Exploring the Discourse in Hip Hop and Implications for Music Therapy Practice

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to explore the discourse of Hip Hop Culture within the context of music therapy. Spellings and definitions of Hip Hop, as proposed by KRS-One (2009), will be provided and then extrapolated in relation to various topics in music therapy, such as treatment planning and theoretical perspective. The position of this paper is that music therapists must adopt reflexive positions on issues such as the cultural appropriation of Hip Hop's artistic elements and the manifestation of power and privilege within its musical and therapeutic relationships. Hip Hop offers a multidimensional theoretical perspective for music therapy theory that views the ability of its artistic elements to transform and produce Spirit, enabling individuals and communities to move from a location of marginalization to that of an empowered, collective voice.

Introduction

> *For a culture with no central home base, no financial backing, no religious affiliation, no political organization, not even a race or an ethnicity that it can call its own; this culture Hip Hop created out of the historical activities of America's inner cities has risen up and has completely established itself in the minds of youth everywhere and has completely side-stepped the entire World system and ways of achieving success and stability in the World. Such a culture is indeed beyond this World and its power structure. Such a culture reveals the activity of GOD—the Love that rescued us.* (KRS-One, 2009, p. 14)

On Saturday, February 4, 2012, Fordham University (Bronx, NY) was host to the first academic, research-oriented conference on Hip Hop, called One Mic, One Movement: Advances in Hip Hop Therapy and Hip Hop Psychology. Edgar Tyson, Assistant Professor of Social Work at Fordham University and a pioneer in the use of Hip Hop in counseling and psychology, brought together researchers and clinicians from different fields—social work, psychology and counseling, pastoral care, community organizers and activists, and the creative art therapies—all promoting the health benefits of Hip Hop. As an invited speaker for that event, I was particularly invested in this topic, since I was conducting a dissertation study investigating the aesthetic components of rap songs written in music therapy and searching for better ways to communicate the various complexities within the discourse of the work I was doing. It was evident to me at this conference that boundaries and definitions were needed across the various disciplines, especially related to the use and primary therapeutic intent of rap and Hip Hop when helping others. For instance, social workers discussed examining rap songs with prisoners to find clinically relevant themes; community organizers discussed Hip Hop as a catalyst for cultural understanding and political action; and ministers discussed the various transpersonal dimensions of Hip Hop for people within their communities. Searching for answers, Dr. Tyson mentioned to me that "any serious scholarship into Hip Hop should begin and end with (the book) *The gospel of hip hop: First instrument* by KRS-One" (personal communication, February 4, 2012).

This text, written by KRS-One (2009), a noted pioneer of rap music and philosopher, provides definitions and spellings specifically to aid and enhance academic and scholarly discourse in Hip Hop. I place value on the knowledge contained in this text because of the author's proximity to the birth of Hip Hop Culture in the 1970s. KRS-One also stresses the importance for academics to value street knowledge as an essential element in Hip Hop discourse. Therefore, instead of myself as an academic appropriating KRS-One's knowledge to create categories or to define the discourse, I begin with his definitions and spellings as a vehicle for exploring the role of Hip Hop within music therapy. KRS-One admits that the definitions and spellings below reflect the current discourse in Hip Hop, take time for people to adjust to, and will surely be expanded and more refined over time.

1) **hip-hop** is the commercial product of rap music. It is used to refer to the genre of music and the mainstream media attention associated with rap music.
2) **Hip Hop** is the cultural engagement with the artistic and stylistic elements of rap; it is the name of the culture. The word *culture* is sometimes spelled Kulture to communicate its unique identity in the world. Today, Hip Hop Culture[1] is global and provides unconditional acceptance for all people whose voices have been marginalized, oppressed, and stifled by societal structures. Hip Hop culture is reflected in its artistic elements, which KRS-One (2009) calls *refinitions*. The refinitions include graffiti art (writing or drawing on surfaces), deejayin' (artistically interacting with precomposed songs using music technology), breakin' (commonly called break dancing, an acrobatic street dance), MCin' (commonly called rapping), beat boxing (creating rhythmic sounds and electronic drums with voice and/or body), street fashion (clothing trends of inner-city youth), street

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[1] I have Chosen not to use the spelling of "Kulture" within this article due to my considerations of issues of appropriation related to this material. This is an issue I am consistently grappling with, as I will note at the end of the article.

language (the linguistic code and communication of Hip Hop), street knowledge (collective wisdom and instinct of communities surviving inner-city life), and street entrepreneurialism (grassroots business practices for those without access to mainstream paths toward success, commonly called hustling).

3) **Hiphop** is viewed to be the spiritual and creative force from which Hip Hop Culture and its refinitions were born. Hiphop is the collective consciousness and reflection of the Sprit that speaks through the aesthetic elements of Hip Hop, providing hope to those living in an oppressed, depressed, and marginalized state.

