Received 10/23/17
Revised 03/23/18
Accepted 10/25/19
DOI: 10.1002/johc.12128

"Real Recognize Real": Hip-Hop Spoken Word Therapy and Humanistic Practice

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Youth of color often experience counseling professionals as inauthentic. This presents a concern, especially considering the low utilization and retention rates of racial minority groups in counseling. This article describes a series of culturally sensitive interventions that are rooted in hip-hop definitions of authenticity.

Keywords: humanism, hip-hop and spoken word therapy, authenticity, help-seeking behavior, cultural relevance

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You sound real good, and you play the part well
But the energy you givin' off is so unfamiliar, I don't feel ya
We need something realer!
—Jay Electronica, "Exhibit C"

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The above quote is a lyric from a song by the famed rapper Jay Electronica (2010). Artists like Jay have used lyric writing as a mechanism for cathartic narration since hip-hop's inception (Chang, 2005). In this lyric, Jay is seemingly critiquing someone's authenticity or realness. According to Kruse (2016), "There is perhaps no more fundamental and no more contested principle in hip hop than keeping it real" (p. 53). To keep it real, or authentic, is at the core of what it means to be a successful participant in hip-hop culture (Neal, 2012). The criteria for realness are multidimensional (McLeod, 1999) and explored in depth later in this article.

Although being able to perform one's art with skill is important, scholars have stressed that presenting art that is a genuine reflection of who the artist is and what the artist has been through takes precedence (Wang, 2012). Such lyric writing and performing "connects the histories of the marginalized, echoes their pain, and concurrently articulates the stance of new people who either have been, or are being, marginalized in different spaces around the

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globe" (Emdin, 2010, p. 5). The hip-hop ideology of "real recognize real" exemplifies a tool used by members of the hip-hop community to affiliate themselves only with individuals whom they believe will understand their oppression (Emdin, 2016). In this sense, authenticity in hip-hop "rejects that which does not accept it, and embraces those who have also been excluded from the norm" (Emdin, 2010, p. 6). This unique attunement to authenticity (Emdin, 2010; McLeod, 1999) provides us as counselors with a valuable lens or conceptual framework through which we might assess the existence of authenticity, or lack thereof, in the counseling relationship. Like Jay Electronica, youth of color also find themselves doubting, in their case, the authenticity of counseling professionals (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012).

For decades, counseling research has stressed the importance of culturally competent counselors adequately engaging people of color (Hook et al., 2016; Richardson & Molinaro, 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Vera & Speight, 2003). This call for multicultural competence has had a notable impact on the field. For example, the American Counseling Association (ACA) ethics code (ACA, 2014) and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015, 2016) signify the counseling field's interest in and dedication toward supporting historically oppressed populations. Researchers in counselor education programs (Clark, Moe, & Hays, 2017; Crockett & Hays, 2015) have implemented and studied the effectiveness of multicultural training for preservice counselors to ensure that when they enter the professional workforce, they are able to "play the part well" (Electronica, 2010).

Although these attempts are laudable, and the research and standards "sound real good" (Electronica, 2010), Black and Brown youth have been noted as highly skeptical of seeking help from mental health professionals (Earl, Williams, & Anglade, 2011; Lindsey, Chambers, Pohle, Beall, & Lucksted, 2013; Lindsey & Marcell, 2012; Watkins, Walker, & Griffith, 2010), often because of a sense of distrust (Alvidrez, Snowden, & Kaiser, 2008). When services are ascertained, Black and Brown youth are known to struggle in disclosing information to counselors they do not feel they can relate to (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012). Counseling professionals have been found to use techniques and/or interventions in practice rather than focus on fostering genuine relationships with clients (Hansen, Speciale, & Lemberger, 2014). The purpose of this article therefore is to offer a humanistic counseling model that is rooted in hip-hop and responds to the lack of realness or authenticity that youth of color feel they perceive when pursuing counseling services.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING GENUINE AND HUMANISTIC IDEOLOGY

Hansen et al. (2014) argued that the alignment between counseling professionals and the humanistic roots of counseling has dissipated over time.

