially conscious" are sometimes experienced by listeners as *dis*empowering, by publicly naming and describing a lack of political and economic power (Newman, 2007). From a social work perspective, this nuanced understanding of empowerment is crucial to integrate as we seek to research and practice from a strengths-based perspective.

Precursors to Individual and Community Risk: Misogyny, Violence, and Substance Use

Empowering messages integrated into hip-hop must be considered in conjunction with content that may inhibit positive youth development via the adoption of risky health behaviors. Violence, misogyny, and substance use content may introduce, support, or perpetuate high-risk attitudes, values, and behavior. Furthermore, the aggregation of individual risk, or the potential for proportionally high levels of risky attitudes or behavior, is an important factor in broader community risk. Kubrin's (2005) analysis of more than 400 "rap music" songs between 1992 and 2000 found that "street code" themes of violence, misogyny, and nihilism were highly prevalent in this music. For many, the alarming aspect of these results are threats of potential priming of "dysfunctional or antisocial thoughts, judgments, perceptions, and behaviors" among young people (Knoblock-Westerwick, Musto, & Shaw, 2008, p. 16) that could lead to high-risk behaviors. (See Figure 1.)

A common critique of hip-hop messages and imagery has been that much of it is misogynistic. Misogyny is "an ideology that reduces women to objects for men's ownership, use or abuse" (p. 939) where women are normalized as expendable and not worthy of respect or compassion (Adams & Fuller, 2006). Misogynistic content within some hip-hop lyrics

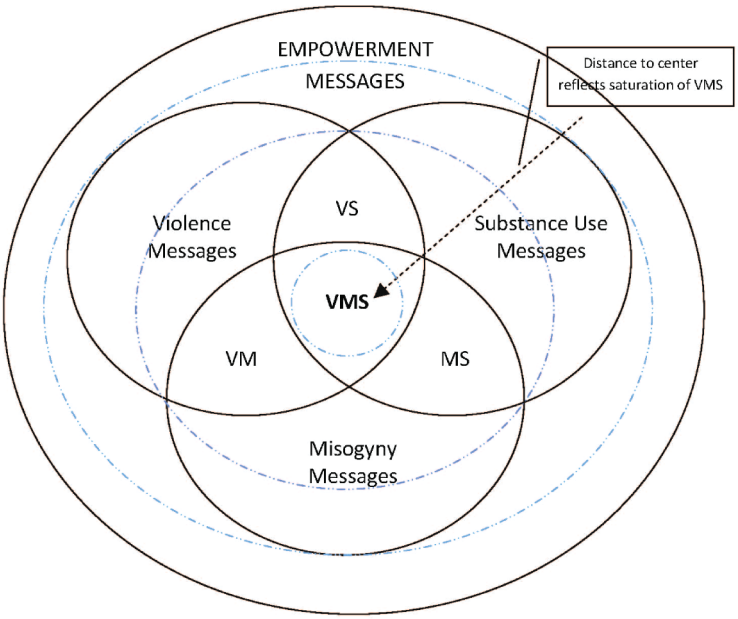

FIGURE 1 Empowerment messages and potential saturation by overlapping risk messages (color figure available online).

or imagery includes "(a) derogatory statements about women in relation to sex; (b) violent actions toward women; (c) women causing "trouble" for men, (d) women as "users" of men; (e) women as beneath men and (f) women as usable and discardable" (Adams & Fuller, 2006, p. 940). Research on misogynistic content of hip-hop suggests a relationship between this content and black girls' sexual and gender role identity, body image, and self-esteem; perceptions and attitudes that could lead to risky behaviors that would inhibit positive youth development. In another study, actions to combat misogyny in hip-hop and its associated imagery were encouraged because it was found that African American preadolescents may accept and use the sexual scripts conveyed through hip-hop music and imagery to influence "conceptualizations of their own and general African American female sexuality" (Stephens & Few, 2007, p. 251), but they may resist as well (Stokes 2007; West, 2009).

