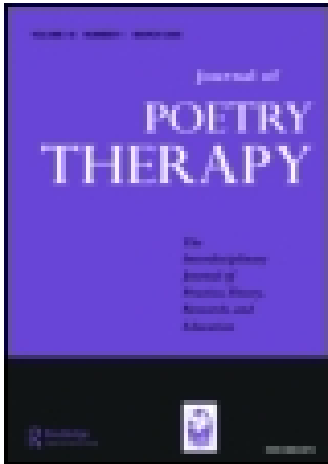


This article was downloaded by: [Ian Levy]

On: 29 August 2014, At: 07:46

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Poetry Therapy: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, Research and Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tjpt20>

Hip-hop emotional exploration in men

Ian Levy^a & Brian TaeHyuk Keum^a

^a Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

Published online: 26 Aug 2014.

To cite this article: Ian Levy & Brian TaeHyuk Keum (2014): Hip-hop emotional exploration in men, *Journal of Poetry Therapy: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, Research and Education*, DOI: [10.1080/08893675.2014.949528](https://doi.org/10.1080/08893675.2014.949528)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08893675.2014.949528>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Hip-hop emotional exploration in men

Ian Levy^{*} & Brian TaeHyuk Keum

Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

(Received 9 April 2014; accepted 22 May 2014)

The focus of this brief review is on how Hip-hop impacts men's willingness to disclose emotion, or even to inquire about counseling. Researchers are exploring the impact of gender norms on the effectiveness of counseling sessions. Emotional writing has been a form of counseling suggested to be particularly effective with male clients. In this paper we explore how Hip-hop based therapy can be a culturally relevant approach for effective counseling with men.

Keywords Counseling; emotion; Hip-hop; men; spoken word poetry; writing

Introduction

Hip-hop is an art form created in the 1970s, post-industrialized, Bronx, NY. During this time period New York City budget cuts on education stripped many public schools of their music based programs. As a result young people were forced to find their own creative outlets for self-expression. As a genre, Hip-hop lyricism is a combination of both instrumental music and poetry. Through the manipulation of old records, Hip-hop lyricism became a platform for individuals, who needed a voice, to speak back against inequalities they faced. Some may posit that the birth of Hip-hop was inherently therapeutic.

Looking back at previous research we find that Bibliotherapy (Harper, 2010; Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994/2011) and poetry therapy (Mazza, 2003) are suggested to be helpful in providing clients with a medium to express emotions and universalize feelings. For instance, Jones (2005) found that song writing and lyrical analysis provided for immediate changes in emotional reactions from substance abusers. His results further indicated that the use of music in therapy reduced negative feelings like anxiety, guilt, and anger, while at the same time increasing positive feelings. The use of music in therapy provides insight into a barrage of feelings for both the client and counselor. Within the same study Jones (2005) found music therapy to be successful in evoking emotion and positively altering mood states with

^{*}Corresponding author. Ian Levy, Teachers College, Columbia University, 122 La Salle St., Apt 3, New York, NY 10027, USA. Tel: 914-512-0427. Email: ian.p.levy@gmail.com

substance abuse clients. Scholars have begun connecting these ideas and found evidence to suggest that text and music combined elicited greater emotional responses than just text or instrumental music alone (Gfeller, Asmus, & Eckert, 1991; Jones, 2005). The ability to have a place to explore thoughts and feelings gives individuals the chance to cope up with their emotions more easily (Baker, Gleadhill, & Dingle, 2007).

As time progresses it is becoming increasingly evident that Hip-hop and spoken word poetry have become a large part of urban culture, and have even begun to spread further (Tillie Allen, 2005). Given the multitude of research suggesting the benefits of music and poetry therapy, scholars have begun analyzing Hip-hop's effectiveness. Elligan (2004) developed a unique psychotherapy called rap therapy to be used with at-risk youth in a school counseling setting. His counseling process is broken down into five distinct stages: assessment, alliance, reframing, role play/reinforcement, and action/maintenance. In the assessment stage the counselor can have discussions with his/her students about the rap they enjoy. By identifying specific songs, the counselor can gather insight into the student's emotional state. Within the sessions themselves, rap therapy can be used to assist the student in expressing negative emotions, to engage in role-play, and to reframe thoughts. Overall young people seemed to prefer Hip-hop based interventions to other therapeutic approaches (Elligan, 2004; Gonzalez & Hayes, 2009).