The purpose of this article is to explore the multiple dimensions and discourse of these spellings and definitions within the context of music therapy treatment, research, and education. It is my hope that this article will provide clinicians a way of conceptualizing treatment planning based on an understanding of the ethos of Hip Hop Culture and provide researchers and educators a way of better defining the discourse when teaching and researching Hip Hop in music therapy. This can often be challenging, due to the complexities of how rap music is produced, the role and history of the creative-arts modalities in Hip Hop Culture, the cultural dialogue surrounding evocative content found in rap, and the reflexivity needed to engage in open dialogue about race, gender, class, appropriation, sexuality, oppression, spirituality, and a host of other important topics relevant to Hip Hop and music therapy.

The Need for Deeper Discourse

There are a multitude of genres within popular music, all of which have their own characteristics, social rituals, and unique ways that music is performed and distributed. Aigen (2009) asserts that "the ability to connect the specific properties of one's means of intervention to a specific outcome is an essential aspect of a modern approach to healthcare" (p. 240). This suggests that music therapists should acknowledge, gain awareness, and have proficiency in the various elements of popular music styles preferred by the people they work with. It is imperative that music therapists not only acquire the musical proficiencies and historical, social, and cultural understandings of various popular music genres but also be able to link these elements to particular therapeutic interventions and the treatment-planning process.

Kenneth Aigen's (2005a) groundbreaking study *Playing in the band: A qualitative study of popular music styles as clinical improvisation* illustrated the role of rock, jazz, and country in the clinical development of Lloyd, a 27-year-old man with significant disabilities. Groove, vital drive, and modal rock improvisation were investigated toward understanding how these stylistic components were used with intention as the medium for Lloyd to experience connection, autonomy and independence, and agency within his music experiences. Aigen (2013) continued to explore the role of jazz, elaborating on the parallels between the role of jazz improvisers and the challenges that therapists and clients[2] face while making music together. Aigen (2008) has also explored the topic of the religious dimensions of popular music (Sylvan, 2002), finding implications for music therapy practice. MacDonald and Viega (2012) contend that the rituals and experiences of Hip Hop can be transformational, involving the community in a block party to celebrate the release of an album created by children in an inner-city environment. Viega (2012) explored the mythic dimensions of rap by looking at his clinical work through the lens of Joseph Campbell's narrative the Hero's Journey. Viega (2013) investigated the aesthetic elements of Hip Hop songs created in music therapy by adolescents who have experienced trauma and abuse. This study looked at how the creative decisions made by the songwriters reflected and illuminated psychological and clinical development for those having experienced childhood trauma, as well as how they revealed the lived experience of the songwriters. These examples highlight the need for music therapists to understand popular music beyond its entertainment value and more for the musical, cultural, experiential, and relational dynamics that occur for people who deeply identify with various styles. Such understandings can enhance intentional decision making for music therapists who are utilizing popular music in treatment.

Aigen (2014, p. 33) states: "When the creation of music becomes a legitimate, self-justifying clinical activity, any roles that the therapist must assume to achieve this goal are not only legitimate but also required." This can occur when producing rap in music therapy, where music creation is often a collaboration of various artistic contributors. For instance, Viega (2012) considered his role as a music therapist in creating songs with adolescents within the musical relationships that form within the production of rap music. These roles emerged from the adolescents who likened him to a rap producer/deejay, a studio audio engineer, and a genuine fan of the music created by the songwriters. MacDonald and Viega (2012) discuss how their work with a group of inner-city youth in a therapeutic songwriting program called Hear Our Voices moved beyond the traditional boundaries of therapeutic practice and into that of community organizers and activists. This required the authors to reflect on their own cultural values and biases toward building a more authentic and collaborative partnership with the community members they were serving. Viega (2015a) notes that cultural reflection was not only essential toward building rapport with a child and his family in a pediatric facility, who collectively described themselves as coming from "ghetto culture" (p. 49), but a valuable assessment tool in understanding the intention and therapeutic benefit of the methods used in treatment.

Music therapy clinicians often find that rap music is outright banned in many of the facilities in which they work (Hadley & Yancy, 2012a). Viega (2008, 2013) notes that for music therapists who see their clients' preferred music as an essential link to their cultural and individual identities, this stance can be problematic in building essential therapeutic rapport and accessing clinical information contained within the lyrics and music regarding their lived experience. This is especially true for rap, since its creation is linked with cultural activity (Hadley & Yancy, 2012a). Unlike other genres of popular music, Hip Hop Culture involves all the creative modalities, each with its own identity and craft associated with it, including art (graffiti), dance (breakin'), and drama (the storytelling elements found throughout Hip Hop that comes to life

[2] I am sympathetic and resonate with the discourse surrounding the use of the term *client* as perpetuating a hierarchical and oppressive dynamic within the therapeutic relationship, especially in relationship to the topic presented here. However, there are times this term is used, especially in relation to other authors' work and when helping clarify specific therapeutic dynamics expressed within this article.

through its fashion, art, and collective wisdom). Viega (2015b) notes that Hip Hop is not something we simply *do*, but a way of being in the world in relation to one's self and with each other; it is something that is *produced* within the world of relationships; it is an ingrained understanding of what it is to be the other, marginalized, oppressed, and victimized, not only culturally, socially, and politically, but psychologically as well. This makes rap a distinctive genre to consider deeply in music therapy in terms of practice, research, supervision, and education.

