

Remixing the School Counselor's Tool Kit: Hip-Hop Spoken Word Therapy and YPAR

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Abstract

This article explores a model for school counselors to capitalize on the therapeutic, empowerment-oriented nature of hip-hop practices to engage in youth participatory action research (YPAR). Drawing from research that supports the use of hip-hop therapy and YPAR in schools, we propose a culturally sensitive group counseling process wherein students use hip-hop lyric writing, recording, and performing to critically analyze, research, and report on issues of personal importance to them.

Keywords

hip-hop, pedagogy, school counseling, youth participatory action research

The illest rapper is livin out by the pistons, where clinics don't give you treatment unless you in high positions.

Ninth-grade student

This quote is from a hip-hop song written by a ninth-grade student who lives in the poorest county in a sprawling urban metropolis known as the Bronx, New York City (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The Bronx is also known as the birthplace of hip-hop (Chang, 2005). In this lyric, the student sheds light on his home environment and provides insight into the experiences of other students of color who live in “the pistons” of society, sitting in the heart of a metaphorical engine of the big city while being pushed up and down by everyday pressures for survival.

The inhabitants of the pistons are urban youth who proudly describe themselves with titles such as the “illest rapper” (ill is slang for being cool, gifted, or talented) because of their lyrical abilities. Meanwhile, these same rappers live in the midst of environmental stressors in communities called “the pistons” that make them more likely to be physically and mentally ill than their counterparts from other ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Wade, Shea, Rubin, & Wood, 2014; Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardlee, 2012). The pistons of a machine grind at the same tasks constantly, are grossly underappreciated, and often go ignored until they completely break down. The mental health inequalities that come along with living in the pistons produce mentally and physically ill people who often look to rap and hip-hop as a space for release of emotional tensions (Viega, 2013).

Research suggests young people of color from impoverished urban neighborhoods face higher levels of mental, physical, and social stress than their more affluent, mostly White counterparts (Blair & Raver, 2016; Day, Ji, DuBois, Silverthorn, & Flay, 2016; Wade et al., 2014). Further, they often display lower levels of trust and higher levels of social isolation (Ward Thompson, Aspinall, Roe, & Robertson, 2016), which commonly result in an increased likelihood of substance abuse and psychological distress (Wallace, Neilands, & Sanders-Phillips, 2017).

Counseling Services

Urban communities are often stripped of access to counseling services (Holm-Hansen, 2006), adding to their stigma and minimizing awareness of the benefits of dealing with emotions and being vulnerable enough to address them (Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006). Even when counseling services are provided, disparities exist in their quality and completion (Holm-Hansen, 2006). Scholars attribute this to the highly Westernized approaches to counseling deployed in the United States, found to be both inadequate and potentially harmful to

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individuals of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds (Tao, Owen, Pace, & Imel, 2015). The lack of culturally responsive counseling services for individuals of color is itself reflective of a field that has historically neglected the needs and concerns of minority groups (Corrigan, Druss, & Perlick, 2014).

Inside urban schools, students are seldom able to access counseling services that meet their social and emotional needs (Kern et al., 2017). This is due in part to the lack of culturally sensitive frameworks used by school counselors to engage urban youth (Williams, Greenleaf, Albert, & Barnes, 2014) and in part to the inundation of bureaucratic noncounseling tasks that often leave school counselors unavailable to youth (Stone & Dahir, 2015). These disparities lead to feelings of isolation and distaste and a misunderstanding as to the value that counseling and support services can provide (Tao et al., 2015).

Amid poor access to counseling services, we suggest that communities become aware of their own tools that might assist in addressing social/emotional concerns. We believe this can be particularly effective when the individuals within those communities use cultural artifacts (such as hip-hop lyricism) to respond to stressors. For instance, we argue that communities with a strong hip-hop culture promote engaging in lyric writing and performing and incorporate this cultural practice to engage members in successful therapeutic, empowerment-oriented practices. By embracing the power and potential of urban youth culture in this capacity, counselors can empower youth to take an active role in the counseling process and see the benefits of counseling services. Thus, in this article, we present an approach to counseling that capitalizes on youth cultural practices to provide culturally sensitive counseling services in schools, namely, using hip-hop album creation and youth activism as vehicles for promoting wellness and positive youth development.

By embracing the power and potential of urban youth culture in this capacity, counselors can empower youth to take an active role in the counseling process and see the benefits of counseling services.

