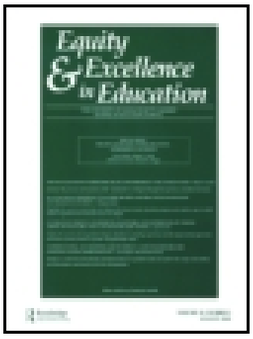

Equity & Excellence in Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ueee20

Processing a White Supremacist Insurrection Through Hip-Hop Mixtape Making: A School Counseling Intervention

Ian P. Levy & Casey Philip Wong

To cite this article: Ian P. Levy & Casey Philip Wong (2022): Processing a White Supremacist Insurrection Through Hip-Hop Mixtape Making: A School Counseling Intervention, Equity & Excellence in Education, DOI: 10.1080/10665684.2022.2158398

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2022.2158398

Published online: 21 Dec 2022.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ueee20

EQUITY & EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION
https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2022.2158398

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Processing a White Supremacist Insurrection Through Hip-Hop Mixtape Making: A School Counseling Intervention

Ian P. Levy [a] and Casey Philip Wong [b]

[a]Manhattan College, Bronx, New York, USA; [b]Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia

ABSTRACT

In this New York City, New York-based study, we made use of a Critical Cycle of Mixtape Creation (CCMC) intervention to examine a Bangladeshi high school student's understanding of justice, and the impact of injustice on his well-being, through his creation of and reflection on original hip-hop song lyrics. The student participated in the CCMC intervention amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing Black Lives Movement, and crucially the white supremacist insurrection on January 6, 2021. Findings indicate that the CCMC enabled the student to process systemic racism and injustices with peers on his own terms and to further develop a knowledge of self. This study offers practical insights for school counselors to use hip-hop interventions with youth to collectively process the world around them.

Since its inception, hip-hop lyricism has functioned as the mouthpiece of a larger hip-hop culture set on truth telling and sustaining community amid vast systemic injustices (Chang, 2005). Currently, in the early 2020s, hip-hop continues to operate in this capacity. From Amanda Gorman's presidential inauguration poem, "The Hill We Climb," to Lil Baby's "The Bigger Picture," spoken word and rap have amplified the voices of oppressed populations and offered avenues for healing. Hip-hop has consistently sustained communities when educational and mental health institutions have failed, compelling educators and counselors alike to tap into the potential of the culture in youth work (Land & Stovall, 2009; Levy, 2021; Wong & Peña, 2017). Similarly, scholars who have called for culturally sustaining approaches to education have advocated for youth participatory action research (YPAR; Edirmanasinghe, 2020; Lyiscott et al., 2018; Marciano et al., 2020), a process of engaging youth in researching, creating, and disseminating projects about issues impacting their lives. Like hip-hop, YPAR positions youth as experts in sharing their truths, believing youth are uniquely positioned to generatively address systemic injustices that they have personally experienced (Edirmanasinghe, 2020). Given hip-hop functioning as organic culturally sustaining pedagogy (Alim & Haupt, 2017) and counseling (Levy, 2019), in this study, we explored how a Bangladeshi high school student processed a white supremacist insurrection within the United States and ongoing systemic injustices, through a hip-hop-based YPAR small-group counseling intervention, the Critical Cycle of Mixtape Creation (CCMC).

Theoretical framework: justice

When invoking *justice* and *injustice* within this article, we do so within traditions of those who think about justice as theory and praxis that move to end systemic cruelty, domination, and exploitation in favor of what has been referred to as "collective freedom" (Kelley, 2012, p. 7). Worlds based in collective freedom have long been invoked by scholars such as Davis (2012), Estes (2019), King (1963),

CONTACT Ian P. Levy ian.levy@manhattan.edu Manhattan College, 4513 Manhattan College Parkway, Bronx, NY 10471, USA

© 2022 University of Massachusetts Amherst College of Education

and Thiong'o (1992). They have defined these worlds by interdependence, mutual responsibility, consensuality, protection of the vulnerable, and relations that allow us to benefit from and be accountable for what we produce. Operating from this position, these scholars have considered how institutions and systems can be designed to work to sustain not only a thriving Earth but also thriving beings on Earth (Wong, 2021).

In the context of the late 2010s, Tuck and Yang (2018) elucidated how the primary justice projects continue to focus on abolition and decolonization. Justice is concerned with eradicating the systemic exploitation and domination of people for their labor (i.e., abolition), and the systemic elimination/removal of people in order to dominate and exploit the lands, waters, and living/nonliving beings they are in relation with (i.e., decolonization). As a generative movement for justice, abolition cannot coexist with enslavement, nonconsensual relations, and anti-Blackness (Davis, 2012; Hesse, 2016). Likewise, decolonization cannot coexist with anti-Indigeneity and the European-descended concept of property (Estes, 2019; Thiong'o, 1992). Both of these traditions of justice have come to see how worldwide forms of systemic exploitation, domination, and cruelty depend on a European-descended hierarchy that centers and sustains white men (i.e., white supremacy) who identify as cis-heteropatriarchal, able-bodied, English-monolingual, monocultural, and Judeo-Christian (Alim et al., 2020; Wong, 2021).

These justice projects have variably considered how white supremacy is a prison for white men themselves, who when ratifying and centering themselves as the center of the universe, are made into immoral monsters (Baldwin, 2021). These traditions have also variably highlighted theories of neocolonialism (Thiong'o, 1992), which have pointed out how these systems are often maintained and made possible by non-white-identifying peoples who come to defend and believe in the European-descended hierarchy of being (i.e., white supremacy); they do so because they are afforded benefits and limited independence.