Tyson (2003) began researching the effects of Hip-hop in a social work setting with African American and Latino young people. He discovered Hip-hop and other music could be used to provide clients with a safe platform to identify and discuss their emotions. In fact, Hip-hop-based interventions were shown to have improved the therapeutic experience and outcomes of both African and Latino youth, and delinquent youth (Tyson, 2002, 2003). DeCarlo and Hockman (2003) coined "rap therapy" which, although different from Elligan's theory, was found to be effective alternative for engaging young men in therapy sessions. These scholars' findings stress the importance of the therapeutic relationship as a necessary aspect of successful therapy. For example rap therapy was particularly effective at engaging clients and developing rapport (Elligan, 2004). Not only have Hip-hop based interventions created safe spaces for young people to genuinely express emotions, but also counselors who utilize Hip-hop in therapy sessions have been experienced by young people as relatable on a personal level (Kobin & Tyson, 2006).

Recently Levy (2012) advanced Hip-hop and spoken word therapy (HHSWT) which intended to expose coping or defensive mechanisms embedded in the individuals' worldview by means of exploring emotions through listening to and composing lyrics. The purpose was to assist the client in moving from living in an insecure world to living with a mindset of high self-esteem and authenticity devoid of cognitive distortions and denial of real self. Travis and Deepak (2011) discussed using Hip-hop culture as a means for empowerment in a social work setting. They argued for the effectiveness of Hip-hop based interventions as vessels to understand young people at a profound level, while simultaneously engaging them in the helping process.

Gender norms and emotional expression

But what appears to be missing in current Hip-hop therapy based literature is how Hip-hop impacts men's willingness to disclose emotion, or even to inquire about counseling. For decades, men's willingness to seek counseling has been comparably lower than women, most likely due to gender differences and the label of being perceived as vulnerable and weak in the context of socialized male gender norms (Andrews, Issakidis, & Carter, 2001; Husaini, Moore, & Cain, 1994; McKay, Rutherford, Cacciola, & Kabasakalian-McKay, 1996; O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995; Thom, 1986; Wills & DePaulo, 1991). It has also been suggested through numerous studies that young men, particularly, exhibit negative attitudes toward utilizing psychological services (Chandra & Minkovitz, 2006; Gonzalez, Alegria, & Prihoda, 2005; Masuda, Suzumura, Beauchamp, Howells, & Clay, 2005). Evidence in the development of emotional inexpression has also been found among adolescent boys when compared to girls, suggesting that socialization of male emotional restrictiveness may begin at an earlier stage in life (Polce-Lynch, Myers, Kilmartin, Forssmann-Falck, & Kliewer, 1998; Polce-Lynch, Myers, Kliewer, & Kilmartin, 2001). Furthermore, recent research results point to evidence that men immersed in socialized male gender norms, who experience greater gender role conflicts, are more likely to self-stigmatize and reduce self-disclosure, leading to less positive attitudes and willingness to seek counseling (Pederson & Vogel, 2007). In addition, lack of self-disclosure in men has been consistently regarded as the bedlam giving roots to men's emotional inexpression and restriction. Indeed, past literature has considered men's emotional inexpression as a long-standing problem that discourage men from seeking psychological services (Balswick, 1988; Brooks, 1998; Moore & Haverkamp, 1989; Pollack & Levant, 1998; Scher, 1981). Likewise with psychological help seeking behavior, discouragement from emotional expression has been consistently linked to sources of socialized male gender norm and ensuing gender role conflict (Balswick, 1988; Good & Sherrod, 2001; Meth & Passick, 1990; O'Neil, 1981).