Hip-Hop Culture and Mental Health

In the 1970s, hip-hop culture arose as a mechanism for speaking up about the challenging conditions faced by many minority groups often due to the absence of resources in education and mental health in those communities (Chang, 2005). For many, hip-hop served as a cathartic outlet, where youth found a voice and an escape from hostile home, school, and neighborhood environments. Today, in the midst of budget cuts across urban public schools that ravage music programs and other spaces where young people may either perform or heal, they once again turn to hip-hop (Emdin, 2010). Just as youth in the 1970s used old record players and vinyl records and pulled cords from street posts to garner enough electricity to host

full-on block parties, contemporary youth find digital tools like open-source software and used computers and tap into their imaginations to create hip-hop. Most important, youth use music to sort through challenges and speak back against various disparities (Emdin, 2010; Petchauer, 2009). They are in many ways creating their own forms of therapeutic, empowerment-oriented practices.

Unfortunately, commercialized forms of hip-hop and hip-hop social norms support masking vulnerability (Rose, 2008) and limit the potential of hip-hop to be utilized by youth as a process to change affect and explore difficult thoughts and feelings (Lightstone, 2012). In contemporary commercial hip-hop, manifestations of depression and anxiety are not identified as emotional concerns that require healthy coping strategies (George, Stickle, Rachid, & Wopnford, 2007). Issues of drug use also are rarely addressed, but when they are considered, substance abuse is glorified. For example, Rigg and Estreet (2018) found that the pro-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) (molly/ecstasy) messages in hip-hop music lead to increased drug use among African American youth.

Although mainstream hip-hop in this sense appears to have a negative impact on the mental states of youth, scholars have pointed to the importance of hip-hop culture as a community-driven movement that has enabled marginalized communities to share untold stories and navigate the stressors they faced in daily lives (Chang, 2005). As such, through the use of hip-hop as a tool for addressing social and emotional concerns, we challenge the messages of contemporary commercial rap. Specifically, we call for counseling professionals to harness the power of hip-hop and use it as a tool to effectively communicate and teach new skills and strategies and to challenge thoughts, ideas, and actions that are largely negative and destructive to minority youth groups. This article builds on research supporting youth participatory action research (YPAR) as a school-based practice that allows youth to critically analyze, research, and report on issues of personal importance to them (Smith, Davis, & Bhowmik, 2010). We discuss the potential for a school counseling intervention that capitalizes on the therapeutic, empowerment-oriented nature of hip-hop practices to engage youth in the process of writing, recording, and performing hip-hop music as part of YPAR.

We call for counseling professionals to harness the power of hip-hop and use it as a tool to effectively communicate and teach new skills and strategies and to challenge thoughts, ideas, and actions that are largely negative and destructive to minority youth groups.

Addressing Student Emotions in Schools

Mental health is a complex term that is commonly defined as encompassing an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Galderisi, Heinz, Kastrup, Beezhold,

& Sartorius, 2015). In this article, we address the emotional and social aspects of students' well-being as it falls under the purview of the school counselor's role in schools.

Adolescents are exposed to more emotional stress than any other age-group and are at an increased risk for developing a range of emotional concerns (Guo, Nguyen, Weiss, Ngo, & Lau, 2015; Lin & Yusoff, 2013). A deluge of research spans educational literature exploring how school counselors may support students' emotional development (Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza, & Giles, 2015; Slaten, Irby, Tate, & Rivera, 2015; Wisner & Norton, 2013). Researchers have suggested group counseling as a safe space to allow young people to engage in a critical analysis of the systemic structures negatively impacting their lives (Bemak, Chung, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Shin et al., 2010; Smith, Beck, Bernstein, & Dashtguard, 2014). Some scholars have even documented school counselors' use of narrative therapy-based interventions to foster hope in academic and personal pursuits for Latinx youth (Cavazos, Holt, & Flamez, 2012). Others have argued for the use of social skills-based groups with youth in schools to address their social, personal, and academic concerns (Bostick & Anderson, 2009). These group counseling methods share a commitment to placing the voices of urban youth at the forefront of group sessions, particularly to discuss the ways that systemic issues impact students' social/emotional and academic development.