The discourse surrounding this topic is especially vital right now, in light of current events in the United States surrounding race, class, and the role of federal and state institutions that continue to underserve, ignore, and provoke marginalized inner-city communities.[3] Often, when uprisings take place in protest of institutionalized oppression and violence against inner-city communities, Hip Hop Culture comes into the limelight, receiving simultaneous critique of its media for inciting or glorifying violence, as well as praise for communicating the plight and struggles of inner-city life. A full investigation into this topic is needed within music therapy, especially since music therapists work within these communities, and some might hold continued biases and judgments toward the content of rap music and Hip Hop Culture. Although this article does not elaborate on socio-political debate in depth, it is my hope that by defining and deepening the conversation here, important topics like the one mentioned above will have an essential place within music therapy discourse.

Hip-Hop: The Product

It is important for the reader not to confuse rap music entertainment with Hip Hop Culture's true ethos and history. As describe by KRS-One (2009), hip-hop, as a product of the mainstream rap industry, reveals very little of the true nature of "Hiphop as consciousness" (p. 66). In his vision, rap music's material artifacts—its videos, its clothing, its music, its art—are merely a tool (a means) to capture collective expression, which makes itself known through the nontangible realm of the collective unconscious. In addition, the product of the mainstream rap industry is often manufactured by corporations, who are in a position to value profit over cultural expression.

KRS-One (2009) spends very little time on the material product of rap music, seeing it as the entryway toward a deeper knowledge that is revealed through engagement with Hip Hop Culture's refinitions. In contrast, it has been my experience that much of the discourse in music therapy appears to be on the product: its lyrical content, images, videos, clothing, and the material lifestyle. Perhaps this is due to a lack of knowledge of the cultural dimensions inherent in rap music, preconceived biases and judgments about rap music, and/or a perceived threat to one's own values and morals. It is essential that music therapists 1) have proper and adequate training on Hip Hop: musically, culturally, and socially; 2) seek supervision and personal therapy to uncover and process their own internal reactions toward the product of rap music; 3) seek out opportunities to be more involved in community organizations, volunteering, and activism, and continue to learn about the plight of those who are marginalized, oppressed, victimized, and vilified. These components can clarify one's positioning within the conversation on rap music and reveal the extent to which judgment and bias can obscure discourse.

When considering rap music as merely a tool or a means in therapy, we can also begin to see how other disciplines might see its benefits, allowing for boundaries between the various practices to be blurred. For instance, counselors and psychologists have coined the term Rap Therapy (Alvarez, 2012; Elligan, 2004), seeing an opportunity for youth to use rap music as a means of exploring themes and issues in their life; social workers, community organizers, and activists use rap as a means to build social bonds and to increase self-knowledge (Leafloor, 2012; Travis, 2012), and ministers use it as a means of providing a space for testimony and healing (Gaztambide & Hidalgo, 2012). Because of the close association of rap music to culture (Hip Hop) and collective consciousness (Hiphop), music therapists will continue to see methods they might use—like song discussion, songwriting, improvisation—increasingly used within other health-related, community-minded, and healing practices. Music therapy can distinguish itself by locating its benefits within the creative processes in Hip Hop and not only using rap music as a means toward a non-musical benefit(s).

For an in-depth look at the product of rap, readers are encouraged to delve into work by Lightstone (2012) and Viega (2013, 2015a) that investigates the aesthetic components of songs improvised and written in music therapy. Biddle (2011) and Viega (2013) advocate for rap songs to be analyzed by integrating meaning created from both the music and the lyrics. This allows for a more holistic narrative to unfold. For instance, in one group of songs, Viega found that although the lyrics presented violent and misogynistic imagery, the music revealed a dystopian soundscape with bottomless bass tones, sirens, and other warlike sound effects. The combined image revealed a songwriter trying to survive in their neighborhood by any means necessary, and where vulnerability had to be hidden as an instinctual tactic for survival. Such insight provided a deeper understanding and empathy for the songwriters' lived experiences and culture from which they identified.

Ethical Considerations When Utilizing Rap Music in Therapy

There is no doubt that rap music, its lyrics and its music, is provocative and evocative. The dialogue within rap music is multilayered, with double and triple entendre, musical and lyrical references to other artists across genres, a meta-dialogue on culture, politics, and society; its content ranges from criminality to spirituality; it can evoke a gamut of visceral, somatic images relate to pain→joy, powerless→ powerful, lust→love, desperation→ confidence, hopelessness → hopeful, and isolation→ connection, just to name a few. Often, narratives are told through fantasy, myth, historical perspective, cartoon imagery, and a variety of other storytelling techniques. Because of the extensive diversity within rap music, ethical considerations must be taken when utilizing its content in therapy.[4]

[3] At the time of writing this article in the summer of 2015, there has been increased scrutiny of how Black communities are left powerless through state violence and systematic institutional racism. The #BlackLivesMatter movement is a response and a call to action to these matters, striving for Black liberation in society.