As Tuck and Yang (2018) also elucidated, justice is a contested and disputed concept. Like Tuck and Yang, we think about justice as not beholden to teleological understandings of cause and effect (i.e., a singular, linear path from oppression to an agreed-upon, "right" way of doing justice) but instead as an "imperative:" justice as a "direction," not as an "end" (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 11). For the purposes of this article, we assessed how a school counseling intervention affected a student's understanding of *justice* and *injustice* in relation to how justice is theorized and practiced within the prevailing tradition reviewed above.

Hip-hop school counseling and South Asian diasporic youth in the United States

Research has shown that youth involved with hip-hop are often not being served by school counselors within U.S. schooling contexts and are regularly making use of hip-hop to process, cope with, and challenge systemic injustices (Wong & Peña, 2017). Because hip-hop originated as an African diasporic culture and art form during the 1970s in the United States, this research has rightfully focused on youth identifying as African American and/or racialized as Black (Love, 2012). Relevant to this article, this work has also notably included studies of Desi youth contending with race, class, gender, and sexuality in New York City (Maira, 2002), the Silicon Valley (Shankar, 2008), and more broadly across the United States (Raja, 2019).

Since the 2000s, a growing number of school counselors have integrated hip-hop into their work to help youth process life experiences with systemic injustices through the analysis of hip-hop lyrics (Elligan, 2000). More recently, Washington (2021) illuminated how hip-hop and rap music can be used in counseling to explore Black boys' experiences with social injustices, such as hypercriminalization, and to promote critical consciousness. School counseling research has indicated that lyric writing can function as a tool for emotional self-awareness and coping with stress (Levy, 2019). Interventions such as school studio creation also have suggested that hip-hop practices facilitate self-expression, identity transformation, and social and emotional development (Levy, 2021). In spite of this burgeoning field of hip-hop and school counseling, there has yet to be a peer-reviewed academic study

examining hip-hop-based school counseling with South Asian youth, let alone Bangladeshi diasporic youth, in the United States.

YPAR and hip-hop in school counseling

YPAR has long been leveraged to foster youth's critical media literacy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) and to support conversations around power, privilege, and race (Welton et al., 2015). Although limited in school counseling, YPAR has emerged as a group counseling process to support youth in emotionally processing and challenging injustices impacting their lives (Edirmanasinghe, 2020) and in advocacy skill development (Langhout et al., 2014). Scholars have suggested that the orientation of hip-hop's cultural practices to social justice makes it consistent with the principles of YPAR (i.e., agency, equity, self-determination; Akom, 2009).

Based on this precedent, Levy et al. (2018) developed the CCMC as a hip-hop-based YPAR and school counseling process wherein youth construct hip-hop songs to research, discuss, write, record, and process their thoughts and feelings about social injustices. The CCMC pulls from hip-hop cultural notions of a mixtape, defined here as a youth-driven project (e.g., songs, cover art, videos, original instrumental beats) that documents lived experiences to advocate for social change (Ball, 2009). Using the CCMC, students identify an issue impacting their lives and then collaboratively research and create a project to remedy that issue (Levy et al., 2018). Levy and Travis (2020) found that the CCMC process positioned youth to tell their own stories, while allowing for reductions in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, and thus held potential as an intervention for addressing emotional stressors and targeting injustices that produce stressors. In the current study, we used the CCMC as a hip-hop-based, small-group YPAR school counseling intervention through which a Bangladeshi youth composed lyrics to process injustice.

Researcher positionality

We are a counselor educator and a linguistic anthropologist who work in education contexts. We respectively lived and worked on Lenape and Tongva/Yaanga lands and met close to a decade before this study.

Levy identifies as a white, Jewish male who constantly grapples with his privilege as a researcher and cis-het man. He has a range of prior experiences as a school counselor and emcee, specializing in the use of hip-hop-based counseling practices to support student development. The sum of his interactions with hip-hop personally and professionally informed his development of the CCMC as an approach that aids students in emotional self-reflection and combating social injustices. His previous work with South Asian youth helped him understand how students used hip-hop to grapple with what it meant to be racialized as Asian, and to process living within Black and Latinx working-class communities in New York City. In this study, he was careful not to overdetermine his interpretations based on this knowledge but brought questions about the transferability of these previous experiences.

Wong is racialized and gendered as an Asian, cis-het man, with heritage from the Cantonese diaspora, and grew up in predominantly working-class communities of color. Experiencing hardship and oppression within the racial, settler, capitalist context of Southern California's Inland Empire, hip-hop became an organic, culturally sustaining mechanism for his mental health. Given his experiences with systemic anti-Asian racism, growing up within working-class communities of color, and his relation with hip-hop, he knew that he would benefit from his life experiences when a South Asian student volunteered to participate in the study. However, Wong also knew he would likewise have to be careful not to make assumptions (i.e., "reflexivity of uneasiness;" Wong, 2019, p. 29).

Purpose of the present study

Our purpose in this qualitative study was to examine a student's understanding of justice, as well as the impact of injustice on his well-being, through hip-hop mixtape making. The data were collected

during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing Black Lives Movement and, crucially, the white supremacist insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. In this study, we made use of the CCMC as a hip-hop-based YPAR methodology, followed by a hip-hop-based mode of narrative inquiry (decoding) to analyze the story of a student, SB (pseudonym), told through lyrics and a two-hour interview. The CCMC process provided SB the opportunity to artistically share his story on his own terms, and the interview provided SB the opportunity to interpret his story with us. In this study, we sought to answer two research questions:

(1) How does hip-hop mixtape making support the student in understanding justice?
(2) How does hip-hop mixtape making help the student explain the personal impact of injustices?