However, as traditional research has consistently suggested emotion inexpression as a problem to be addressed in men who think about or are utilizing psychological services, recent scholars have attempted to demystify the process by addressing the intricacies involved in men's emotional expression in relation to external variables such as social context, evaluation of social acceptance, and gender differences (Simon & Nath, 2004; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Recent researchers have argued that men's emotion inexpression does not necessarily stem from its relevance to alexithymia but rather, it is the process that even though men are aware of their emotion, they choose not to express them in the context of evaluations for the emotion's causes, modes, and consequences (Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Relatedly, research results are usually generalized to implicate men's lack of awareness of emotions as they have been conditioned to discourage from feeling negative emotions such as sadness and fear that may attribute to label of vulnerability and weakness stemming from gender differences in emotional regulation and expression (Blazina & Marks, 2001; Cusack, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2006; Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, &

Froh, 2009; Nolen-Hoeksema & Aldao, 2011). However, recent advances in the field suggest that gender differences in emotion awareness are minimal and that studies need to examine the behavioral context and the different forms in which men may choose to express their emotions (Heesacker et al., 1999; Wester, Vogel, Pressly, & Heesacker, 2002; Wong & Rochlen, 2005).

One form in which emotion can be indirectly addressed is the emotional writing, shown to have favorable results in physical health, psychological well-being, physiological functioning, and general functioning (Smyth, 1998). A significant body of literature exists in highlighting the evidence that emotional writing can have positive influences on psychological and physical functioning (Pennebaker, 1997). Interestingly enough, at its core great Hip-hop lyricism is emotional writing. That is to say that the more vividly we are able to speak to our emotional experiences, the better Hip-hop we are able to create. In addition given that Hip-hop is a socially and culturally acceptable art form, it is far less likely that using Hip-hop to explore and/or disclose emotions would lead to feelings of vulnerability or weakness.

Conclusion

One form in which emotion can be indirectly addressed is the emotional writing, shown to have favorable results in physical health, psychological well-being, physiological functioning, and general functioning (Smyth, 1998). A significant body of literature exists in highlighting the evidence that emotional writing can have positive influences on psychological and physical functioning (Pennebaker, 1997). At its core, great Hip-hop lyricism is emotional writing. An emotional experience that is vividly expressed through writing serves as a meaningful foundation to create genuine Hip-hop. As highlighted in this paper, such emotional writing when used in the context of Hip-hop may facilitate socially and culturally acceptable ways to express emotions in African American men and possibly for men in general. Based on previous discussion on the clinical implications of expressed emotion in counseling settings, culturally acceptable emotional expression through emotional writing may have significant therapeutic benefits. The benefits may be highlighted in conjunction to the need for multicultural competency (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992), in what may be salient in modern urban culture.

Research implications

While various researchers have studied the effectiveness of Hip-hop as a mode of therapy (DeCarlo & Hockman, 2003; Elligan, 2004; Gonzalez & Hayes, 2009; Kobin & Tyson, 2006; Travis & Deepak, 2011; Tyson, 2002, 2003), more research is needed to advance the intervention in the counseling setting. The most urgent need more research in this process revolves around defining the structure and method of the intervention. For this reason, initial qualitative examinations may be particularly helpful in drawing the experiences of emotional writing within the context of Hip-hop. Results may be valuable in distilling specific examples of therapeutic interactions and participants' processes. Moreover, studies must be

conducted to provide empirical data on HHSWT for its impact on well-being and clinical symptom measures. It would be especially essential to develop a structured model based on these results in advancing the possible efficacy of HHSWT.