Violence and substance use are similarly prevalent in hip-hop messaging and are of concern because of the high risk of morbidity and mortality associated with violent or substance-using behaviors. A study by Wingood and colleagues (2003) found a significant relationship between exposure to hip-hop videos and negative behavioral health outcomes, including increased prevalence of assaulting teachers, arrest, sexually transmitted infection (STI) acquisition, and substance use. These results were mirrored in another study which found a significant and positive relationship between listening to rap music and general alcohol use, malt-liquor use, potential

alcohol-use disorder, marijuana use, club-drug use, and aggression (Chen et al., 2006). These studies paint a clear picture about why concern exists regarding hip-hop's potential to inhibit positive youth development.

Hip-Hop and Youth Development: Individual and Community Empowerment Framework

Our framework has two connected empowerment dimensions: *individual* and *community* empowerment. Individual empowerment subtypes are (1) self-esteem and power, (2) resilience and survival, and (3) individual growth and positive youth development. Community empowerment subtypes are (1) collective growth, community youth development, and cultural resilience and (2) social change. A concentration of "positive youth development" (Lerner et al., 2007) constructs is found within individual growth and positive youth development dimension. This dimension also includes the potential for *contribution*, an effort toward working toward positive change outside of the self. The framework is discussed across each dimension in Table 1, with the understanding that songs may encompass multiple dimensions simultaneously. For example, identity and self-esteem are clearly linked to resilience and survival and a challenging environment.

Individual Empowerment

Self-esteem and prosperity

Within the framework's self-esteem dimension, messages often articulate relative approval of self and perceived competence in environments that may persistently assault one's view of self. Subthemes are (1) identity, (2) economic freedom, and (3) self-medication.

Strengthening or sustaining self-esteem and gaining prosperity are prominent identity messages, often by declaring (1) a powerful reputation for being able to negotiate the challenges of life, (2) artistic skills, particularly in relation to the hard work and dedication it takes to perfect one's craft, and (3) the ability to inflict aggression, or sexual prowess (Kubrin, 2005). In a study by Newman (2007), students found more commercial and "non-conscious" hip-hop appealing because it more overtly supported "their dreams and expectations of a successful and prosperous adulthood" as opposed to portraying them "as victims whose only hope is a massive and unrealistic social change" (p. 131).

Self-medication, as a strategy to help one feel better about current circumstances, is one of the themes also embedded in hip-hop messages. Self-medication can be interpreted through the context of racial and socioeconomic disparities in health care. The lack of access to adequate, reliable health care and the lack of trust in the health care system for some lead to

TABLE 1 Song Index with Messages by Individual and Community Empowerment (ICE) Framework Dimensions

Individual Empowerment			Community Empowerment	
Self-Esteem	Resilience	Growth	Community	Change
Identity, self-liking, power	Expression, coping	Development, mentoring	Culture, pride	Awareness, action
Money to Blow (Birdman)	Ghetto Show[a] (Talib Kweli)	I Am (Novel/Talib Kweli)	Life is Good (DJ Rev/ Mos Def)	Back Home (Blue Scholars)
Breathe (Fabolous)	Rabbit Run (Eminem)	Retrospect for Life (Common/Lauryn Hill)	The Corner (Common)	Wounded Eyes (Blue Scholars)
I Feel Good (Jay Electronica)	Spaceship (Kanye West)	Shiny Suit Theory (Jay Electronica)	Black Girl Pain (Talib Kweli)	Harlem Streets (Immortal Technique)
I'm Good (Clipse/Pharrell)	Coming of Age (Dead Prez)	Talking to Myself (Eminem)	The People (Common)	Why? (The Roots)
Allure (Jay Z)	Who We Be (DMX)	Villain (Crooked I)	Strange Fruit (Common)	W-4 (Dead Prez)
In My Lifetime (Jay Z)	Take a Walk (Masta Ace)	Now or Never (The Roots)	Life in Marvelous Times (Mos Def)	Look Around (Dead Prez)
Mic Like A Memory (CunninLynguists)	Take a Minute (K'Naan)	I'm Beaming (Lupe Fiasco)	Around My Way (Talib Kweli)	Running Away (Buckshot/Immortal Technique/KRS-One)
Bet I Bust (Remix) – B.o.B, TI	This the Ish That I Live (Trick Daddy)	The Show Goes On (Lupe Fiasco)	Runaway Love (Ludacris/Mary J. Blige)	#Jan25 Egypt (Omar Offendum plus guests)
Moment for Life (Nicki Manaj/Drake	Pain (Z-Ro)	Henny at Halftime (Reks/Ron Artest)		Words I Never Said (Lupe Fiasco)
I Gave You Power (Nas)	Life's a Bitch (Nas/AZ)[a]	Not Afraid (Eminem)	Horizons (Karmacy)	My Favorite Mutiny (The Coup)
Highs N Lows (Kid Cudi)	Uncommon Valor (RA the Rugged Man)	Self Saviour (Chace Infinite/Talib Kweli)	Postcards from Paradise (Himalayan Project)	Fight the Power (Public Enemy)[a]
Cigarettes (Reks/Lil Fame)	The Ecology (Fashawn)	Josephine (Hi-Tek)	Can It Be (Murs)	
Chase the Clouds Away (Evidence)	Sky's the Limit (Notorious B.I.G.)	Otherside (Macklemore)	Revolution (Asheru)	