Despite the promising outcomes of group counseling and related counseling services, young people continue to struggle to access school-based services that provide emotional outlets. School counselors are often minimally involved in supporting students' emotional needs either due to lack of time or support (DeKruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013). This reality can be attributed to multiple issues school counselors face, including oversized student caseloads, a misunderstanding of the role of the school counselor by school leadership, or general struggles managing the inundation of bureaucratic tasks (McCarthy, Van Horn Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzmán, 2010). Both mental health counselors and school counselors hold master's degrees in the counseling and school counseling fields, respectively. Although the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012) does not label school counselors as mental health providers, they do have particular training and knowledge of youth development and have skills specific to providing services to children and adolescents. For example, school counselors play a crucial role in supporting students' social/emotional development, inclusive of identifying and expressing feelings; identifying and discussing changing family, personal, and social roles; and demonstrating effective coping skills for dealing with problems (ASCA, 2012).

Hip-Hop Therapy-Based Interventions in Schools

Over the last decade, the significance of hip-hop and spoken word poetry in urban culture has become increasingly evident

(Ross & Rivers, 2018). Many scholars have gone so far as naming youth culture "hip-hop culture" (Emdin, 2016). Given the volume of research suggesting the emotional benefits of music therapy (Baines, 2013; Gutiérrez & Camarena, 2015), poetry therapy (N. Mazza, 2003, 2012; N. F. Mazza & Hayton, 2013), and bibliotherapy (Harper, 2010; Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 2011), scholars have sought to analyze hip-hop's therapeutic effectiveness. Elligan (2004) developed a unique approach to psychotherapy called rap therapy, in which youth in schools discussed rap music they enjoyed as a platform for therapeutic dialogue. In sessions, rap therapy can be used to assist the student in expressing negative emotions, to engage in role-play, and to reframe thoughts. Youth were found to prefer hip-hop-based interventions to traditional forms of talk therapy (Elligan, 2004; Gonzalez & Hayes, 2009).

Hip-hop-based interventions have also been shown to improve the therapeutic experience and outcomes of both African American and Latinx youth (Tyson, 2002, 2003). Tyson (2003) researched the effects of hip-hop in a social work setting with African American and Latinx young people, finding it a safe medium to identify and discuss emotions. Rap therapy was particularly effective for engaging clients and developing rapport (Elligan, 2004). Counselors who use hip-hop have been perceived by clients as relatable on a personal level (Kobin & Tyson, 2006). Travis and Deepak (2011) used hip-hop culture as an empowerment tool and argued for the effectiveness of hip-hop-based interventions as vessels to understand young people and engage them in the helping process. More recently, Levy (2012) created hip-hop and spoken word therapy (HHSWT), which could be used to explore clients' emotions and expose coping or defensive mechanisms through the process of listening to and composing lyrics. The purpose of HHSWT is to assist the client in moving from living in an insecure world to living with a mind-set of high self-esteem and authenticity devoid of cognitive distortions and denial of real self. Levy (2012) called for the melding of hip-hop cultural practices with existing evidence-based practices. These interventions included the use of lyric writing as cognitive journaling and the use of song collaboration (where two or more artists discuss, write, record, and perform a song about a shared emotional experience) as role-play. Further, Levy and Keum (2014) argued that because hip-hop is a socially and culturally acceptable art form, it allows urban youth to explore difficult thoughts and feelings they would normally avoid out of fear of feeling vulnerable or weak.

Scholars have also discussed using hip-hop pedagogy in classrooms to bolster students' emotional self-awareness. For example, Emdin, Adjapong, and Levy (2016) evaluated the effectiveness of a hip-hop science curriculum in which students were asked to write, record, and perform rhymes about science content. While this program led to noticeable increases in students' knowledge of science content, students also wound up explaining science content by discussing emotionally charged experiences (Emdin, Adjapong, & Levy, 2016). These findings are in line with the position taken by Levy and Keum (2014)

that engaging in hip-hop lyric writing is a socially and culturally acceptable platform to express emotions. Emdin et al. (2016) suggested that emotional disclosure would likely occur when youth are asked to write hip-hop lyrics about any topic. This wave of research is particularly important because school counselors must navigate large caseloads and bureaucratic tasks through collaboration (with teachers, administrators, and other school staff) that enables them to provide adequate personal and social support to youth (Stone & Dahir, 2015). Due to hip-hop lyric writing's cultural relevance and potential to evoke the disclosure of emotional content, it behooves school counselors to become involved in deploying this approach in schools.