References

- Andrews, G., Issakidis, C., & Carter, G. (2001). Shortfall in mental health service utilisation. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, *179*, 417–425. doi:10.1192/bjp.179.5.417
- Baker, F., Gleadhill, L., & Dingle, G. (2007). Music therapy and emotional exploration: Exposing substance abuse clients to the experiences of non-drug-induced emotions. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *37*, 321–330. doi:10.1016/j.aip.2007.04.005
- Balswick, J. (1988). *The inexpressive male: A study of men who express love too little*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Blazina, C., & Marks, L. I. (2001). College men's affective reactions to individual therapy, psychoeducational workshops, and men's support group brochures: The influence of gender-role conflict and power dynamics upon help-seeking attitudes. *Psychotherapy*, *38*, 297–305. doi:10.1037/0033-3204.38.3.297
- Brooks, G. R. (1998). *A new psychotherapy for traditional men*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Chandra, A., & Minkovitz, C. S. (2006). Stigma starts early: Gender differences in teen willingness to use mental health services. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *38*, 754.e1–754.e8. Retrieved November 26, 2006, from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16730608>
- Cusack, J., Deane, F. P., Wilson, C., & Ciarrochi, J. (2006). Emotional expression, perceptions of therapy and help-seeking intentions in men attending therapy services. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, *7*, 69–82. doi:10.1037/1524-9220.7.2.69
- DeCarlo, A., & Hockman, E. (2003). Rap therapy: A group work intervention method for urban adolescents. *Social Work with Groups*, *26*, 45–59. doi:10.1300/J009v26n03_06
- Elligan, D. (2004). *Rap therapy: A practical guide for communicating with youth and young adults through rap music*. New York, NY: Kensington Publishing Corp.
- Gfeller, K., Asmus, E., & Eckert, M. (1991). An investigation of emotional responses to music and text. *Psychology of Music*, *19*, 128–141. doi:10.1177/0305735691192004
- Gonzalez, J. M., Alegria, M., & Prihoda, T. J. (2005). How do attitudes toward mental health treatment vary by age, gender, and ethnicity/race in young adults? *Journal of Community Psychology*, *33*, 611–629. doi:10.1002/jcop.20071
- Gonzalez, T., & Hayes, G. B. (2009). Rap music in school counseling based on don Elligan's rap therapy. *Journal of Creativity and Mental Health*, *4*, 161–172. doi:10.1080/15401380902945293
- Good, G. E., & Sherrod, N. (2001). Men's problems and effective treatments: Theory and empirical research. In G. Brooks & G. Good (Eds.), *The new handbook of psychotherapy and counseling with men: A comprehensive guide to settings, problems, and treatment approaches* (Vol. 1, pp. 22–40). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Harper, E. (2010). *Bibliotherapy intervention exposure and level of emotional awareness among students with emotional and behavioral disorders* (Doctoral dissertation). Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH.
- Heesacker, M., Wester, S. R., Vogel, D. L., Wentzel, J. T., Mejia-Millan, C. M., & Goodholm, C. R., Jr. (1999). Gender-based emotional stereotyping. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *46*, 483–495. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.46.4.483
- Husaini, B. A., Moore, S. T., & Cain, V. A. (1994). Psychiatric symptoms and help-seeking behavior among the elderly: An analysis of racial and gender differences. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *21*, 177–195. doi:10.1300/J083V21N03_12
- Hynes, A. M., & Hynes-Berry, M. (1994/2011). *Biblio/poetry therapy – The interactive process: A handbook*. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press.
- Jones, J. D. (2005). A comparison of songwriting and lyric analysis techniques to evoke emotional change in a single session with people who are chemically dependent. *Journal of Music Therapy*, *42*, 94–111. doi:10.1093/jmt/42.2.94