Method: the CCMC

Procedure: mixtape curriculum

Following Institutional Review Board approval, in January 2021, Levy facilitated a CCMC small group at a high school in New York City. Eight students volunteered for a 16-week (January–April 2021) group during which they identified an area of interest, researched and digested content for their project, developed a product, recorded and planned the release of the project, and evaluated the mixtape process and response to the release. Each day, the small group of students met on Zoom, where they engaged in the CCMC-aligned goal of the day. Coincidentally, the first group session was held on January 6, 2021, at the same time as the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC. So, while selecting their CCMC topic, the students were witnessing and/or experiencing white supremacy in real time.

Throughout the CCMC process, lyric writing occurred live on Zoom. When facilitating specific activities (e.g., researching an article or video related to the insurrection), breakout groups were used before discussion, and lyric writing with the whole group took place. By the end of the small groups, youth participants disseminated hip-hop songs by uploading them to Genius (https://genius.com/) and annotating their lyrics. The students also shared their stories (via hip-hop songs) at a virtual showcase, hosted by Levy in collaboration with his institution and the students' high school. After the showcase, all youth were offered an opportunity to participate in this study, which would include submitting their lyrics to us and participating in a two-hour interview about the work they created in the small group. The group collectively decided that one student, SB, would best describe their group work and had a powerful song that should be shared widely. The final stage of the CCMC requires that it be evaluated for effectiveness. To do this, we used a hip-hop-inspired mode of narrative inquiry to decode (Jay, 2011) SB's lyrics and place them in the context of his interview. In this way, the CCMC process traverses the intervention, data collection, and analytic process, which is a YPAR process designed for simultaneously researching and applying hip-hop school counseling (see Figure 1 for how the CCMC maps onto YPAR and how it played out in our research with SB).

Participant: SB and the colonial context

SB identifies as a Bangladeshi male and was 18 years old at the time of the study. He is one of a significant diaspora of migrants to New York City fleeing ongoing neocolonial conditions in Bangladesh (i.e., Bengali ruling elites beholden to Western interests following the country's formal "independence"). He attended a high school in New York City which comprised 600 students across Grades 6–12. Demographically, the student population was 91% Hispanic, 4% Black, 3% white, and 1% Asian, with 16% of students having disabilities, 80% receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and 6% being English learners.

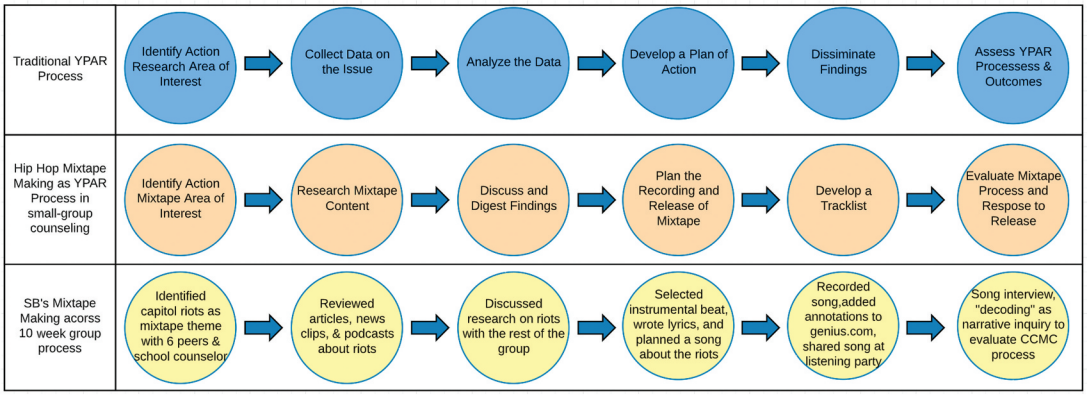

Figure 1 A school counselor's use of the critical cycle of mixtape making as youth participatory action research.

Mixtape data collection and analysis

Two forms of qualitative data were collected in this study and used for this data analysis: a hip-hop song created by SB and a 2-hour interview with him about the context behind his song. The song, entitled "Away," was initially inspired by the white supremacist insurrection on January 6, 2021, but further evolved into SB making sense of his place in the United States as a Bangladeshi immigrant. Hoshmand (2005) suggested that the meaning of a story is best understood when a privately constructed self-account is placed in context, so SB's story is his hip-hop song in the context of his interview. (To listen to SB's song for this study, "Away," and read the lyrics, visit https://bit.ly/3QD8T1d.)

To assess how SB's engagement in the CCMC process helped him reconcile his understanding of justice, we chose to employ a hip-hop-based mode of narrative inquiry (Josselson, 2011), which we refer to here as *decoding*. This mode of analysis was inspired by the Jay-Z (2011) book, *Decoded*, in which he assesses his lyrics in the context of issues of justice throughout his life (i.e., interpreted through the lens of hip-hop's fifth element: knowledge of self). "*Decoded* is . . . a collection of lyrics and their meanings that together tell the story of a culture, an art form, a moment in history". Much like narrative inquiry, decoding enabled us to gather insight into SB's lived experience through his telling of his own stories in oral and written form (Josselson, 2011), by "interpreting the story, placing it in context, and comparing it with other stories" (Patton, 2015, p. 128). Analysis of emergent themes within a narrative is one appropriate strategy for narrative inquiry (Hays & Singh, 2012); in this case, we used hip-hop lyrics and an interview for decoding.