[4] For more on music therapists' perceptions on the verbal boundaries when using rap in therapy, see Short (2013).

Below are some suggestions for music therapists monitoring the use of evocative lyrical and musical content in rap music guided by levels of practice as defined by Bruscia (2014):

a) *Augmentative Level*: Using songs with evocative content should be avoided if therapy is occurring at an activity or supportive level. Instead, the music therapist may want to choose activities using musical and lyrical content that communicates messages that speak directly toward the chosen activity. Instrumental versions of popular rap songs are available without the lyrics, which can provide ideas for recreative and didactic musical activities. The primary reason to avoid evocative content here is not related to minimizing a client's experience but is due to the level of training, support, and self-awareness needed by the music therapist to provide a safe container for the client.
b) *Intensive Level:* In re-educative levels of therapy, the use of evocative content may be considered if its purpose is geared toward exploring themes directly related to the needs of the client. Often, the use of rap music at this level might mirror that of social workers, psychologists, or counselors who use music to work on increasing pro-social behaviors and other therapeutic concerns. A music therapist who engages in this practice should have advanced training and continue to seek clinical supervision and personal therapy. Music therapists will most likely be working in tandem with other members of the treatment team at this level.
c) *Primary Level:* At a reconstructive level of therapy, a music therapist would view the use of evocative content as a necessary component toward understanding the inner world of the client. Lyrical and musical content may be seen as metaphoric and reflect client processes in therapy. It is recommended that only music therapists who have advanced training, seek advanced supervision, and engage in personal therapy work at this level of therapy with rap music.

Hip Hop Culture: Historical Perspective, Creative and Therapeutic Process

Alonzo Westbrook (2002) defines Hip Hop as "the artistic response to oppression. A way of expression in dance, music, word/song. A culture that thrives on creativity and nostalgia" (p. 63). In this definition, we see the shift from rap music as a product of the entertainment business to Hip Hop as a multimodal cultural reaction and expression of oppression; it consists of cultural and individual narratives; and it involves lived experiences that are rooted in history but distinguished as an expression of current events. KRS-One sees Hip Hop's elements cast in the beginnings of human awareness and the subsequent search for peace, goodness, and righteousness in the face of oppression and fear. In this regard, Hip Hop is seen as an ancient tradition that has reappeared to meet the demands of modern times. From this perspective, Hip Hop is a culture whose messages and stories need to be cultivated, cared for, and taught.

Historical Foundations

Though a complete history of Hip Hop Culture is well beyond the scope of this article, it is vital to present its roots so that music therapists can have an understanding of its essential therapeutic components: Hip Hop rose like a phoenix out of the ashes of two neighborhoods that represented the social, political, and economical dystopia of the early 1970s: Trenchtown in Jamaica and the New York City borough of the Bronx. In the 1970s, both areas were forgotten by their local and federal governments and saw a rise of youth gangs. These youth gangs did not appear to be interested in the Black power politics of their parents; they were more interested in surviving (Chang, 2005).

Disc jockeys were instrumental in their roles as subversive ceremonial leaders within the tumultuous political landscape of both areas. They were not only playing records but also using the volume (regain power) and effects (regain control) of their custom sound systems to make the voices of the people in their neglected neighborhoods heard. Jamaican dub/reggae artists and producers, like King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry, began to increase the drums and bass in the mix of the records they were playing, seeing their mix as an aural interpretation of what street music should sound like (Chang, 2005). The role of the DJs and producers thus began to shift from one who simply plays records and captures sound to artists who are creating a powerful and unique aural experience that represent the time and place from which they are living. Concurrently, in the Bronx, several DJs were beginning to use their turntables in a similar way, developing specific techniques to manipulate the record player and create a new musical style. Many of these DJs, such as DJ Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaataa, were Jamaican immigrants whose families relocated to the Bronx.

The use of creative expression as the medium for which peace, unity, and community building is strengthened was formed in the earliest moments of Hip Hop's history. For instance, the Ghetto Brothers were one of the first street gangs in the Bronx to make music as a conscious replacement for gang violence. Their promotion of social justice and nonviolence through music had a profound effect on many gang members who would later turn out to be pioneers of Hip Hop, most notably Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation (Chang, 2005). Similarly, other neighborhood kids in the Bronx were finding creative modalities to express their unique styles, discovering what would later be named graffiti, break dancing, and b'boying. Word-play competitions moved from local street corners and onto the stage, forming the basis of modern rapping techniques. These creative elements appeared to collectively, spontaneously, and naturally materialize in the face of extreme marginalization, providing the elements needed to have one's voice heard, even if it needed to be subversively accomplished.