- Kashdan, T. B., Mishra, A., Breen, W. E., & Froh, J. J. (2009). Gender differences in gratitude: Examining appraisals, narratives, the willingness to express emotions, and changes in psychological needs. *Journal of Personality*, 77, 691–730. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00562.x
- Kobin, C., & Tyson, E. (2006). Thematic analysis of Hip-hop music: Can Hip-hop in therapy facilitate empathic connections when working with clients in urban settings. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 33, 343–356. doi:10.1016/j.aip.2006.05.001
- Levy, I. (2012). Hip hop and spoken word therapy with urban youth. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 25, 219–224. doi:10.1080/08893675.2012.736182
- Masuda, A., Suzumura, K., Beauchamp, K. L., Howells, G. N., & Clay, C. (2005). United States and Japanese college students' attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. *International Journal of Psychology*, 40, 303–313. doi:10.1080/00207590444000339
- Mazza, N. (2003). *Poetry therapy: Theory and practice*. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge.
- McKay, J. R., Rutherford, M. J., Cacciola, J. S., & Kabasakalian-McKay, R. (1996). Gender differences in the relapse experiences of cocaine patients. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 184, 616–622. doi:10.1097/00005053-199610000-00006
- Meth, R. L., & Passick, R. S. (1990). *Men in therapy: The challenge of change*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Moore, D., & Haverkamp, B. E. (1989). Measured increases in male emotional expressiveness following a structured group intervention. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 67, 513–517. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.1989.tb02134.x
- Nolen-Hoeksema, S., & Aldao, A. (2011). Gender and age differences in emotion regulation strategies and their relationship to depressive symptoms. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 51, 704–708.
- O'Neil, J. M. (1981). Male sex-role conflict, sexism, and masculinity: Implications for men, women, and the counseling psychologist. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9, 61–80. doi:10.1177/001100008100900213
- O'Neil, J. M., Good, G. E., & Holmes, S. (1995). Fifteen years of theory and research on men's gender role conflict: New paradigms for empirical research. In R. F. Levant & W. S. Pollack (Eds.), *A new psychology of men* (pp. 193–214). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Pederson, E. L., & Vogel, D. L. (2007). Men's gender role conflict and their willingness to seek counseling: A mediation model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54, 373–384. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.54.4.373
- Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. *Psychological Science*, 8, 162–166. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.1997.tb00403.x
- Polce-Lynch, M., Myers, B., Kliewer, W., & Kilmartin, C. (2001). Adolescent self-esteem and gender: Exploring relations to sexual harassment, body image, media influence, and emotional expression. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 30, 225–244. doi:10.1023/A:1010397809136
- Polce-Lynch, M., Myers, B. J., Kilmartin, C. T., Forssmann-Falck, R., & Kliewer, W. (1998). Gender and age patterns in emotional expression, body image, and self-esteem: A qualitative analysis. *Sex Roles*, 38, 1025–1048. doi:10.1023/A:1018830727244
- Pollack, W. S., & Levant, R. F. (1998). *New psychotherapy for men*. New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.
- Scher, M. (Ed.). (1981). Counseling men [Special issue]. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 60(4), 239–242.
- Simon, R. W., & Nath, L. E. (2004). Gender and emotion in the United States: Do men and women differ in self-reports of feelings and expressive behavior. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 109, 1137–1176. doi:10.1086/382111
- Smyth, J. M. (1998). Written emotional expression. Effect sizes, outcome types, and moderating variables. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, 174–184. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.66.1.174
- Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development*, 20, 64–89. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1912.1992.tb00563.x
- Thom, B. (1986). Sex differences in help-seeking, self-esteem, and achievement motivation: An attributional analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 21, 318–326.
- Tillie Allen, N. M. (2005). Exploring Hip-hop therapy with high-risk youth. *Praxis*, 5, 30–36.

- Travis, T., & Deepak, A. (2011). Empowerment in context: Lessons from Hip-hop culture for social work practice. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 20*, 203–222. doi:10.1080/15313204.2011.594993
- Tyson, E. H. (2002). Hip-hop therapy: An exploration study of a rap music intervention with at risk and delinquent youth. *Journal of Poetry Therapy, 15*, 133–144. doi:10.1023/A:1019795911358
- Tyson, E. H. (2003). Rap music in social work practice with African American and Latino youth: A conceptual model with practical applications. *Journal of Human Behavior and the Social Environment, 15*, 131–144.
- Wester, S. R., Vogel, D. L., Pressly, P. K., & Heesacker, M. (2002). Sex differences in emotion: A critical review of the literature and implications for counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 30*, 629–651. doi:10.1177/00100002030004008
- Wills, T. A., DePaulo, B. M. (1991). Interpersonal analysis of the help-seeking process. In C. R. Snyder & D. R. Forsyth (Eds.), *Handbook of Social and Clinical Psychology: The Health Perspective* (pp. 350–375). New York, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Wong, Y. J., & Rochlen, A. B. (2005). Demystifying the inexpressive male: New directions and implications for counseling and research. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity, 6*(1), 62–72. doi:10.1037/1524-9220.6.1.62