At the onset of this process, we copied transcriptions of the lyrics and interview into separate Word files to be read multiple times toward the generation of codes eventually grouped into themes. To ensure rigor about the meaning behind the student's story, we independently generated separate lists of themes and then met to compare our interpretations and generate an agreed-upon list of themes (Patton, 2015). As a hip-hop-based trustworthiness measure, we withheld reviewing SB's lyric annotations on Genius so they could function as member checking to cross-validate our list of themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The final list of themes contained quotes from SB's song and interview, allowing the meaning of his hip-hop lyrics to be understood in context in a manner that also centered SB and honored his work.

Findings

As part of the CCMC process, SB created and shared his story, "Away." We use quotes from both the song and the interview in this section to share his story of self. A series of themes emerged from decoding both the lyrics and the interview to answer our two research questions. We titled each theme

with a descriptive phrase (e.g., "Does the U.S. government represent justice?") and a corresponding lyric from SB's song ("The words they say"). The contents of each theme consisted of interview quotes and lyrics. We analyzed these themes through the lens of our theoretical framework of justice, which enabled us to make sense of SB's story in the context of how justice is conceptualized within theories and praxis of movements for collective freedom (Davis, 2012).

Research question 1: how does hip-hop mixtape making support the student in understanding justice?

Does the U.S. government represent justice? ("The words they say")

SB's song begins with "I wish I could keep on dreaming/The words they say/They have no feelings." Throughout the interview, he shared his frustrations about the U.S. government and how Congress members were elected to enforce justice but were not doing so. SB's developing realization could be said to align with long-standing analysis by decolonial and abolitionist scholars who locate the United States as a white settler, capitalist nation-state foundationally based in historical and ongoing systemic domination, exploitation, and cruelty (see Davis, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2018). He saw the white supremacist rioters storm the U.S. Capitol to stop the confirmation of a democratic election without serious obstacles (Hawkman & Diem, 2022). This occurred as SB also witnessed Black and other people of color protesters for #BlackLivesMatter criminalized without any real action being taken to address the ongoing assault and murder of Black people by the police.

As a result of both this action (e.g., quashing #BlackLivesMatter protests) and inaction (e.g., white supremacists being allowed to storm the U.S. Capitol) by the U.S. government, SB was beginning to question the ontology that he had learned in Bangladesh and during his U.S. schooling: that the U.S. government *is* justice. Following the riots at the U.S. Capitol and SB's ongoing attempts to defend the United States and its policies (both personally and during school debates), it became increasingly difficult for him to say that the U.S. government works and aims for freedom for anyone who is not racialized as white:

> All those four years of frustration and all the things that's going on is just . . . were in my head, and also I was involved in Debate Team, so there were many issues [laughter]. . . . Yeah, I went into national competition as well, so there would be arguments where sometimes I would have a hard time to defend U.S. and many of the policies. So, yeah, I got personally involved in many things. So, yeah, it's been a long four years.

Unifying with white supremacists is not justice ("Unity you say")

Within his lyrics and interview transcript, SB interrogates the calls for unity that came following the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol: "Unity you say but Everyone's screaming/Spread love don't hate/But we all in this nation still bleeding." In alignment with analyses by scholars such as Davis (2012)—"Our unity must be emancipatory. It cannot be simplistic and oppressive" (as quoted in Kelley, 2012, p. 15)—SB thinks about how calls for an uncritical unity were evidence of a different standard of justice afforded to the white rioters, which he contends was the result of the history and legacy of white supremacy in the United States:

> I would say superiority view of certain things, you might feel like . . . Yeah, inferiority complex. Some people don't want to be inferior to others. They wanna be the one who's like top and better one, so that can . . .. Yeah, that leads to racism. From the history, I can say white people always thought they were better because they had technology and this, so they felt like gods and like this and that.

SB argues that people constructed as "white" developed a "superiority view of certain things" because of how they developed technologies that led them to think they were "better." He connects this historical feeling of "superiority" ("they felt like gods and like this and that") to how the U.S. government responds. The government, especially its leaders (e.g., Trump), refuses to hold the white rioters responsible for the figurative "bleeding" that they caused by storming the U.S. Capitol, as if they are "gods."

Police perpetuate injustice from Bangladesh to the United States ("so much for freedom where is it")

In the early part of the interview, SB attempts to rationalize the state-sanctioned murder and police brutality taking place against people racialized as Black by taking up widely circulating anti-Black scripts ("sometimes they can act a little bit aggressive"). This dominant white supremacist ideology gives police officers the benefit of the doubt and locates police as belonging to an institution of "freedom" that would only brutalize or kill by accident or for good reason. Thus, people racialized as Black are constructed as the problem ("When you see someone resist something, you try to use more force against it so you can be on top of the situation").

However, in the interview transcript, when we question SB about why people racialized as Black are more "aggressive" toward the police, he begins to reflect on whether this anti-Black script is true. He begins connecting the experience of people racialized as Black to the unjust experiences his father had in Bangladesh with Pakistani police:

> Yeah, Black people here and my family . . . we had to migrate from one area to another or back to get into a safer area where the Pakistani police and also Pakistani military police wouldn't be harsh on us. My dad told me, and also my grandma used to tell me, how they had to always look down and not speak up. We couldn't speak up, and we couldn't even talk a little bit aggressively or louder. We had to obey everything they say. I think Black people can relate to it because not everyone can speak up loudly, and if they do . . . then white people, especially police officers, they will see it as negatively, and they're like, "Oh yeah, you're trying to be aggressive against me." . . . I think that's something that can be related there. Because when you're being oppressed, you just don't have power. You just feel vulnerable, and you're at a disadvantage there. There's no equal there. It's just one force is way more powerful. The other one is just obeying whatever you have to . . . Whatever they put on to, you just have to do it, and you don't have any choice.