Others point to specific preestablished cultural practices, such as hip-hop cyphers, that allow urban youth to freely express difficult emotions. Levy, Emdin, and Adjapong (2017) defined hip-hop cyphers as "highly codified yet unstructured practices where youth who identify with hip hop culture exchange information in the form of raps or dance" (p. 2). Within hip-hop cyphers, participants commonly share inherently emotional content because unspoken cultural norms require that (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. Recent hip-hop-based research has pushed for counseling professionals to "identify cultural practices that marginalized communities have developed as a means for their own healing and integrate those into their groups" (Levy, Emdin, & Adjapong, 2017, p. 7).

Hip-Hop Mixtape Creation

For the purpose of this article, we explore the creation of the *hip-hop mixtape* as a distinct hip-hop cultural process. Today, hip-hop mixtapes are collections of songs that are recorded over popular hip-hop instrumentals and distributed for free. The hip-hop "mixtape was originally comprised of DJ mixes recorded at house or block parties and distributed via cassette tape throughout the community" (Ball, 2011, p. 282). Hip-hop mixtapes are distributed via street vendors, online, or various forms of underground journalism (Ball, 2009; Maher, 2005). Mixtapes are most commonly created by new hip-hop performers, or "emcees," on a quest to showcase that they can recite a 16-bar verse (called "spitting a 16" in hip-hop culture) worthy of recognition (Ball, 2011; Pulley, 2010). Mixtapes are a staple in the personal discography of a new emcee because they can borrow (but not sell) well-known, copyrighted hip-hop beats to use behind their original 16-bar verses. This process builds emcees' street credibility as they compile the funds necessary to purchase their own music (Pulley, 2010). Given that mixtapes are usually an artist's first foray into the world of an emcee, the content often showcases who the artist is, where they are from, and their struggles and aspirations. In many ways, the hip-hop mixtape has played a key role in the emergence of hip-hop culture as a platform to push back against

systemic inequity by providing a voice to traditionally marginalized individuals and communities (Ball, 2009, 2011).

Like the birth of hip-hop culture as a community-centered movement against inequities and disparities in the South Bronx (Chang, 2005), the hip-hop "mixtape's origins are grassroots and countercultural" (Ball, 2011, p. 285). Maher (2005) posits, "There wouldn't be a rap music industry if it weren't for mixtapes The development of hip hop revolves around [them as] a singularly crucial but often overlooked medium" (pp. 138–139). Historically, the hip-hop mixtape was the main source of communication for Black and Brown communities suffering from modern forms of colonialism and imperialism (Ball, 2011). The mixtape allowed budding artists a platform to create original forms of media and tell their own stories. In short, making a hip-hop mixtape is an equitable and easily accessible medium for new artists (underprivileged voices) to promote their music (share their stories) and speak back against larger systems of inequality that minimize both the cultural expressions and lived experiences of urban communities (Ball, 2011).

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In light of the necessity to provide culturally sensitive counseling services through the coupling of evidence-based interventions and community-defined practices (Levy, 2012; Levy et al., 2017), we suggest a new model rooted in the process of creating a hip-hop mixtape. The hip-hop mixtape creation process is harmonious with the process of YPAR, in which young people are empowered to engage in the development of research, collection of data, and dissemination of findings regarding issues they deem most relevant to their lives (Smith et al., 2010). The remaining sections of this article explore YPAR processes in more depth and detail a new, culturally sensitive YPAR and hip-hop-based theory for school counselors.

Principles of YPAR

YPAR has been documented widely in the fields of education and social psychology (e.g., Cahill, Rios-Moore, & Threatts, 2008; McIntyre, 2000). YPAR is a group research approach that supports youth development by allowing youth to identify and investigate issues that are of direct interest and concern to them (Ozer, 2016). The principle tenets of YPAR follow Freire's (1970) vision for education that dismantles the *banking concept of education*, where students may be perceived as passive recipients of information or counseling interventions. Instead, YPAR shifts to a process in which youth drive all aspects of inquiry, including developing research questions, leading investigations, engaging in shared decision-making, and disseminating findings necessary to facilitate the changes

they seek to achieve (Ozer, Newlan, Douglas, & Hubbard, 2013). YPAR is described as a decolonizing practice in which youth are encouraged to uncover the existing power asymmetries that preserve educational inequities to improve unjust circumstances (Torre et al., 2008).