Foundational humanistic principles suggest that certain conditions are required to cultivate a therapeutic relationship sufficient for psychological growth. The discussion in this article was guided by the Rogerian concepts of authenticity, or congruence; warmth, or unconditional positive regard; and empathetic understanding. These core conditions beget the establishment of a strong therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1957). Essential in a therapeutic relationship is the notion of a counselor being their real, or authentic, self. Rogers (1961) described supporting the emergence of one's real self quite succinctly in the following statement:

> It is only by providing the genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can successfully seek for the reality in him. I have found this to be true when the attitudes I feel are not attitudes with which I am pleased, or attitudes which seem conducive to a good relationship. It seems extremely important to be *real.* (p. 33)

Furthermore, Gelso (2009) theorized that the *real relationship* in psychotherapy is "the personal relationship existing between two or more people as reflected in the degree to which each is genuine with the other and perceives and experiences the other in ways that befit the other" (pp. 254–255). Gelso (2009) posited that a strong real relationship is built on a high magnitude of both genuineness between the client and the counselor and realism (perceiving and experiencing others in ways that fit them). For Gelso (2002, 2009), realism is the antithesis of transference. A client's negative perceptions of the counselor have traditionally been conceptualized as a client's projections (i.e., transference; Gelso, 2002). In fact, Gelso (2009) suggested that negative reactions that clients experience can be based on negative qualities or characteristics of which the counselor may be unaware, thus emphasizing the importance of valuing clients' authentic perceptions or experiences of their counselors in session. Evidence suggesting that Black and Brown youth do not feel comfortable with counselors (Corrigan, Druss, & Perlick, 2014; Garcia, Circo, DeNard, & Hernandez, 2015), or feel that counselors do not understand or like them (Lindsey et al., 2013; Lindsey, Joe, & Nebbitt, 2010; Lindsey & Marcell, 2012), points to a serious issue in the ability of counseling professionals to create authentic or real relationships with youth of color.

TOWARD CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN HUMANISM

To ensure the establishment and maintenance of the therapeutic relationship with youth of color, humanistic counselors develop the critical awareness and cultural competence necessary to explore the societal status of Black male clients "in the context of their lived experiences to better understand the impact of self and the social barriers in place" (Hannon & Vereen, 2016, p. 241). Cosgrove (2007) proposed that a client's experiences are subjective and individualized. Gergen (1991) postulated that an individual's subjective experience is influenced by their social, cultural, and political environments.

Others have argued that it is impossible to fully understand a client's personal experience "without obtaining beforehand some understanding of the conditions which permitted and shaped these experiences" (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000, p. 824).

In light of this, youth of color have historically struggled to access mental health professionals with the cultural competence needed to understand their context and realities and to deploy culturally sensitive interventions (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, & Ananeh-Firempong, 2003). A client's perception and experience of not being understood undermines the emotive bond and empathic connectedness required for a strong therapeutic relationship (Laska, Gurman, & Wampold, 2014). This reality is supported by research that points to highly Westernized approaches to counseling used within the United States, which are known to be both inadequate and potentially harmful to individuals of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds (Tao, Owen, Pace, & Imel, 2015).

A specific focus on context evokes the twofold process of both digesting the complex intersectionality of Black male clients' identities (LaMantia, Wagner, & Bohecker, 2015) and developing one's self-awareness as a counselor to shed biases that hinder authentic perceptions of said identities (Hannon & Vereen, 2016). Hannon and Vereen (2016) spoke to irreducibility in counseling by stressing that counselors must be able to "see Black men in the context of their ecological world and experiences" (p. 242). The humanistic concept of irreducibility emphasizes "holism and authentic relational encounters as the route to human connection and healing" (Hansen et al., 2014, p. 174). Counselors are tasked with exploring how previously held negative stereotypes may actually "be representative of agency and meaning making, [and] seen as areas of strength to be nurtured within the counseling realm" (Hannon & Vereen, 2016, p. 242). The development of cultural competence, however, is an ever-changing and lifelong process (Ratts et al., 2016), requiring a commitment to cultural humility (ongoing self-critique, self-reflection, collaboration, and nonjudgmental listening; Hook et al., 2016). To respond to the lack of authenticity that youth feel from counselors and counseling services, the field is in need of frameworks or models that enable counselors to both contextualize the experiences of Black male clients and develop the cultural competence and humility needed to dismantle counselors' own problematic perceptions of Black male cultural norms, which mask the innate strengths of their clients.