The emphasis on the potency and power of the spoken word in rap music is steeped in oral traditions that anthropologist Robin Sylvan (2002) traces back to West Africa. Poets and musicians within the tribes of West Africa, also known as jalis or griots, had to possess a high level of oral skill to deliver the potency of words in a way that would evoke supernatural and sacred messages for the members of a tribe. These powerful spiritual messages were known in Africa as nommo. Today, rappers appear to play a similar role to their ancient forerunners, expressing the culturally germane problems and issues facing the world today and speaking for and to those whose voices have been squelched by society. Rapping is an art form that is equal parts improvisation and storytelling.

Just as the jalis and griots of West Arica used spoken word as "potent and sacred, having the power to evoke that which was being spoken about" (Sylvan, 2002, p. 184), so do the rappers of modern Hip Hop. Often, the same words and images in their rhymes can evoke humor from one person and complete shock and outrage from another. This duality is summarized by rapper Ice Cube, who once said that "Rap is really funny, man. But if you don't see that it's funny, it will scare the shit out of you" (Chang, 2005, p. 331).

The development of technique and craft in Hip Hop rose out of a primal need for authentic self-expression and a desire to enhance audiences' experiences at community music events. Three examples of early Hip Hop stand out: first, DJ Kool Herc (often referred to as the father of Hip Hop) was the original creator of the breakbeat. This quote defines what DJ Kool Herc was going after when developing this momentous advance in the musical evolution of Hip Hop:

> The moment when the dancers really got wild was in a song's short instrumental *break,* when the band would drop out and the rhythm section would get elemental. Forget melody, chorus, songs—it was all about the groove, building it, keeping it going. Like a string theorist, Herc zeroed in on the fundamental vibrating loop at the heart of the record, the break. (Chang, 2005, p. 79)

Second, Grand Wizard Theodore shares the story of how he pioneered the scratch, a rhythmic sound made when the DJ moved the needle of a record player back and forth over the vinyl record. While practicing deejayin' in his bedroom, his mother told him to turn down his music. He held the record while she was admonishing him, and he noticed the sound he was making. After months of honing this technique, he debuted the scratch to an ecstatic audience (Blondheim, Meza, & Pray, 2001). Third, Grandmaster Flash mastered and furthered Herc and Theodore's techniques by developing beat juggling and mixing techniques, taking two different records and rhythmically going back and forth between them using a sound mixer. These inventors developed foundational musical elements that should be considered as competencies for music therapists who work within Hip Hop Culture.[5]

Music Therapy Considerations

From the brief historical perspective above, we can begin to surmise how the foundational ethos and creative expression of Hip Hop Culture relates to music therapy practice. Below are some suggestions for music therapists to consider when working within Hip Hop Culture:

1) Music therapists need to aspire to learn and become proficient in at least one of the refinitions: Hip Hop's artistic elements, which include graffiti art, deejayin', breakin', MCin', beat boxing, street fashion, street language, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurialism. This requires studying, honoring, and honing the craft of Hip Hop. For my own work, I have focused on Hip Hop deejayin' techniques, including beat production and sampling. Oftentimes, music therapists might rap or move into what they perceive to be the style as portrayed by the media only to come across as inauthentic or, worse, mocking or appropriating their clients' culture. By becoming proficient in one of the refinitions, a music therapist will not only utilize that style authentically in a therapeutic setting, but also demonstrate a therapeutic presence that is based on cultural respect and rapport.
2) Music therapists need to incorporate music technology utilizing techniques common to Hip Hop, such as sampling and mixing. Many of these techniques require the therapist and client to recontextualize and reconstruct original sounds toward the creation of something new and unique. Therefore, the use of technology in this way can be seen as not just the means to make music, but the medium in which co-constructions of new identities are created.
3) Music therapists need to consider a multi-modal approach by incorporating dance, art, and other storytelling techniques. Though deejayin' and rap are essential musical elements in creating rap music, utilizing them apart from art, dance, and storytelling may negate the cultural experience. When creating a therapeutic space, a music therapist may consider how they can incorporate dance, movement, storytelling, and art into the music experience. When possible, music therapists should incorporate experts in other artistic mediums to enhance the overall music experience for the clients.
4) Music therapists need to take a cultural perspective rooted in recognition of the sociopolitical oppression of inner-city communities. However, this does not mean casting people in inner-city communities as victims, but instead honoring their humanity and respecting their ability to survive the marginalized sociopolitical-economic conditions that surround them. By embodying a perspective based on empowerment and resource-oriented approaches to therapy, therapists are taking a stance against mainstream views of inner-city communities that regretfully perpetrate false stereotypes. Music therapists need to challenge patriarchal hierarchies and power differentials that interrupt the health and well-being of the communities in which they work. Music participation can be a source of empowerment in this regard and encourage social and cultural interaction and dialogue. Music therapists must take the position of being an integral part of the community and not just being seen as the sole expert. This perspective can translate into other clinical and healthcare settings where people do not have access to services and are underrepresented in their own community.
5) Music therapists must understand that music experiences in Hip Hop are the medium in which the participant experiences a sense of community, unity, and self-actualization through authentic expression. The creative elements in Hip Hop provide a vehicle in which peace and knowledge can be achieved. Hip Hop is inclusive in this way and is not limited in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, or ethnicity. All are welcomed into the