SB processes how the very violent and dehumanizing experiences, which his father had as a Bangladeshi man, resembled the treatment that Black people receive in the United States. Rather than people racialized as Black and his Bangladeshi father being prone to being more "aggressive," SB begins to make the connection that the colonial regime in, respectively, the United States and Bangladesh have the power to decide who is and is not "aggressive." Following justice scholars such as Davis (2012), Estes (2019), and Thiong'o (1992), SB begins to make the connection that the structures of policing in the United States and Bangladesh are perhaps broadly an extension of colonialism in each context. Although not making the connection that the neocolonial Pakistani regime was only made possible by a global white supremacist project (i.e., the lands of Bangladesh were colonized by the British, who ceded control of Bangladeshi lands to the Pakistani nation-state, followed by seizure of power by Bangladeshi elites beholden to Western interests; Huque, 1997), nor calling for abolition of policing and carceral systems, SB begins to see how policing is connected to racism and serves to get particular populations to "obey:" "So much for freedom where is it[?]."

The white time for justice ("maybe someday everything will be okay")

SB shares the affective pain and frustration of having to wait for justice in his poignant refrain: "Is this hell where I will have to stay/Ohhh/Why can't I just sleep away/Maybe someday everything will be okay/Or I'll just sleep away." Reflecting on this refrain in his interview, SB revoices and ratifies a popular white liberal theory of "slow" progress which argues that racial justice is a matter of gradually and strategically helping individuals get comfortable enough to change their unjust and racist beliefs (Fleming, 2022), which is not something that any one person can change and cannot be rushed. This white liberal theory of slow progress leaves SB feeling like he does not have any real agency to change injustice and might as well "sleep away:"

> You start slowly. It's not going to happen right away. It's a generational process. It's going to take time. One generation after another, you start to understand more and more and start to get better. . . . As human beings, sometimes we want everything to be solved right away, but not everything . . . The racism is deeply rooted into our society. I think it's going to take time, and in order to do that, you have to start it slowly, from the bottom up.

In contrast to SB's revoiced white liberal theory of slow progress, theorists of justice, such as Fleming (2022), have broadly challenged these calls for slow progress as actually being strategic stalling efforts by those who benefit from existing systems. The radical refusal to wait for justice was perhaps best expressed by King (1963) in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail:"

> Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." *(para. 11)*

Thus, although SB powerfully recognizes the cost of waiting for justice, he misses how justice deferred is no justice at all. This is no fault of SB on his own but, rather, more indicative of the systemic domination of theories of progress by white supremacy.

Injustice happens because of individual ignorance and lack of education ("You throw hate")

As SB witnesses anti-Black racism taking place during the Black Lives Movement, and as more broadly being expressed by the rioters and white supremacists, he tries to make sense of why racism is happening: "You throw hate but I try my best to keep it cool/You spread lies thinking you're right/Never looked in a mirror to see you're a fool." In these lyrics, SB rearticulates a widely circulating script within the U.S. nation-state: that racism is the ahistorical result of irrational and ignorant hatred by individuals against other individuals, rather than being about persisting and developing institutions and systems of white supremacy. That is, in the context of the U.S. and white settler nation-states, people are understood to personally (re-)create racism through their own ignorant words and actions, rather than racism being an ideology used to rationalize and justify systems of domination that make use of exploitation, assemblage, subordination, segregation, and violence to "demarcat[e] the colonial rule of Europe over non-Europe" (Hesse, 2016, p. viii; i.e., white supremacy). Operating from an individualist theory of racism, the second-person interlocutor (*you*) only makes sense to SB if you are holding racist beliefs because you have not been taught better.

With this theory of racism, SB's theory of change rearticulates hegemonic neoliberal scripts theorizing that racism can be eradicated if racist individuals come to see that their hatred is irrational through "education:"

> I know in the country we have, each state [has] different regulations for education. I think anything you wanna do, you wanna start it from bottoms up, like low-class family and also education. Like younger kids, you wanna start teaching them, and properly. . . . Don't just view white people also being extremely bad as well, but even though they have done bad things in the past, if you point the fingers at people even now, they will get defensive about it because then they will feel, even though some people are comfortable with it, they'll get defensive about it. No one wants to see their race being bad, even though their grandparents or someone from the past might have done bad things. No one wants to see themselves as being the bad person.

Revoicing one of the recurring and crucial tenets of white supremacist, individualist theories of racism, SB takes for granted that races naturally exist and have always existed in the ways that he understands them ("No one wants to see their race being bad"). He expresses how racist hatred is something that every person can hold if they are not careful, and therefore levels the racism experienced across races as being the same ("Don't just view white people also being extremely bad as well"). In this way, bringing up "bad things in the past" done by certain races (i.e., white people) becomes unproductive. If racism is only about the beliefs that one holds, then talking about racism of the past can make the targeted person feel like a "bad person" and create more hatred (i.e., perpetuate racism). The modernist present is taken for granted as already being free, where racism is an anachronism and relic of the past, rather than systemic.

Research question 2: how does hip-hop mixtape making help the student explain the personal impact of injustices?