THE HIP-HOP SPOKEN WORD THERAPY MODEL

Given the need to offer culturally responsive counseling services, scholars have explored hip-hop interventions in counseling practice to support youth in processing difficult emotions (Travis & Deepak, 2011; Tyson, 2002; Washington, 2018). Hip-hop practices have also gained traction because of the labeling of youth culture as hip-hop culture (Emdin, 2016; Tillie-Allen,

2005). Kobin and Tyson (2006) noted that the use of hip-hop practices helps to develop counselor-client rapport, allowing counselors to be perceived as more relatable. Hip-hop has been demonstrated as valuable in increasing client engagement and fostering deeper understanding of client experiences (Travis & Deepak, 2011). Levy and Keum (2014) noted that hip-hop spaces offer socially and culturally acceptable platforms for youth to explore difficult emotions through hip-hop writing and performance. In fact, at the community level, scholars posit that youth of color engage in cathartic lyric writing and performing as a direct response to the lack of culturally salient counseling services (Levy, Cook, & Emdin, 2018).

This aforementioned research engendered the hip-hop spoken word therapy (HHSWT) counseling model, whereby youth engage in previously validated counseling interventions through the process of writing, recording, and performing hip-hop music (Levy, 2012). The humanistic roots of HHSWT can support clients in exploring thoughts and feelings of particular importance to them, in culturally salient ways, and may assist counselors in understanding and building empathic connection with youth (Levy, 2012). HHSWT invites counselors to pinpoint hip-hop cultural practices that their client's communities use for catharsis and bring them into sessions. Specifically, HHSWT offers counselors a set of hip-hop-centered activities or tools that they can use in the counseling process to support youth in exploring difficult thoughts and feelings. These activities include the hip-hop *cypher*, which is a highly codified yet unstructured rap or dance, for group process and sharing (Levy, Emdin, & Adjapong, 2018); creating emotionally themed *mixtapes* from a collection of songs (Levy, Cook, & Emdin, 2018); lyric writing as emotive journaling; and dyadic song collaboration as role play (Levy, 2019). Each of these HHSWT techniques offers a culturally salient process in which Black and Brown youth can disclose and process difficult thoughts and feelings with their counselor.

However, the HHSWT model is also offered here as valuable in bolstering a counselor's self-awareness and fostering a stronger therapeutic relationship. That is, HHSWT techniques can support the ability of counselors to learn about the contexts and realities of their clients, but only if the counselors practice cultural humility. Although researchers have suggested that racial, ethnic, and/or cultural differences between clients and counselors can function as a barrier to a therapeutic relationship (Wintersteen, Mensinger, & Diamond, 2005), cultural humility has been found to bolster counselor-client rapport beyond racial differences (Owen et al., 2016). Cultural humility can facilitate deeper trust and disclosure in the therapeutic relationship (Hook et al., 2016) and is quite similar to the Rogerian condition of unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957). Without a commitment to cultural humility, "it is impossible to understand all the intersectionalities that we, our students, and our clients inhabit and enact" (Anastas, 2010, p. 91), even when clients are offered a platform in session (such as lyric writing) to describe those feelings. HHSWT is therefore positioned to function as a model for

counseling that is humanistic and youth-centric, and therefore does not require that counselors be of the same racial, ethnic, or cultural status as their clients, so long as they are constantly developing competence and practicing cultural humility.

Authenticity in Hip-Hop

To develop strong therapeutic relationships and deploy a hip-hop-based model that responds to the inauthenticity that youth of color feel, counselors need to understand how hip-hop culture defines authenticity. Much like Rogers (1961) did, hip-hop culture also emphasizes the importance of realness (McLeod, 1999). For hip-hop culture, authenticity is a socially agreed-upon construct used to combat the threat of assimilation (McLeod, 1999). As a culture with growing popularity and prominence (Chang, 2005), hip-hop constantly fights to protect its roots (Rose, 2008). Hip-hop emerged out of an urge to speak back against social conditions that oppressed mostly Black, urban communities (Chang, 2005), creating an expectation that participants in the culture use their art as a platform for commenting on social issues, circumstances, or particular urban beliefs and worldviews (Forman, 2002; Hill, 2009). Hip-hoppers practice authenticity as a means to advocate for and protect against the erasure of their cultural complexities (McLeod, 1999).