[5] For a more in-depth overview of various techniques in Hip Hop in music therapy, readers are encouraged to refer to readings on Hip Hop in the texts *Creative explorations and resources for music therapists (vol. 2): Compositions and themes for improvisation* (Lee, Berends, & Pun, 2015) and *Therapeutic uses of rap and hip-hop* (Hadley & Yancy, 2012b).

act of creative process toward the primary goals of self-knowledge, recognition of oppression, and discovering solutions toward peace.

Looking within the music therapy literature, there are several theories that are aligned with the ethos of Hip Hop Culture. These include resource-oriented music therapy (Schwabe, 2005; Rolvsjord, 2010), music as empowerment (Rolvsjord, 2004), feminist perspectives in music therapy (Hadley, 2006), community music therapy (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004), culture-centered music therapy (Stige, 2002), and music-centered music therapy (Aigen, 2005b).

The clinical intention of therapeutic goals when producing Hip Hop in music therapy should reflect the cultural intentions, steeped within the reflexivity of the therapist, and backed by theory from within our field. Music therapists should be mindful of not appropriating Hip Hop as a means to achieve their own goals but instead determine goals reflective of their clients' cultural values and the intention of the creative arts within the culture.

Empowerment perspective. Korbin and Tyson (2006), in an analysis of rap lyrics from a perspective in social work, found four themes in Hip Hop that reflect an empowerment perspective: increasing self-efficacy, developing group consciousness, reducing self-blame, and assuming personal responsibility. Music therapists utilize and individualize various methods and interventions beyond lyric analysis; therefore, I am proposing that these overall goals may be considered in any music therapy method (e.g., recreative methods), although some interventions might be more useful for achieving these goals within a therapeutic context than others.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a person's ability to make changes in zir[6] environment, which often requires having the passion or desire to overcome and succeed. This can be a powerful goal for many clients, whose increased participation in and motivation for treatment through their involvement in Hip Hop can lead to finding internal and external resources to help overcome obstacles in their lives.

Group consciousness and empathy. Hip Hop offers unconditional spiritual acceptance, reassurance, and offerings to all members of society (Korbin & Tyson, 2006; KRS-One, 2009). Group consciousness means recognizing the "I" as "we" and the "you" as "me" and developing empathy in the process. Developing group consciousness requires the requisition of empathy by both the therapist and client. Walton (2015) notes that empathy is more than imagining oneself in the other's shoe but is a phenomenological experience of being the other. Music therapists might find this challenging in the face of evocative, provocative imagery and content in Hip Hop, which requires listeners to experience the content as a reflection of themselves, and recognize the responsibilities they have within the group to make changes internally and within the environment.

Reducing self-blame. Many rappers share their autobiographical accounts to relay their stories of resilience and endurance through adversity. By doing so, Hip Hop offers opportunities for people to be reflexive of their lived experience and the circumstances that have brought them to this moment in time. Adverse childhood experiences lead to a potential cycle of dangerous or destructive patterns carried into adulthood (Felitti, 2002; Felitti et al., 1998; Dube et al., 2001). Hip Hop can offer people a way to gain a new perspective on the life events that have led to being in a particularly challenging situation, such as being hospitalized, institutionalized, incarcerated, or any other health-related event. For an example of this in music therapy, see Viega's (2015b) case study of a young patient who was shot by a family member and in the hospital for treatment. Utilizing therapeutic songwriting interventions, this child explored complex themes related to his family dynamics that led up to the shooting, even offering forgiveness for the shooter.

Assuming personal responsibility. Hip Hop features themes of resilience and endurance through times of stress and oppression. Explorations in personal reasonability often coincide with messages of spirituality: a higher power helping an individual compose oneself and providing wisdom to take back into the community. For an example in music therapy, see MacDonald and Viega's case study (2012) "Hear our voices: A music therapy songwriting program and the message of the Little Saints through the medium of rap," which explores the therapeutic songwriting process of a group of children at an after-school program in an underserved community in Philadelphia. In the song "Superwoman/Superman," the group explores the complex topic of a police officer getting shot in their neighborhood. Throughout the song, they discover the need for all members of the community to take responsibility for the shooting through faith and forgiveness.