Researchers have recently explored YPAR's application in school counseling (Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017; Smith et al., 2010, 2014). For example, Smith, Davis, and Bhowmik (2010) engaged a group of 10 high school students in YPAR, documenting the use of critical pedagogy as central to their counseling approach and driving the action research process. Researchers have encouraged school counselors to incorporate these same principles of YPAR into counseling practice (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Rowell, 2006). Cook and Krueger-Henney (2017) described YPAR's application to group counseling as a liberating praxis of shared participation in group work that elevates youth as the experts of knowledge production.

YPAR Implementation in School Counseling

YPAR is a research process conducted among youth and the school counselor where they engage in shared discussion to investigate a topic that is of direct interest to young peoples' personal lives and their communities. YPAR includes shared decision-making where the counselor works alongside the youth collaboratively to appreciate and learn about their personal experiences (Ozer et al., 2013). Insofar as youth are the experts of their lived experiences, they are also the experts of the knowledge produced through their research inquiry.

During the course of YPAR, several activities and group processes unfold. Recognizing youth as experts, the counselor encourages students to share leadership responsibilities during all aspects of YPAR implementation (Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017). The concept of action is a principle aspect of YPAR, in which youth participants collaborate with the counselor in conducting action-oriented research to reach the shared objective(s). Once the YPAR group is formed, the counselor collaborates with students to select a research topic that is of keen interest and captures the students' unique racial, social class, religious, and gender-based experiences (Fox & Fine, 2015). Agreeing on the research topic involves facilitating shared discussion with youth to reach consensus. YPAR research topics can include a variety of issues such as topics related to psychological health and well-being (e.g., healthy relationships, suicide/violence prevention, and substance abuse prevention), social/environmental factors (e.g., school policies, social media, and poverty), and academic issues (e.g., opportunity gap, postsecondary exploration, and college access). Although the counselor supports students in selecting the YPAR focus, aligning the field of research topics with the school and counseling curricula requirements is possible, as long as the range of issues coincides with students' interests and concerns (Mirra, Filipiak, & Garcia, 2015).

After selecting the research topic, the students lead data collection and analyses. The school counselor supports the process by encouraging students to research various data sources while sharing their reactions to the data findings. Next, based on data findings, students collaboratively develop and negotiate a shared action plan in an effort to make agreed-upon changes for improvement. Students then disseminate findings with support from the counselor and school administrators, and, last, reflect on the YPAR process and outcomes.

Throughout the duration of the YPAR project, the school counselor encourages students to achieve their desired goals and outcomes through honing research, leadership, and strategic-thinking skills (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Ozer, Rittman, & Wanis, 2010). In this manner, youth obtain the skills to influence change and overcome barriers to reach shared objectives. Another key aspect of YPAR is the process of intentional power sharing and appreciating diverse perspectives (Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2015; Ozer et al., 2013). The counselor intentionally encourages students to recognize how power dynamics function at institutional and local levels so they can unpack and examine how these dynamics may affect the research outcomes of the YPAR group. This process of building awareness is achieved through facilitating shared discussions in which the counselor creates a safe environment for discussing students' thoughts and reactions. In this manner, YPAR promotes the development of critical consciousness that empowers youth to build awareness and question the hegemonic structures that often constrain their lived experiences and future pathways (Smith et al., 2014).

Hip-Hop-Based YPAR

In merging HHSWT and YPAR practices, we aim to position youth culture at the forefront of the YPAR process. Specifically, the amalgamation of these two processes capitalizes on the community-defined process of creating a hip-hop mixtape as the anchor through which young people can engage in YPAR. As alluded to earlier, HHSWT is a counseling framework in which school counselors take young people through the process of discussing and analyzing difficult emotional experiences with the sole purpose of then converting those thoughts and feelings to hip-hop songs. While the ultimate goal for a school counselor is to use HHSWT as a platform to help students engage in self-expression and exploration of emotions through composing and listening to hip-hop lyrics (Levy, 2012), this therapeutic process is anchored in the creation of an emotionally themed hip-hop mixtape (a collection of songs). To create this mixtape in a group setting, counselors using HHSWT can utilize counseling techniques like lyric writing as cognitive journaling, role-play as collaboration, and the hip-hop cypher to bolster group dynamics (Levy, 2012; Levy et al., 2017) and foster emotional exploration.