Dimensions of Authenticity

Authenticity in hip-hop is defined in six semantic dimensions that "draw upon [hip-hop] culture's most important symbols in ways that attempt to preserve its identity" (McLeod, 1999, p. 145). A real or genuine therapeutic relationship is built in part on a counselor's ability to understand the complex contexts and identities of Black male clients (Hannon & Vereen, 2016). However, Gelso (2002) also encouraged counselors to privilege their client's reality, emphasizing the importance of valuing the way that their clients experience, perceive, and feel about them. As mentioned previously, a strong real relationship is built on a high magnitude of both (a) genuineness between the client and counselor in session and (b) realism, or the perceiving and experiencing of others in ways that fit them (Gelso, 2009). Consequently, it is crucial that counselors understand how clients who identify with hip-hop culture might use hip-hop-based definitions or perceptions of realness to assess their counselor, and that counselors establish genuineness and realism in the therapeutic relationship. McLeod (1999) defined the six dimensions of authenticity as (a) social-psychological, (b) racial, (c) political-economic, (d) social-locational, (e) gender-sexual, and (f) cultural. I will explore these definitions to assist counselors in identifying why youth might feel a lack of authenticity in the counseling relationship, and then I will offer an HHSWT model for responding to the threats to authenticity.

Social-psychological debates regarding authenticity in hip-hop culture are aimed at determining whether individuals are being true to themselves or willingly abandoning their own sense of self in pursuit of mass trends. Being able to use one's voice to speak to the lived experiences of both oneself and one's peers provides novice hip-hop artists with street credibility or, in this case, authenticity (Forman, 2002; McLeod, 1999). Although it is possible that certain listeners might define an artist's ability on the basis of articulation, rhythm, rhyme scheme, or wordplay (Alim, 2003), McLeod (1999) stressed the truthfulness of one's narrative, and the ability to speak to the realities of, and resonate with, others as the ultimate measure of social-psychological authenticity. For counselors, Lemberger-Truelove and Bowers (2018) suggested that "quality counseling relationships are threatened when the student or stakeholder does not believe that he or she is connected [with the counselor]" (p. 281). In conjunction with research indicating that Black and Brown youth fail to develop strong rapport with counselors they feel they cannot relate to (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012), there is reason to conjecture that clients should be supported in speaking to their lived experiences in a way that resonates with their counselor.

Strong racial ties—specifically, regarding a participant in hip-hop culture's commitment to pro-Black messages—are also a key aspect of authenticity. Notions of adhering to the Black experience are a crucial component of authenticity and "by disassociating oneself from Blackness, a hip-hop artist opens himself or herself to charges of selling out" (McLeod, 1999, p. 141). The lack of culturally sensitive approaches to counseling is a considerable gap in the field, causing potential harm to clients (Tao et al., 2015) and often leading to feelings of skepticism and the belief that counselors are untrustworthy (Alvidrez et al., 2008; Earl et al., 2011). Counselors who are unable to understand the complex realities of Black men inhibit the ability of their clients to bring their genuine selves into session (Hannon & Vereen, 2016). Conversely, counselors who practice cultural humility and understand the complex realities of the other (Anastas, 2010; LaMantia et al., 2015; Owen et al., 2016) can demonstrate commitment to improving themselves (i.e., cultivating self-awareness and working through racial biases), which is facilitative of trust and strong rapport. Counselors who fail to showcase a commitment to understanding the experiences and intersectionalities of the other risk failing to meet a client's expectations regarding racial authenticity and hindering the client's ability to be genuine with them.

The political-economic dimension of authenticity concerns the concept of *selling out*. Selling out in this sense is a deliberate removal of one's genuine persona and music from the streets or underground (the hip-hop-based community from which the individual came) to enter a music business culture and embrace a commercial success (McLeod, 1999). Generally speaking, selling out is the antithesis of authenticity. Similarly, the social-locational dimension of authenticity compares the streets with the suburbs, suggesting that when individuals remove themselves physically from the streets

or hood to live in a more affluent area, they are “distancing themselves from their roots” (McLeod, 1999, p. 143). As previously noted, Hansen et al. (2014) critiqued the field of counseling for selling out on the humanistic core conditions that support empathic connection, congruence, or unconditional positive regard in pursuit of more psychopathologic and/or practicing interventions. Despite the growth of the counseling field toward practice-based goals, counselors can be experienced as inauthentic by clients who perceive them to have relinquished their genuine persona in pursuit of adhering to nonhumanistic counseling practices.