Catharsis

Community members can find emotional catharsis through shared expression of the artistic elements in Hip Hop, relating vicariously through the stories told in rap, and feeling ecstatic within the passion of the music (Shaffer, 2004). These qualities can be translated into therapeutic goals in music therapy to help clients explore and express feelings released in and through shared music experiences. In Hip Hop, an individual's catharsis can be a release of shared cultural oppression, allowing the person to experience a sense of unity and a connection with the larger Hip Hop community. This feeling can lead to a sense of purpose and personal responsibility toward helping and aiding others in a global community. This is reflected in the work of Robin Sylvan (2002), who pointed out that shared music-making in Hip Hop can induce quasi-religious experiences where contact with the supernatural and the feeling of being a part of the greater whole can be a transforming experience for those involved.

Authenticity

Authenticity is an important part of the individual style that one expresses within the different artistic elements of Hip Hop. Authenticity, having the ability to voice your lived internal and external experience in a truthful and genuine manner, is also a shared social construct in Hip Hop, involving the act of "being real" within one's racial, class, and cultural experiences and expression (Hodgman, 2013, p. 402). KRS-One (2009) notes that authenticity is grounded in one's journey toward self-knowledge, commitment to self-improvement, and recognizing the plight of people who are oppressed and marginalized.

[6] I am choosing to use gender-neutral pronouns, a stance that I believe is particularly important when focusing on inclusivity and representation of voices that are often underrepresented.

This goal can be achieved in music relationships through the music therapist's creation of a safe and open environment where honest dialogue and discourse can be shared among all group members. This requires music therapists to be reflexive and grounded in their own authenticity, achieved through supervision and personal therapy, and advancing competencies in the musical and historical components of Hip Hop.

"I Am Hiphop": A Perceptive on Practice Based on the Transformation of Spirit

KRS-One (1999, track 18) notes that "Saying 'I am Hiphop' literally means I am my own strategy for self-improvement… as we think, so Hiphop is." He contends that Hiphop is not of the physical world but presence of Spirit, which once committed to, is shown through cultural activity (Hip Hop) and sold through commercial products (hip-hop). In essence, Hiphop is the transformative force and Spirit that reveals itself through the creative elements of Hip Hop Culture. Hiphop is a way of being in the world, and with it comes responsibility to care for how it is represented within the world, through shared knowledge and creative experience.

Hiphop, viewed as a transpersonal force and a collective consciousness guiding people toward self-realization, provides music therapists with a perspective that is not limited to working with people who prefer rap music; it is a perspective that is rooted in the belief that Spirit is manifest through the creative elements, for the purpose of giving voice to the voiceless, and using that toward the betterment of the community and society. Not to be minimized, I would be remiss not to use the word Love[7] when describing Hiphop; as KRS-One surmises, "This is what we originally did our artistic elements for, we did it for the Love: That unspoken collective intelligence that is shared psychically by all who belong to the group" (2009, p. 26).

I want to highlight this perspective through a quick case example, one that you might recognize in your own work: I was working on a Sunday at a mental health facility with a group of 12 people from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, and races. The feeling in the room was a collective sense of hopelessness; each person was in crisis, heavily medicated, sluggish, head down, and eyes closed. I moved toward the group slowly, providing them with the context of why we were all together and offering them a space for music-making, testimony, and a shared experience, only if and when they were ready. Knowing that they might need some guidance entering into the space, I offered a Bob Marley song, "One Love." People slowly began to sing, play instruments, and move their bodies. That song transformed into a drum improvisation, and the energy continued to build. By the end of a 45-minute session, people were on the microphone providing testimony of their lives, and finding support through group drumming and call-and-response vocals. It was a (re)mix of various cultures moving into one collective voicing of hopelessness and powerlessness. One woman at the end said, "I forgot what it was like to have fun with a group of people without the drugs." Another noted, "The music brings life back to us." Within a Hiphop perspective, their comments represent an evaluation of the success of this group experience and justification for the creative arts toward the goals presented in this article.

I took a Hiphop perspective as a primary stance in my 2013 dissertation study, revealing the development of faith within songs created by adolescent songwriters who had experienced extreme trauma and abuse. Seeing a connection between the ethos of Hip Hop Culture and various perspectives in music therapy and psychology, I proposed a theoretical bricolage that (re)mixes and samples these elements with the focus on the transformation of Spirit and faith development (see Figure 1).

Here, developmental psychology, humanistic psychology, feminist theory, culture-centered music therapy, resource-oriented music therapy, and music-centered music therapy filter through the creative processes of Hip Hop Culture to provide the music therapist a perspective that is guided by the transformation of Spirit. No one theory dominates another, but instead is revealed as needed through creative experience and expression. This perspective does not lay claim to one epistemological stance but begins within axiology, focusing on ethics and aesthetics.