(*Continued*)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Individual Empowerment			Community Empowerment	
Self-Esteem	Resilience	Growth	Community	Change
Identity, self-liking, power	Expression, coping	Development, mentoring	Culture, pride	Awareness, action
I Got it Made (Special Ed)[a]	Bring Me Down (Saigon)	Where R U Going? (Grits)	If (Kenn Starr, Talib Kweli, Asheru)	
Nuthin' but a 'G'-Thing (Snoop Doggy Dog featuring Dr. Dre)[a]	We Don't Care (Kanye West)	Bad Don't Seem So Wrong (Trae/Lupe Fiasco)		
	Know the Ledge (Rakim)[a]	Breath (The Grouch)		
	The Message (Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five)[a]	Prayin' For You (Lecrae)		
		Treat 'Em Right (Chubb Rock)[a]		

[a]Older, classic representation of the dimension.

alternative strategies of coping or managing a range of health and mental health challenges. The lack of physical safety, vis-à-vis the streets and the possibility of police brutality and racial profiling, also promotes alternative coping strategies. For example, in an older track by Nas (1994) featuring AZ, is the infamous hook "Life's a b*tch and you die/ that's why we get high/ cuz you never know when you're gonna go."

Resilience and survival

Resilience and survival are prominent themes within hip-hop culture. In these instances, an individual can express the hardships present for so many youths and families; pain experienced directly or indirectly (Rose, 2008) and subsequent resilience. Resilience has been defined as "the process of positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543). The three subthemes in this dimension of the framework are (1) expressive/cathartic, (2) protective, and (3) persistence.

The first types of messages in this dimension simply tell the stories of hardship, allowing expression and potential catharsis for the storyteller and for the listener. Their value exists in the ability to "vent" anger and/or pain experienced or witnessed (Newmann, 2007, p. 143). "Sixteen" by Strong Arm Steady (2009) begins "You could tell he missed his mom because of his snotty nose/ raised in an era with battering rams that knock down your neighbor's door/ post-traumatic stress consumed him at only eight/ playground terror, beating up kids because he barely ate."

A select group of resilience messages are protective, concentrating on avoiding future hardships or victimization (Kubrin, 2005) by defining boundaries about interpersonal behavior/relationships. Messages may accentuate prior ability to survive settings and conditions as a badge of honor to bolster reputation and esteem, as well as to affirm a positive future (i.e., persistence). These instances have heavily ingrained "survival mode" messages and often suggest that survival is priority even at the expense of others' well-being. Fashawn's "The Ecology" (2009) states, "Just trying to survive these days and times . . ./ Because where I'm from brothers die every day/ sunny CA/ understand the ecology of how we behave/ baseheads/ drive-bys it's just how we was raised/ murder for capital, we've got to get paid/ that's the mind state that boosts the crime rate."

Messages of resilience stem from explicit articulation of the high-risk contexts that individual find themselves in (Rose, 2008) and can be celebratory with appreciation of the ability to transcend challenging circumstances. An example can be found in Ghostface Killah's "All I Got Is You" (1996) where he describes, "Seven o'clock, plucking roaches out the cereal box/ Some shared the same spoon, watching Saturday cartoons/ sugar water was our thing, every meal was 'No Frills'/ In the summer, free lunch held us

down like steel/ and there was days I had to go to Tex's house with a note stating 'Gloria can I borrow some food? I'm dead broke'." The closing narration of the track adds, "I remember them good old days because see the child I was is what made me the man I am today."