The gender-sexual dimension of authenticity criticizes being emotional, suggesting that demonstrations of weakness or vulnerably make one “soft” or fake. These claims support being “hard,” or able to push through challenges, as a symbol of being real (McLeod, 1999). The gender-sexual aspect of hip-hop’s authenticity demonstrates the importance of clients believing in their ability to address their concerns independently, and for counselors to support that process. Humanistic counselors create empathic and judgment-free spaces in which clients bring their true selves to session, and they use active-listening skills to support clients in exploring the knowledge/answers within, thereby also supporting clients’ belief in their own ability to persevere (Rogers, 1961).

Finally, the cultural dimension addresses hip-hop’s status “as a culture that has deep resonating traditions, rather than as a commodity” (McLeod, 1999, p. 143). Hannon and Vereen (2016) suggested that counselors working with Black male clients, in particular, need to consider the client’s complex experiences to avoid stereotypical perceptions that reduce the clients to objects or phenomena. Therefore, counselors who struggle using culturally sensitive counseling practices and engaging in self-awareness/cultural humility practices risk reducing clients to stereotypical versions of themselves. These counselors would fail to allow their clients to exist genuinely in session and are likely to not be trusted (i.e., clients hold negative attitudes and perceptions of the counselors). For hip-hop culture, the definition of cultural authenticity requires treating one’s voice as a holistic representation of one’s experience, as opposed to reducing it to a product.

REAL RECOGNIZE REAL IN HUMANISTIC PRACTICE

In this article, I have explored the importance of the therapeutic relationship and how youth of color experience a lack of realness or authenticity when pursuing counseling services in order to offer the practical implementation of a hip-hop-based humanistic model that can be used to remedy these concerns. Although a handful of scholars have explored the uses of hip-hop-based practices in counseling as culturally sensitive responses to some of these concerns (Kobin & Tyson, 2006; Travis & Deepak, 2011; Tyson, 2002; Washington, 2018), only a small portion of this research has been connected directly to humanistic practices or to hip-hop’s definitions of authenticity.

In the final section, I will detail how counseling professionals may use the HHSWT model to satisfy all dimensions of authenticity in hip-hop culture.

Social-Psychological and Racial

To respond to the authenticity dimension of social-psychological, clients must feel able to openly express their real experience, as well as feel heard, validated, and unjudged by their counselor. Furthermore, race-based authenticity demands that urban youth in counseling sessions are able to process thoughts and feelings associated directly with their racial identity. Not having opportunities to do that level of work in session disallows a client's genuineness. Basic constructs of humanistic counseling place importance on supporting a client's authentic introspection to generate insights (McWilliams, 2005). Hansen (2005) suggested counselors should deploy interventions that resonate emotionally with clients or are "experientially meaningful to clients, without regard for considerations of correctness" (p. 10).

This presents a valuable opportunity for counselors to use the hip-hop lyric writing process to encourage youth to construct introspective lyrics supporting exploration of their lived experiences and particular emotional themes covered in sessions. Given research that suggests youth feel more comfortable exploring thoughts and feelings through lyric writing than through traditional forms of talk therapy (Gonzalez & Hayes, 2009; Levy & Keum, 2014), and that they perceive counselors who use hip-hop-based interventions as relatable on a personal level (Kobin & Tyson, 2006), I call on counseling professionals to become comfortable using hip-hop lyric writing interventions in session. Levy (2019) found prompting youth to write and record emotionally themed hip-hop songs in session created a platform to explore difficult thoughts and feelings and led to youth feeling a deeper connection with their roots.

To accurately deploy HHSWT interventions, such as emotive lyric writing, counselors need to be prepared to analyze hip-hop lyrics for the expressed cognitive and affective content beyond their own biases. Counselors must engage in constant self-reflection to bolster their own self-awareness and biases (practice cultural humility) so that they can engage with clients in a nonjudgmental manner and develop empathic connection. To engage in this work, counselors should listen to current hip-hop music and analyze lyrics for emotional and cognitive themes. Barriers to objectively hearing affective content in hip-hop lyrics must be addressed so that counselors can unconditionally support clients. Furthermore, counselors should be willing to converse with clients in session about how they identify with hip-hop and which artists, music, or messages in lyrics resonate with them. It is only when counselors have done the necessary cultural humility work that they can have clients write their own content, and then use active-listening skills to effectively process, discuss, and validate the clients' thoughts and feelings as presented in the hip-hop lyrics brought to session.