Disillusioned by racist stereotypes ("Fooling with me like I'm high")

As SB is processing his verse, when prompted, he brings up how he sees racism functioning in his life as a migrant from Bangladesh. Similar to many migrants of color, who hear and internalize the propaganda that the United States is a bastion of freedom and equality, SB comes to the reality that this is a lie: "Fooling with me like I'm high." He begins to make sense of this almost hallucinogenic lie in alignment with intellectuals such as Baldwin (2021), who also poignantly situated the lie of U.S. freedom in the lie of whiteness:

> The lie has penetrated to our most private moments . . . It is a crisis of identity. And in such a crisis, at such a pressure, it becomes absolutely indispensable to discover, or invent, . . . the stranger, the barbarian, who is responsible for our confusion and our pain. Once he is driven out—destroyed—then we can be at peace.
> *(pp. 23–24)*

In the interview transcript, as SB reflects on his lyrics, he recounts how the lie had come home for him as he encountered classmates and people in his life who made sense of him through one-dimensional racist stereotypes. Even though SB had not yet come to the Baldwinian analysis that racist stereotypes about him were being used to elevate the United States and the lie of whiteness (i.e., white supremacy), he is clear that these racist stereotypes obscure the truth and need to be openly challenged:

> We have a very small population there [SB's school], and kids would ask me sometimes, "Why did [you] move here, and is it nice over there [in Bangladesh]?" And they would often think Bangladesh is a run-down, broken country. I'm like, "There are places that are run-down, there are places that are nice and super chill, but yeah, you get both, mix of all of it."

Although SB shares that his family migrated from Bangladesh because of the difficulty and dangers of life there, he is shocked and disappointed in how his classmates come to think about Bangladesh as a country with nothing good about it ("a run-down, broken country"). Yet, SB speaks truth to power: There is always joy and thriving taking place alongside harm and violence ("you get both, mix of all of it"). Although SB acknowledges that his family experienced oppression as a result of colonialism and ongoing exploitation, he is disturbed by how often the complexities of Bangladesh, his family's migration, and the lives of Bangladeshi peoples inside and outside the United States are flattened and painted with dehumanizing assumptions and judgments.

Alienated by systemic racism against Asian migrants ("You convince us we Equal")

Considering his experiences as a young man who immigrated from Bangladesh, SB reports strong feelings of alienation that coincide with the findings of long-standing research on the racialization of South Asian migrant youth in the United States. Although SB revoices what has been referred to by justice scholars as the model minority myth (see, e.g., Reyes & Lo, 2009)—a white supremacist ideology that Asians are an ideal minority, which proves racism and oppression do not exist anymore—he finds discomfort with this myth. Although SB is still working through how racism functions in the lives of his Black classmates, his experiences with anti-Asian racism help him question the model minority myth and bring him closer to struggles for racial justice. Throughout the interview, SB details how he felt judged and excluded because of the ways he was racialized through language (i.e., a widely studied feature of the "forever foreigner" stereotype of U.S.-based Asians, whereby they are positioned as never being able to speak a naturalized variety of English and thus never become a "real" American; Reyes & Lo, 2009). Thus, amid a white supremacist insurrection and the ongoing Black Lives Movement, SB also grapples with the unacknowledged feeling that he will never feel a sense of belonging in the United States, no matter how hard he tries to study English and do what is expected of him:

> Sometimes I would feel left out because I couldn't speak English, and I would have difficult time articulating to someone what I'm trying to get at and what I'm trying to point at. Like, I don't know if they even deceived me in

> front of me or not, but I did feel uncomfortable the way I spoke. And I felt like what if someone is judging me, the way I speak, and what if they're talking behind my back. Those are the kinds of feelings . . . Even though sometimes before you can even say anything, you're just in your head. As an immigrant, it's just constantly in your head.

Discussion

Although hip-hop has now been widely documented as being able to support U.S.-based youth racialized as Black and Latinx in processing and coping with injustices (Ball, 2009), this study extends this research to youth racialized as Asian within school counseling spaces, specifically South Asian youth from the Bangladeshi diaspora. As an African diasporic cultural and artistic form, this study continues to ratify hip-hop as not just being bound to advancing "Black freedom," but what Davis has referred to as "collective freedom" (as quoted in Kelley, 2012, p. 15). That is, hip-hop mixtape making was a tool that provided SB the opportunity to become more critically conscious not only of the injustices facing Black communities but also of the ways white supremacy functions in relation to the U.S. government, Bangladesh, anti-Asian racism, and structures of policing across the world. Like Jay (2011), the process of creating and reflecting on original hip-hop lyrics helped SB work toward developing a knowledge of himself as a Bangladeshi immigrant young man, which included understanding his relation to the white supremacist rioters at the U.S. Capitol and his Black neighbors experiencing police brutality and killings in their families and communities.

This finding corroborates Wong's personal experiences and ongoing research elucidating how hip-hop has been a way for U.S.-based Asian and Pacific Islander working-class youth to work through and challenge systemic injustices (Wong & Peña, 2017). It is way to process forms of coloniality and oppression affecting people racialized as Asian and Pacific Islander, as well as, perhaps imperfectly, anti-Blackness and forms of systemic domination, exploitation, and cruelty impacting communities across the world (e.g., SB's commitment and ongoing struggle to unlearn anti-Black scripts). These findings also support prior hip-hop work, including Travis's (2013) individual and community empowerment framework, suggesting the transferability of hip-hop's knowledge of self to South Asian diasporic youth in the United States who access hip-hop lyric writing as a tool for self-expression, negotiation of injustice, and identity exploration (Levy, 2019; Travis, 2013). Further, and especially as a counselor educator who identifies as a White cishet man born and raised in the U.S., listening to and discussing hip-hop lyrics offered a glimpse into SB's lived experience in a way that might otherwise have been incomprehensible.