Individual growth and positive youth development

The last dimension of the individual empowerment portion of the framework emphasizes individual growth and development, and also includes contributions made within a community context. Individuals in this stage have the sense that they have grown in some capacity and seek to sustain, maintain, and enhance that growth. Growth and skills messages can be understood by positive youth development constructs, such as an individual's effort to think better of himself or herself (confidence), build skills better (competence), relate better (connection), and make better decisions (character).

Growth and development can also manifest through the ethic of caring and contribution. Often this occurs through themes of service, role-modeling, or mentorship to peers or youths; encouraging others to make wise choices, further their education, avoid risky behaviors, increase responsibility, and to avoid the mistakes and pitfalls made by others. Gender-specific mentorship manifests in "Girlfriend, Sistagirl" by Mystic (2001) in which she encourages young women to be assertive about preserving themselves and avoid the traps that naive coupling can bring: "Girlfriend, sistagirl, you a precious queen in a twisted world/ looking for love in all the wrong places/ giving up things that can't be replaced/ girlfriend, sistagirl, you are the mother of the world/ he'll break you down, he'll make you cry/ you were born to sing, and you were made to fly."

Community Empowerment

Within the individual and community empowerment framework, *community empowerment* is the product of strengthening the social network or combining individual instances of empowerment or resilience. The subtypes of community empowerment are (1) collective growth, community youth development, and cultural resilience, and (2) social change.

Collective growth, community youth development, and cultural resilience

This dimension moves from individual growth to collective growth and broader community youth development. Improvements are at the community level and are often anchored in a cultural resilience. In these instances pride is accentuated and expressed as collective and inclusive. This community growth includes strengthening environmental assets for youths such

as family, schools, community, and institutions. These may be ethnic or culture-specific communities or broader notions of humanity as a whole.

Dead Prez is a group that offers a universally applicable example of promoting collective growth by emphasizing individual responsibility within the context of its net benefits to humanity in "Helpful" (Dead Prez, 2009). The song is filled with specific examples of how to be helpful: "Donate my extra clothes to a clothing drive/ help the lady across the street bring her bags inside/ send a letter to a prisoner to lift his spirits/ be a mentor to a child 'cause it takes a village." The message continues the mentorship and modeling themes discussed in the individual growth and positive youth development dimension, but extends the themes further with attention to how these actions can help beyond the individual to strengthen society as a whole.

Other messages are explicitly and overtly embedded in cultural realities and emphasize resilience or growth in the face of collective challenges to well-being. These messages often lead with acknowledgment of historical obstacles, constraints, or challenges unique to a cultural group. The concept of culture is used broadly and may transcend ethnicity to include other social identities based on class, immigrant status, age, or gender. In "Black Girl Pain" by Talib Kweli featuring Jean Grae (2004), gender intersects with African American social status initially and then moves to the status of African and colored populations of South Africa. Kweli describes his efforts to help his own daughter feel empowered with a strong identity and the urgency to do so within the family and broader African American context. Grae follows with similar urgency seeking to empower the girls and women of African and colored descent that may be struggling with their own identity due to the ethnically segmented social climate of different regions of South Africa.

Social change: awareness and action

Social change messages focus on (1) increasing the awareness of and critical thinking about social disparities and (2) acting to change perceived systemic or environmental inequities. Resistance of cultural oppression is often encouraged; it is issue based and linked to specific cultural and identity groups (e.g., ethnicity, gender). Examples of messages that focus primarily on raising awareness of oppressive and unjust societal dynamics are common, as are messages geared toward actions to rectify these inequities. As stated in the hook of "We Need a Revolution" by Dead Prez (2002), the sentiment in these messages is that "The system ain't gonna change unless we make it change." Pinn (1999) linked action-oriented hip-hop themes to prior spirituals, blues, and gospel traditions seeking change for African Americans in the Civil War and Civil Rights eras. Although African American challenges and change efforts are often highlighted, hip-hop is embraced across cultures and across nations. Thus, messages regarding community empowerment and the urgency for change are felt by many. In "Every Last

One of Us" by Common Market (2006), they state, "we're about to change the mentality of old world savagery into a new reality/ one where teachers and lawyers will trade salaries/ and liquor stores are razed to make way for art galleries . . . it's a kingdom that we gotta construct/ who's ready to build from the ground up? 'Every last one of us!"'