Although school counselors can use HHSWT to support students' emotional development, it was not developed with the express purpose of arming young people with the skills to

address systemic inequities. However, by asking students to write and record emotionally themed mixtapes, which have the propensity to encourage artists to share unspoken narratives and push back against larger systems of inequality (Ball, 2011), counselors can facilitate emotional dialogue and lyric writing about systemic inequities. Consequently, we suggest that the community-defined practice of mixtape production can be the bedrock for the coupling of YPAR and HHSWT, allowing young people access to an innovative group process wherein they engage in action research to inform the development of mixtapes that are most relevant to them.

Critical Cycle of Mixtape Creation

Following the same critical process as YPAR, school counselors utilize salient activities and facilitation skills of HHSWT to lead the critical cycle of mixtape creation (CCMC). Drawing from the cycle of investigative inquiry (Cook & Kruger-Henny, 2017), CCMC uses hip-hop song construction to engage young people in researching an issue they deem important to their community. Through a series of emotional discussions with their school counselor that culminate in the creation of hip-hop music about their discussions and research, young people are offered the chance to build “understanding, skills, and knowledge of issues, with the goal of promoting change and improvement” (Cook & Kruger-Henny, 2017, p. 181). Young people move from the stage of mixtape theme identification and planning to disseminating their findings through the release and evaluation of their mixtape. As shown in Figure 1, CCMC contains a series of steps including (a) identify action mixtape area of interest, (b) research mixtape content, (c) discuss and digest findings, (d) develop a tracklist, (e) plan the recording and release of mixtape, and (f) evaluate mixtape process and response to release.

As in YPAR, action remains a salient aspect of the CCMC process. Young people collaborate with the counselor in conducting action-oriented research to produce a hip-hop mixtape. The mixtape topic functions as a research topic, requiring the school counselor to begin early group sessions with a discussion among youth in which they decide on possible themes or topics the mixtape can cover. Drawing from YPAR, mixtape themes can include psychological health and well-being, social/environmental factors, academic issues, or anything of interest to students. HHSWT recommends that school counselors ask young people to present songs that they like because these songs provide a glimpse into their mental state (Levy, 2012). By having group members present their favorite songs to the group, the counselor can then ask follow-up questions like, “What lines in this song stuck out to you?” or “Do you relate to anything the artist said?” to generate a discussion that helps the group narrow possible mixtape topics or issues to research, write, and record. However, a single topic may be divided into various songs that students research and write about. For example, a mixtape about police brutality can contain songs that detail police brutality news stories, personal

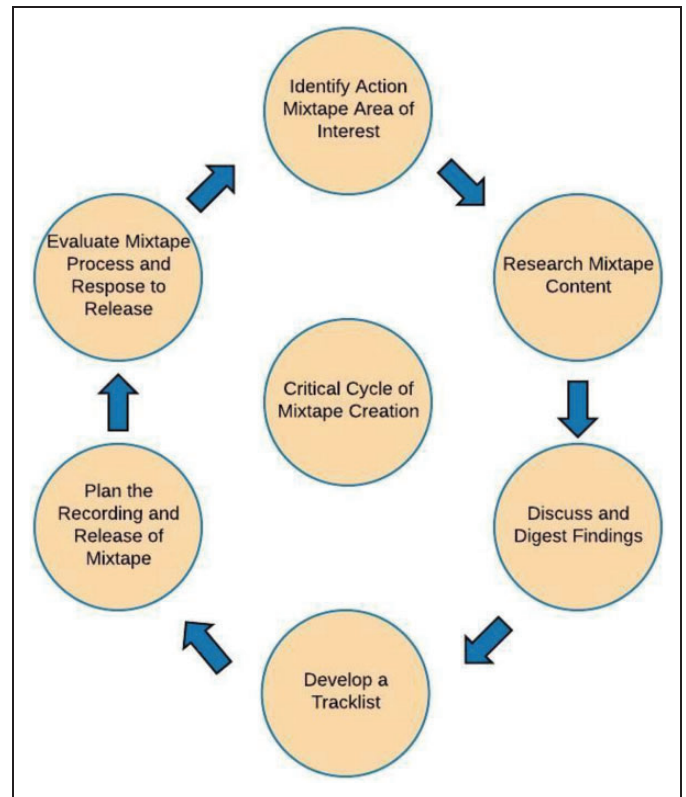


Figure 1. Drawing from the cycle of investigative inquiry, the critical cycle of mixtape creation uses hip-hop song construction to engage young people in researching an issue they deem important to their community. By undergoing a series of emotional discussions with their school counselor, which culminate in the creation of hip-hop music that details both their discussions and research, young people are offered the chance to build skills and knowledge of issues to promote their change and development.

encounters with police, racism, and/or historical movements against police brutality. It is important that mixtape themes are complex enough to research and compose various songs.