The social-psychological and racial dimensions of authenticity in hip-hop culture invite lyricists to seek support in critiquing their own lyrics to make sure they accurately reflect their truth and will resonate with their audiences. Therefore, through the practice of cultural humility and use of hip-hop lyric writing interventions in session, counseling professionals can seek empathetic understanding as they foster excitement among youth to pen lyrics that accurately speak to their real, and Black, experience. Youth are thereby encouraged to bring their genuine selves and experiences into session, where they can interact with a counselor who has done the self-work needed to exist and be perceived authentically.

Political-Economic and Social-Locational

Notions of *staying independent* are of great importance in the maintenance of political-economic authenticity. Independence in this hip-hop capacity represents a client's sense of alignment with their personal network of resources (the underground). As described by McLeod (1999), the social-locational component of authenticity "keepin' it real" means "not disassociating oneself from the community from which one came—the street" (p. 142). Humanistic counselors focus on validating and understanding the contextual experiences of their clients because they "recognize the problems caused by traditional psychological approaches that decontextualize the individual from his/her environment" (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000, p. 824). A consideration of the social, cultural, and political forces in a client's life is vital in supporting the client's psychological growth and/or self-congruence (Hansen et al., 2014) and is imperative for counselors as they attempt to holistically validate and understand their clients. Laska et al. (2014) urged clinicians to develop an emotive bond with clients through culturally aligned beliefs about healing and emotional challenges. Adherence to counseling interventions that fail to recognize the knowledge, beliefs, and worldviews of hip-hop culture will push a client's persona toward absorption by the dominant (commercial) culture. Moreover, staying true to our humanistic roots to support an authentic counseling relationship requires us as counselors to privilege the power of humanistic core conditions and the belief in the client's ability to generate solutions (Hansen et al., 2014). To support the political-economic and social-locational domains of authenticity in hip-hop, counselors must support and validate clients in drawing from their personal network of resources, and staying true to their roots, as they work toward addressing their present concerns.

Levy, Cook, and Emdin (2018) offered a framework for using hip-hop mixtape creation as a process in which clients can design, implement, and evaluate an action research project of particular importance to them. Through dialogue and collaboration, counselors assist clients in tapping into their personal experiences and local network for information or research on specific topics. Levy, Cook, and Emdin (2018) recommended supporting students in identifying

family or community members who might be able to offer them hip-hop beats that they can record their emotionally themed lyrics over, or who might offer them time in a recording studio to formalize their songs. Counselors might have clients interview their peers, family, and community members about a given emotional theme to support the exploration of their own thoughts and feelings and creation of lyrics. Through mixtape creation, counselors validate clients' desire to maintain independence by supporting them in tapping their personal network to aid them in the helping process and staying true to their cultural beliefs around healing and emotional challenges. The belief that the client is in possession of all of the faculties needed to solve their own problems is inherently humanistic and promoted via the hip-hop mixtape intervention.

Gender-Sexual

Countering barriers to emotional expression is essential in humanistic practice, mostly in the establishment of a warm, accepting environment that invites emotional disclosure. The use of hip-hop cyphers, "highly codified yet unstructured practices where youth who identify with hip hop culture exchange information in the form of raps or dance" (Levy, Emdin, & Adjapong, 2018, p. 104), has been explored in group counseling practice to establish group norms supportive of group cohesion. Scholars have argued that using hip-hop cyphers in group counseling enables clients to enact a series of predefined norms and/or rules of engagement that support emotional expression (Levy, Emdin, & Adjapong, 2018). These include (a) participants stand in a circle, (b) each member has an opportunity to share, (c) every voice is viewed as equal, (d) participants are praised when they share, and (e) support is provided in moments of discomfort (Levy, Emdin, & Adjapong, 2018).

Considering the gender-sexual dimension of hip-hop authenticity further, there is a specific distinction between being perceived as hard (distanced from emotions as a means to appear in control) or soft (being perceived as weak or vulnerable), with soft being a marker of inauthenticity (McLeod, 1999). Hip-hop lyric writing has been discussed as an activity that is socially and culturally acceptable enough to enable clients to express emotions while sidestepping vulnerability and weakness (Levy & Keum, 2014). That is, counselors who use hip-hop-based interventions such as sharing lyrics in group cyphers provide clients with a socially acceptable context in which to feel vulnerable as they open up to others, while empowering clients to believe in their ability to find answers to their own problems. Counselors might also identify local open mic nights in the surrounding community for clients to work toward performing at. This public type of sharing within hip-hop spaces is what scholars have argued offers clients a socially acceptable platform from which to disclose difficult thoughts and feelings (Levy, Emdin, & Adjapong, 2018; Levy & Keum, 2014).