Social Work Practice Implications

The framework proposed in this article is meant for use across all preventive and intervention efforts that infuse hip-hop. Specific practice suggestions are described below. It can be of particular value in rapport building and engagement with youths, assessment and goal development, while also creating a structure for practice and evaluation. Research on the practice value of hip-hop has strengthened considerably in the past decade (Tyson, 2006; DeCarlo & Hockman, 2003). Elligan (2004), Kobin and Tyson (2006), and Tillie Allen (2005) are but a few of the researchers and practitioners that have proposed specific practice models integrating hip-hop. Kobin and Tyson (2006) offer one of the more detailed social work examples, linking it to narrative therapy and bibliotherapy while embedding it within core social work values of strengths-based and empowerment perspectives (Tyson, 2003; Kobin and Tyson, 2006). The individual and community empowerment framework's utility will be discussed within the context of common principles outlined in prior hip-hop models, allowing readers to understand its flexibility and value in creating structure for change efforts and the ability to incorporate any type/genre/expression of hip-hop.

Establishing the relationship

A strong trusting relationship between social worker and youths can be promoted through fun and engaging rapport-building strategies. First, social workers must become familiar with the landscape of hip-hop (Tyson, 2006; Tillie Allen, 2005). Table 1 includes a sample of particularly insightful songs with messages indicative of framework dimensions. Social workers can use the Individual and Community Empowerment (ICE) framework assessment tool to immediately begin categorizing specific messages, stanzas, and songs across the five framework dimensions. What will become immediately clear is that neither hip-hop artists nor songs can be neatly categorized as simply "gangsta" or "conscious" or "positive" or "negative." Instead, songs and messages are complex and the more seasoned listener/social worker can better use themes as reference points with clients.

In prior models, logistics of setting and environment are addressed first. For example, ground rules are set for sessions or groups, including respect and communication parameters. Icebreakers and the playing of music are often included as part of the overall process. The framework allows social workers flexibility in choosing the type of music that is played to help set the

tone or allowing youths to choose music from the start, tailoring messaging (e.g., self-esteem, resilience, victimization, change) to the type of group or setting as needed, with the goal of stronger engagement.

Assessment

One of the more robust uses of the framework occurs during assessment efforts, particularly when youths find it difficult to answer questions. They may be sensitive or simply find answering questions directly too personal. Youths should be allowed to propose several of their favorite hip-hop songs to the worker in order to capture breadth in themes. The individual and community empowerment assessment (Figure 2) of major themes and common presenting issues should be used; again, with the ability to also assess common youth risk factors and fill in other specific risk dimensions that may not be listed.

This helps locate the frequency of themes/issues within the framework and directly link to a therapeutic/change structure. For example, if a majority of messages exist for resilience and growth/development then the worker can be sure to focus more in–depth to assess the knowledge, attitude, or behavioral relevance of these messages on youth-focused desired change. The worker then has the added flexibility of identifying alternative songs in collaboration with the youth client that address similar themes and integrating them into the change process. These alternative songs may have messages that mirror the exact experience, allowing an even deeper critical reflection, or the messages may convey a slightly different perspective, encouraging new insights.

Youths then have the ability to critique, refine, and expand upon assessment information. This is the time where multicultural strengths may be identified, including ethnic-specific beliefs, family solidarity, community supports, individual and collective resilience in overcoming institutional and cultural racism, ageism, classism, and heterosexism. The potential result is a very comprehensive youth-centered assessment that offers a coherent picture of the client and his or her circumstances to inform goal development.