After the group selects an overall mixtape topic, students are encouraged to collect data or research mixtape content on their topic through analyzing existing hip-hop songs and/or music, news clips, articles, and public interviews (with artists or other individuals). Students may also survey their school communities to gather thoughts and feelings from students, teachers, administrators, school staff, and/or parents. Sorting through data provides students with the research necessary to construct songs about their chosen topic. Once research is complete, counselors may ask group members to discuss and digest findings. This conversation occurs for the sole purpose of developing a tracklist of songs for the mixtape. Students can negotiate “solo tracks” where they work on a song by themselves or collaborate with each other. Students interested in the same themes can form subgroups and collaborate on songs together. In this case, a counselor may offer students the opportunity to engage in role-play by having students hash out a shared issue on a joint verse (Levy, 2012). For example, if students were

writing about unjust encounters with police officers, the counselor might ask two students to write from the position of the police officer and the pedestrian to play out potential encounters.

After the various tracks have been identified, group members transition to planning the recording and release of the mixtape. During this stage, the group has a formal meeting where they decide on the title of the mixtape, the tracks to be recorded (potentially listing deadlines for each track), and the album artwork. The group discusses a promotional plan, which includes the possible release of “singles” (songs released prior to the album to generate excitement for the project), a plan for releasing the album (posting music online versus creating physical copies), and whether they would like to schedule a mixtape release party (where artists perform their album for the first time). The group also considers how the dissemination of their mixtape might have a positive impact on their selected issue. With the police brutality example, youth might contemplate sharing their mixtape with the local community to promote critical conversations around police brutality. Perhaps school counselors could even support youth in bringing copies of their album to local precincts. Once these details are ironed out, the group then breaks into smaller subgroups and works on individual tracks. Although the group may come back together to share what they have written and receive feedback, the purpose is to execute the writing, recording, and release of the mixtape.

The group also considers how the dissemination of their mixtape might have a positive impact on their selected issue. With the police brutality example, youth might contemplate sharing their mixtape with the local community to promote critical conversations.

During the final step of CCMC, the group has completed their plan for the recording and release of their mixtape and evaluates the mixtape process and response to mixtape release. The group might discuss the positive and negative aspects of the CCMC process to inform adjustments for their next mixtape. If the group performed their mixtape, they may want to watch a video of their performance to assess their showcase and discuss reactions from the audience. The school counselor might pose questions like “Did our lyrics about important issues resonate with the audience in the way we hoped?” or “How could we have been more effective in sharing our music with our audience?” The group can also refer back to their dissemination plan and assess whether or not their research, release, and/or performance of their mixtape affected the change they hoped for. If students hoped their project would mobilize their community against issues of police brutality, did they accomplish that goal? Overall, the CCMC process allows a group to identify an issue of importance for them and proceed to research, write, record, and disseminate their findings and/or solutions in a culturally relevant and youth-driven capacity.

Implications for School Counselors

As standards-based approaches to reforming the current educational system continue, school counselors and educators are tasked, and held accountable for, the creation of school cultures in which students can thrive academically (Dimmit, 2003). School counseling literature stresses the importance of school counselors collaborating with teachers to create such school cultures (Hatch & Bowers, 2002). Various classroom spaces can have room for CCMC if it is deployed strategically. The most obvious spaces to support teachers in the process of CCMC are music elective classes because hip-hop and other forms of digital media continue to grow rapidly within music education (Thibeault, 2010). School counselors might collaborate with music teachers to create a hip-hop lyric writing unit where they can use CCMC to simultaneously address the necessary outcomes of the music classroom and support students’ social/emotional outcomes. Leading scholars in English education continue to push for pedagogy and curriculum that support students’ development of skills to analyze and deconstruct media images (Morrell, 2014). Some have used hip-hop media as YPAR in English curriculum (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008; Hill & Petchauer, 2013). Critical media literacy aims to help youth disrupt problematic narratives about their humanity (Morrell, 2014), often resulting in emotionally laden conversations around topics like race or gender (McArthur, 2016). Involving school counselors in these emotional conversations in classrooms is recommended given counselors’ training and skill set. Consequently, school counselors can advocate for their role as collaborators and work with teachers to support academic and socioemotional outcomes simultaneously. Counselors can execute this via push-in support in classrooms or general support around curriculum planning to ensure students’ academic and social/emotional needs are addressed in classrooms.