Reflexivity

My own journey into Hip Hop has been personally transformational, filled with self-reflection, discovery, and insight. I have always been a fan of popular music and viewed rap music as a natural extension of that. However, working with inner-city youth in Washington, DC, Chicago, and Philadelphia, I felt it was my responsibility to begin to decode the lyrics and music, learn and honor its deep cultural roots, and allow myself to build a relationship through my own authentic self-knowledge. Slowly, my casual listening has turned into a full-blown preference. I have found the discourse and meta-dialogue in Hip Hop to be complex and vital in understanding current socio-political narratives surrounding youth, inner-city lives, racism, oppression, classism, self-hate, corporatization, powerlessness, marginalization, spirituality, and a host of other topics. Some of the areas that have presented me with the most challenges include:

1) Recognizing, acknowledging, and being open to the privilege I have experienced as a Caucasian male who is involved in academia and a helping profession. This has required seeking mentorship, supervision, and personal therapy.
2) Being careful and mindful of not appropriating Hip Hop Culture toward my own gain as a clinician, researcher, and academic, a conversation I have every time I write, present, and teach about Hip Hop. My preference in presenting discourse regarding the marginalization of members of society due to class, race, gender, and sexuality is to first hear from the voices within that culture and ask how I can be of help. This has led to choices in my writing like utilizing gender-neutral pronouns and presenting street knowledge as a primary source of building theory.
3) Being reflexive as a listener to rap music about my relationship to its cultural elements and dialogue. I am consistently moved by the aesthetic experience I have

[7] Love, like Spirit, is capitalized to denote the spiritual connotations contained within each word.

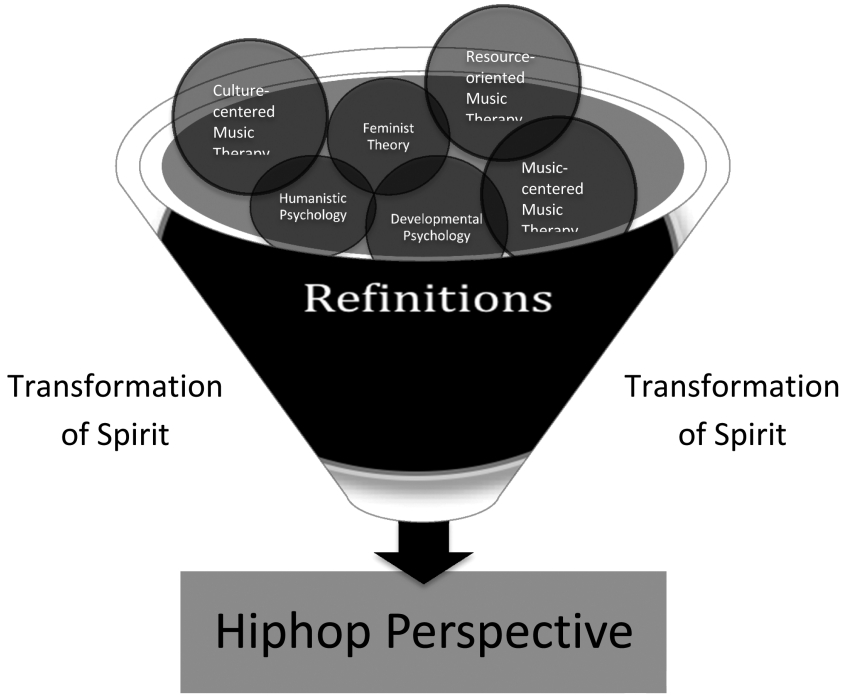

Figure 1. Hiphop perspective—Bricolage effect (Viega, 2013).

> while listening to rap music, feeling unity and separation simultaneously. For instance, I can experience and deeply recognize the isolation, need for connection, longing, and vulnerability expressed in the lyrics and music of "Marvin's Room" by the rapper Drake. However, there are ways he expresses himself that I cannot, due to my own cultural positioning. This duality is present for me and is consistently shifting in perspective, letting me know that more discourse is needed on this topic within music therapy.

The definitions and spellings proposed by KRS-One (2009) and explored in this article have provided me with a way of being reflexive and understanding this discourse in more depth. For instance, I can explore my own experience with the evocative language in rap music (hip-hop), how this reflects issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and corporatization within the culture (Hip Hop), and then witness within myself a growing knowledge of a deeper presence of humanity that shares these issues (Hiphop). Although I have not experienced the physical nature of living in an inner-city environment, I recognize the aspects of my own psyche that are underserved, marginalized, oppressed, victimized, barren, and perhaps dangerous; as I find ways to love those parts of myself, I begin to see the people and world around me differently; and as the nature of my internal and external realities shifts, I bring back a responsibility to share this knowledge and take part in a larger global community dedicated to the betterment of those who are in need. To end this article, I would like to share the words of Jay-Z (2010), who summarizes what I have shared:

> *This is why the hustler's story— through hip-hop—has connected with a global audience. The deeper we get into those sidewalk cracks and into the mind of the young hustler trying to find his fortune there, the closer we get to the ultimate human story, the story of struggle, which is what defines us all.* (p. 19)

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