In sum, SB's engagement with lyric writing as an avenue to process injustice supports scholarship suggesting that both hip-hop and YPAR can be integrated into school counseling work for students to process emotional distress, and to activate youth in generating actionable solutions (Edirmanasinghe, 2020; Levy & Travis, 2020). As found in other qualitative inquiries, SB's ability to process, research, and report on media surrounding the insurrection further validates the CCMC as YPAR to foster youth's critical media literacy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008); engage with power, privilege, and race (Welton et al., 2015); support advocacy skill development (Langhout et al., 2014); and work toward cultivating a critical consciousness (Washington, 2021).

Limitations

Although we focused this study on a Bangladeshi young man processing injustice in the context of New York City, hip-hop is a form of art that seeks to challenge systemic injustices. Thus, this research is highly transferable to understanding how youth make sense of colonization, policing, and broader processes of systemic domination, exploitation, and cruelty. However, this study is limited in its transferability in considering how hip-hop functions differently with youth living outside of urban or inner-city contexts and spaces outside of the U.S. nation-state. Additionally, this study took place in New York City, where it may be easier for a school counselor to openly process an event like an insurrection without

pushback from the school administration or larger community. Namely, in the present context of the early 2020s, there are U.S. states where anti-critical race theory efforts impinge upon discussing the nation's history of racism, as well as social and emotional programming in schools (Meckler, 2022). This is a significant factor in considering the transferability of a justice-centered model like the CCMC, which intends to support youth's development of emotional self-awareness and advocacy skills in the context of systemic injustices. It must also be noted that we racialize as a white, Jewish man and an Asian man and do not have embodied experiences with South Asian-ness, nor Blackness or Latinidad. Therefore, we acknowledge that our respective embodiments shaped how we interpreted a U.S.-based Bangladeshi youth navigating an African diasporic culture. There is no unbiased or normative interpretation (Wong, 2021), and we fully expect researchers with different embodiments to interpret SB's experiences in other ways.

Future directions

As we consider future research studies, scholars must consider the use of hip-hop interviews with youth racialized as Asian, which currently occupies only a sliver of the extant hip-hop-based research. We encourage mixed-methods research with larger sample sizes, across multiple school sites. Theoretically, this study advances the use of a hip-hop-based YPAR process that includes infusing hip-hop practices in data collection and analysis (i.e., lyric annotations as member checking, decoding as narrative inquiry). Scholars should be encouraged to continue to theoretically reimagine how they design interventions and collect and analyze data in ways that are congruent with and sustain cultural practices. In fact, it is evident that the facilitation of an artist interview as part of the CCMC data collection and analysis may have offered SB a chance to explore his thoughts and feelings about justice at a deeper level. This murkiness between what is intervention and what is data collection and analysis should be explored further, perhaps through artist interviews and stand-alone interventions to assess the meaning behind music created by students.

Practically, future directions include school counselors' use of small hip-hop groupings so youth can collectively process the world around them. Youth can be further supported in disseminating the findings from their small groups to teachers, principals, and other educational stakeholders toward structural changes via mixtape making (see Figure 1 as a guide). We also recommend more opportunities for furthering participatory governance, such as having youth on committees, including school boards, where they can engage in the CCMC process to report on and generate school- and district-wide policy changes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Ian P. Levy is an assistant professor of counseling and therapy and the director of the school counseling programs at Manhattan College. He worked as a school counselor in New York City for five years, specifically in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. His research examines hip-hop-based practices in schools as a culturally responsive approach to counseling wherein students process difficult thoughts and feelings through the writing, recording, and performing of emotionally themed music.

Casey Philip Wong is an assistant professor of the social foundations of education in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University. His interdisciplinary research examines justice in educational theory, policy, and practice by interrogating systems of coloniality, carcerality, and oppression in education through critical feminist, anti-colonial, and abolitionist frameworks and by investigating and developing culturally sustaining and strength-based pedagogies to teach and learn otherwise. He researches and collaborates with communities to affirm, foster, sustain, and revitalize educational institutions and relations that critically center overlapping and interconnected African/Black, Indigenous, Latinx/a/o, Asian, and Pacific Islander communities.

ORCID

Ian P. Levy http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4798-0224
Casey Philip Wong http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1412-4317

References

Akom, A. A. (2009). Critical hip hop pedagogy as a form of liberatory praxis. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *42*(1), 52–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680802612519

Alim, H. S., & Haupt, A. (2017). Reviving soul(s) with Afrikaaps. In D. Paris & H. S. Alim (Eds.), *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world* (pp. 157–174). Teachers College Press.

Alim, H. S., Paris, D., & Wong, C. P. (2020). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A critical framework for centering communities. In N. S. Nasir, C. D. Lee, R. Pea, & M. M. de Royston (Eds.), *Handbook of the cultural foundations of learning* (pp. 261–276). Routledge.

Baldwin, J. (2021). *Nothing personal*. Original work published 1964. Beacon Press.

Ball, J. (2009). Freemix radio: The original mixtape radio show: A case study in mixtape "radio" and emancipatory journalism. *Journal of Black Studies*, *39*(4), 614–634. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934707299640

Chang, J. (2005). *Can't stop, won't stop: A history the hip hop generation*. St. Martin's Press.

Davis, A. Y. (2012). *The meaning of freedom: And other difficult dialogues*. City Lights Publishers.