School counselors might collaborate with music teachers to create a hip-hop lyric writing unit where they can use the critical cycle of mixtape creation to simultaneously address the necessary outcomes of the music classroom and support students’ social/emotional outcomes.

School counselors are trained to create school-wide interventions that address student concerns (Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009). The ASCA National Model recommends that school counselors assemble advisory councils that review school counseling activities, outcomes, and make recommendations for improvement (ASCA, 2012). School counselors may wish to use CCMC as a group framework with their student advisory council as they actively investigate and improve aspects of their comprehensive school counseling program. Advisory councils can partner directly with administration to facilitate buy-in for CCMC. Regardless, we recommend that school counselors using CCMC guide youth in selecting topics

that are related to the goals or mission of the school to help in gathering administrative support.

Disruptive student behavior in classrooms has been shown to negatively impact the school community and learning within classrooms (Elligan, 2004; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Hernández, 2004; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). The ASCA National Model states that school counselors should be actively involved in discipline work through the nonpunitive provision of interventions that support students' behavior change and healthy development (ASCA, 2012). A growing approach in school discipline research is the use of small-group restorative circles as positive conflict resolution alternatives to harsh discipline practices (Ortega, Lyubansky, Nettles, & Espelage, 2016). Restorative circles "allow participants to understand each other, take responsibility for their choices, and generate actions for moving forward together that are agreeable to all involved" (Ortega et al., 2016, p. 3). We posit here that school counselors can use CCMC in restorative circles to push beyond the mitigation of small-group conflict and disseminate the work of students and counselors to the larger school community. For instance, if a restorative circle was proposed to deal with derogatory name calling, the CCMC framework could be used to research the history of derogatory names and their use within the school, design a mixtape on approaches for a harmonious school community, and disseminate the findings through a peace-themed mixtape showcase. Depending on availability, school counselors could be involved in the planning or direct implementation of CCMC-focused restorative circles.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

Urban youth of color are at higher risk for difficult social and emotional experiences (Kliewer & Lepore, 2015) and receive fewer counseling services than White youth (Holm-Hansen, 2006). School counselors are inundated with inappropriate noncounseling duties (Stone & Dahir, 2015) and experience burnout at alarming rates (Bardhoshi, Schweinle, & Duncan, 2014). As a result, they are seldom involved in socially and emotionally focused work and students are often left to deal with their stressors alone. Education researchers have called for a shift in pedagogical and counseling frameworks to highlight youth voice and culture (Mirra et al., 2015; Morrell, 2014; Ozer et al., 2013), and a handful of researchers have pointed to hip-hop-based interventions to engage youth in academic content and self-exploration (Emdin, 2010; Emdin et al., 2016; Levy, 2012). Others have championed YPAR as a youth-driven process of identifying and investigating issues of concern (Ozer, 2016). Researchers have also encouraged school counselors to integrate YPAR into their counseling practice, including critical pedagogy, action research, and social action (Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017; Smith et al., 2010, 2014).

We aimed to couple best approaches from the fields of hip-hop education, school counseling, and YPAR to offer an innovative group process wherein students engage in action

research that is most relevant to them. The CCMC uses hip-hop song construction to support youth in researching and disseminating important information about issues in their community. Strong conceptual reasoning supports school counselors in implementing CCMC in a variety of capacities within their schools and supports researchers in evaluating those efforts. Although we outlined some ways school counselors can integrate CCMC into their practice, alternative approaches are certainly possible. Part of what makes school counselors a great asset to any school community is their ability to analyze their particular school context and develop pathways to support students. The concept of CCMC addresses needs for culturally sensitive and youth-driven counseling processes in schools, but research on both YPAR and hip-hop-based interventions in school counseling is limited. School counselors may struggle to find the physical space or time to engage in this work. Researchers have examined the use of hip-hop-based approaches to YPAR in classroom curriculum (Akom, 2009; Hill & Petchauer, 2013; Turner, Hayes, & Way, 2013), but seldom focused on counseling services to address socioemotional concerns. The field of school counseling is becoming increasingly more data-driven, making documentation of the impact of school counselors' efforts imperative. As such, we highly recommend that researchers partner directly with school counselors—priming them with the skills to implement CCMC and measuring both student and counselor skill development outcomes.

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