Framework for intervention and evaluation

At the conclusion of the assessment, once goals have been defined, the individual and community empowerment framework can be used to provide structure for practice and evaluation. The information gathered can be utilized within the context of other hip-hop practice modalities (e.g., Hip-Hop Therapy, RAP Therapy) or other traditional practice theories (e.g., Adlerian, Existential, or Narrative therapies). In essence, the general goal is to encourage self-understanding and insights among youths along with a plan for promoting optimal youth development. At the conclusion of work toward change, the framework can be used to help evaluate modified

EMPOWERMENT		RISK	
Part I: Self-esteem	☐	I. Substance Use	☐
1. Self-liking and self-competence	☐	1. Availability of substances	☐
2. Pride and respect	☐	2. Substance use sales	☐
3. Economic opportunity/prosperity	☐	II. Violence	☐
4. Power and influence	☐	3. Availability/possession of firearms	☐
Part II: Resilience	☐	4. Portrayals of violence	☐
5. Expression and catharsis	☐	5. Peer antisocial/delinquent behavior	☐
6. Stress/trauma and coping	☐	6. Gang involvement	☐
7. Non-victimization	☐	7. Favorable attitude toward gun use	☐
Part III: Growth	☐	8. General crime (e.g., robbery/theft)	☐
8. Maturity	☐	III. Misogyny/Homophobia/Sexuality	☐
9. Appreciation	☐	9. Derogatory, violent actions toward girls or women (or LGBTQ community)	☐
10. Caring/empathy	☐	10. Risky sex behavior	☐
11. Connections/relationships	☐	IV. School Context	☐
12. Confidence, hope, and optimism	☐	11. School: Low engagement/success	☐
13. Character/positive decision making	☐	12. School: Safety	☐
14. Competence/skill building	☐	V. Family/Community Context	☐
15. Contribution/responsibility/service	☐	13. Family: Interpersonal conflict	☐
16. Mentorship and role modeling	☐	14. Family: Supervision/structure problems	☐
Part IV: Collective Growth/Community	☐	15. Family: Problem/risky behaviors	☐
17. Physical and psychological safety	☐	OTHER RISK AREAS	☐
18. Youth-friendly space/belonging	☐	16. Extreme economic deprivation	☐
19. Cultural identity and cultural resilience	☐	17. Race/ethnic discrimination	☐
20. Unity and solidarity	☐	18. Immigration/acculturative stress	☐
Part V: Social Change	☐	19. Disability/health issues	☐
21. Social justice/public health equity	☐	20. Crisis/emergency	☐
22. Resistance and social action	☐	21. Criminal justice involvement	☐
23. Freedom and liberation	☐	Other: _____	☐

FIGURE 2 Individual and community empowerment assessment of music themes.

knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors about dimensions of esteem, resilience, youth development, collective growth, sociopolitical development, and social change.

CONCLUSION

The proposed framework provides a clear set of tools to both better understand youths and hip-hop culture and to directly engage youths in the

helping relationship. It acknowledges that attitudes and behaviors that feel empowering to an individual or community may be risky or pro-social, or contain elements of both and that these interpretations are embedded within a historical, political, and social context (Mahiri and Connor, 2003).

More important, we highlighted the value of these empowerment themes to social work because of potential positive influences to positive youth development. Specifically, the framework introduced two broad empowerment dimensions that can be used to guide the establishment of a therapeutic relationship, a comprehensive assessment process, and the outline of practice and evaluation strategies.

The consistency of the individual and community empowerment framework's dimensions with themes in research literature suggests promise for future empirical study. Thus, next steps include further research to examine the framework's ability to help youths and practitioners critically analyze the contents of hip-hop music. For practitioners, this will also include analysis of the ability to strategically use this content in rapport building, assessment, goal development, practice, and evaluation. For youths, this will include examination of youth perspectives about hip-hop culture, alignment of their perspective with individual and community empowerment framework themes, and responsiveness to hip-hop–integrated interventions. Particular to social work practice, the proposed framework introduces hip-hop culture as a lens for increased cultural competence and enhanced practice skills. Cultural competence can be enhanced through greater self-awareness of potential biases against hip-hop, but also via knowledge building about youth culture, high-risk environments, and ethnic minority cultures. Last, the individual and community empowerment framework can assist social workers with actively engaging youths to help make sense of the ways in which youths can embrace contradictory messages within hip-hop while still finding pathways to positive youth development.

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