Cultural

The cultural dimension of authenticity pertains to one's ability to commit to hip-hop as a culture over a commodity. In humanism, irreducibility suggests that the counseling process is holistic, requiring a detailed grasp of a client's social, cultural, and political context (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000). Hannon and Vereen (2016) suggested that when working with Black males, in particular, counselors need to consider the client's complex experiences to avoid stereotypical perceptions that reduce them to objects or phenomena. For hip-hop culture, the definition of authenticity requires treating one's voice as a holistic representation of one's experience, and not as a product. The aforementioned hip-hop tools for counselors (the cypher, the mixtape, lyric writing, and collaboration) identify salient cultural practices engaged in by the hip-hop community. I argue that the use of these practices by counselors enables clients to feel heard and valued as holding answers to their own concerns. By leaning on interventions that enable clients to use their cultural forms of healing and catharsis to guide the session, counselors support clients in bringing their genuine and whole selves into session (Levy, 2019). In this sense, hip-hop's authenticity and irreducibility are aligned. As per Kobin and Tyson (2006), clients perceive counselors who use hip-hop approaches in counseling sessions positively, as people they can connect with.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

There are a handful of limitations to this article. Of note, although the arguments I make are based on existing research, the article itself is conceptual. Logical arguments are made for the inclusion of the HHSWT in counseling practice to address the lack of authenticity youth feel in session, but empirical support of this model is needed. Also, a client's feelings regarding a counselor's authenticity are inherently complex and subjective, making this model difficult to measure. An additional limitation of engaging in this work is the fear of cultural appropriation among White or non-hip-hop-identifying counselors who attempt to integrate the suggested practices in an authentic, nonexploitative manner. Although I have explored development of cultural competence and the practice of cultural humility as means of addressing this concern, I have not discussed cultural appropriation explicitly. Last, although the use of hip-hop as a counseling tool is burgeoning, more research is needed to substantiate its wider use.

Implications for Future Research

Although some researchers have explored the use of hip-hop-based interventions in counseling sessions, few if any have explored the

authenticity of counselors. Future researchers may compare measures of a client's perceptions of counselors who use HHSWT against perceptions of counselors who use traditional approaches to talk therapy; the self-reported surveys from clients, and observational assessments from supervisors of a counselor's authenticity, would be fascinating. Given the importance of authenticity in hip-hop culture, researchers could explore the development of an assessment of a counselor's authenticity rooted in McLeod's (1999) six dimensions. In addition to conducting quantitative examinations of authenticity, scholars could collect focus-group or individual-interview data to explore perceptions of counselor authenticity among individuals who have received hip-hop-based counseling services. Action-based research with young people of color is also recommended. Finally, I highly recommend research exploring the training of counselors in the use of HHSWT, particularly with respect to cultural competence, the cultivation of cultural humility, and development of active-listening skills.

CONCLUSION

It is the responsibility of humanistic counselors to create the conditions necessary for clients to feel comfortable expressing and exploring difficult thoughts and feelings. The establishment of said conditions requires that counselors be able to construct therapeutic relationships that feel real to their clients. As explored in this article, realness is defined by both parties being genuine and able to perceive each other in ways that accurately befit them. Scattered across the field of counseling research are reports that young people of color lack trust in and negatively perceive counseling professionals, suggesting that feelings of realness or the establishment of a strong real relationship are missing. Young people of color who identify with hip-hop culture are uniquely able, on the basis of a handful of values and beliefs instilled by hip-hop culture, to detect authenticity. Consequently, to properly cultivate strong therapeutic bonds with young people of color, counselors must develop a detailed understanding of hip-hop's authenticity dimensions and how these forms of authenticity are violated. Having this understanding, counselors are then tasked with deploying humanistic counseling skills that meet hip-hop's authenticity requirements—effectively, providing youth with, as Jay Electronica (2010) would say, "something realer." Beyond authenticity, however, is a call for cultural competence in the larger contextualization of counseling work and to advocate for the use of culturally sensitive counseling interventions with marginalized populations. Given our focus on multicultural and social justice competencies, in addition to ACA's declaration to act in the interest of supporting historically oppressed populations, approaches such as HHSWT are worth further exploration.

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