Duncan-Andrade, J. M., & Morrell, E. (2008). Youth participatory action research as critical pedagogy. *Counterpoints*, *285*, 105–131. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42979872

Edirmanasinghe, N. (2020). Using youth participatory action research to promote self-efficacy in math and science. *Professional School Counseling*, *24*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X20970500

Elligan, D. (2000). Rap therapy: A culturally sensitive approach to psychotherapy with young African American men. *Journal of African American Men*, *5*(3), 27–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-000-1002-y

Estes, N. (2019). *Our history is the future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the long tradition of Indigenous resistance*. Verso.

Fleming, J. B., Jr. (2022). *Black patience: Performance, civil rights, and the unfinished project of emancipation*. New York University Press.

Hawkman, A. M., & Diem, S. (2022). The big lie(s): Situating the January 6th coup attempt within white supremacist lies. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *22*(5), 490–504. https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086221094883

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. Guilford Press.

Hesse, B. (2016). Preface: Counter-racial formation theory. In P. K. Saucier & T. P. Woods (Eds.), *Conceptual aphasia in Black: Displacing racial formation* (pp. vii–x). Lexington Books.

Hoshmand, L. T. (2005). Narratology, cultural psychology, and counseling research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *52* (2), 178–186. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.178

Huque, A. S. (1997). The impact of colonialism: Thoughts on politics and governance in Bangladesh. *Asian Affairs*, *28* (1), 15–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/714041319

Jay-Z. (2011). *Decoded*. Spiegel & Grau.

Josselson, R. (2011). Bet you think this song is about you": Whose narrative is it in narrative research? *Narrative Matters*, *1*(1), 33–51. https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nm1_1art02

Kelley, R. D. G. (2012). Foreword. In A. Y. Davis (eds.), *The meaning of freedom: And other difficult dialogues*. (pp. 7–16). City Lights Publishers.

King, M. L., Jr. (1963). *"Letter from a Birmingham jail"*. African Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania. https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

Land, R. R., & Stovall, D. O. (2009). Hip hop and social justice education: A brief introduction. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *42*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680802631238

Langhout, R. D., Collins, C., & Ellison, E. R. (2014). Examining relational empowerment for elementary school students in a yPAR program. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *53*(3/4), 369–381. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-013-9617-z

Levy, I. (2019). Hip-hop and spoken word therapy in urban school counseling. *Professional School Counseling*, *22*(1b), 2156759X1983443. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19834436

Levy, I. (2021). *Hip-hop and spoken word therapy in school counseling: Developing culturally responsive approaches*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003023890

Levy, I. P., Cook, A. L., & Emdin, C. (2018). Remixing the school counselor's tool kit: Hip-hop spoken word therapy and YPAR. *Professional School Counseling*, *22*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X18800285

Levy, I., & Travis, R. (2020). The critical cycle of mixtape creation: Reducing stress via three different group counseling styles. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, *45*(4), 307–330. https://doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2020.1826614

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Love, B. L. (2012). *Hip hop's li'l sistas speak: Negotiating hip hop identities and politics in the New South*. Peter Lang.

Lyiscott, J. J., Caraballo, L., & Morrell, E. (2018). An anticolonial framework for urban teacher preparation. *The New Educator*, *14*(3), 231–251. https://doi.org/10.1080/1547688X.2017.1412000

Maira, S. M. (2002). *Desis in the house: Indian American youth culture in NYC*. Temple University Press.

Marciano, J. E., Peralta, L. M., Lee, J. S., Rosemurgy, H., Holloway, L., & Bass, J. (2020). Centering community: Enacting culturally responsive-sustaining YPAR during COVID-19. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, *14*(2), 163–175. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-04-2020-0026

Meckler, L. (2022, March 28). In 'social-emotional learning,' right sees more critical race theory. *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/28/social-emotional-learning-critical-race-theory/

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.

Raja, S. (2019). *2Pac was a true Paki: A brief survey of South Asian American participation in hip hop* [Plan II Honors thesis, The University of Texas at Austin]. Texas ScholarWorks. https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/75497

Reyes, A., & Lo, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Beyond yellow English: Toward a linguistic anthropology of Asian Pacific America*. Oxford University Press.

Shankar, S. (2008). *Desi land: Teen culture, class, and success in Silicon Valley*. Duke University Press.

Thiong'o, N. W. (1992). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. East African Publishers.

Travis, R., Jr. (2013). Rap music and the empowerment of today's youth: Evidence in everyday music listening, music therapy, and commercial rap music. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *30*(2), 139–167. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-012-0285-x

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2018). Introduction: Born under the rising sun of social justice. In E. Tuck & K. W. Yang (Eds.), *Toward what justice? Describing diverse dreams of justice in education* (pp. 1–17). Routledge.

Washington, A. R. (2021). Using a critical hip-hop school counseling framework to promote Black consciousness among Black boys. *Professional School Counseling*, *25*(1), t. 4. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X211040039

Welton, A. D., Harris, T. O., La Londe, P. G., & Moyer, R. T. (2015). Social justice education in a diverse classroom: Examining high school discussions about race, power, and privilege. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *48*(4), 549–570. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2015.1083839

Wong, C. P. (2019). *Pray you catch me: A critical feminist and ethnographic study of love as pedagogy and politics for social justice* [Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University]. SearchWorks. https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/13250127

Wong, C. P. (2021). The wretched of the research: Disenchanting *Man2-as-educational researcher* and entering the 36th chamber of education research. *Review of Research in Education*, *45*(1), 27–66. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X21990609

Wong, C. P., & Peña, C. (2017). Policing and performing culture: Rethinking "culture" and the role of the arts in culturally sustaining pedagogies. In D. Paris & H. S. Alim (Eds.), *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world* (pp. 117–138). Teachers College Press.