From Our Cell to Your Block: Hip Hop and Podcasting as a Youth Participatory Action Research Intervention

Ian P. Levy[1] 🟢 and Michelle Bell[1]

Abstract

This narrative inquiry explores the experiences of youth in a school within a juvenile detention facility, who participated in a hip hop and podcasting small-group counseling intervention. Specifically, youth wrote and recorded a podcast consisting of a hip hop song, interviews with their peers, and staff reflections on the youth's experience. Salient results from this study offered that the hip hop podcasting group supported youth in emotionally processing their experience of being incarcerated.

Keywords

hip hop, podcasting, social/emotional development, school counseling

Introduction

"We're just caught up in the wind. Forgotten about like that."

The above quotation is from a student who, while attending a school within a juvenile detention facility in California, participated in a podcast interview with their peers during an innovative small-group counseling intervention. Describing their experience in this school, the young person's feelings of being forgotten or uncared for are, unfortunately, not surprising. Resources and support are significantly lacking for providing social/emotional interventions to youth in detention centers, even while these same youths are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health disorders and/or psychological stressors (Walden et al., 2019). Youth often display an array of psychological concerns before and during incarceration, such as disruptive behavior, impulse control difficulties, and conduct-related disorders (Whitley et al., 2022). Amidst the lack of avenues to express themselves within juvenile detention centers, youth often experience feelings of disengagement, powerlessness, and decreased self-worth (Kearley et al., 2021). The U.S. education system is predisposed to looking at Black and brown youth through a mental health disparity lens (i.e., the labeling of youth as distressed, disruptive, or disengaged; Holcomb-McCoy, 2021). As part of an effort to implement counseling services that reject a deficit lens in favor of highlighting youth's assets (internal talents, skills, abilities), research calls for the integration of youth participatory action research (YPAR; Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022). Within YPAR research,

school counselors are asked to identify these very same youth as uniquely able to reflect on their experiences within broken systems as they work to co-generate creative solutions to systemic inequities.

As a creative approach to YPAR, scholars have turned to hip-hop-based practices in group counseling. Literature suggests that hip hop music making in counseling with Black and brown youth supports both the processing and challenging of social, political, and economic inequities (Levy, 2021; Travis & Maston, 2014; Washington, 2021). Hip hop music has been transformed as an outlet for marginalized youth to share their attitudes and experiences living in poverty and their ways of adapting to these life circumstances (Hains et al., 2021). Over time, Black and brown youth continue to transform the ways that hip hop culture has been leveraged to share stories across various technological mediums such as blogging/vlogging, radio shows, streaming, and podcasting (Anyiwo et al., 2022). Hip hop functions as a tangible mechanism for counter-storytelling, or the sustaining of authentic stories that can be erased and/or forgotten due to the dominant (and often problematic) narratives. Consequently, this study explores the use of a hip-hop-based small-group counseling intervention within a

[1]Manhattan College, Bronx, NY, USA

Corresponding Author:
Ian P. Levy, Department of Counseling and Therapy, Manhattan College, 4513 Manhattan College Pkwy, Bronx, NY 10471-4099, USA.
Email: ilevy01@manhattan.edu

high school in a juvenile detention facility, to support adjudicated youths in making sense of their experiences within the juvenile justice system.

Adjudicated Youth and Recidivism

Adjudicated youth are youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system and have been found to have committed the act for which they were charged (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d). Research suggests that interventions targeted toward adjudicated youth often aim at increasing protective factors or decreasing risk factors for recidivism (Evans-Chase & Zhou, 2014). Recidivism is measured for adjudicated youth either placed in the community following a period of incarceration or released directly into the community with some form of support services (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001). Recidivism rates vary and are impacted by environmental factors and personal characteristics such as gender, type of offense (violent/nonviolent), academic achievement, and type of postadjudication intervention (Blomberg et al., 2012). Recidivism rates are highest for adolescent youth with high rates of substance use (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Conversely, positive experiences in institutions (such as services matching youth's needs and the facility's environment) are associated with decreasing the risk of recidivism (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014).

Assessed at admission, adjudicated youth are known to have high levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs; Narvey et al., 2021), which increase the risk for psychological distress (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019). Youth who enter incarceration with high ACE scores and low levels of empathy are also at an increased risk for recidivism (Narvey et al., 2021). Counseling interventions that increase empathy can mitigate the effects of ACEs on recidivism (Narvey et al., 2021). Counseling interventions that increase internal resilience, family communication, or school connectedness or that foster peer relationships may be helpful in reducing psychological distress for those with high ACE exposure (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019). Therefore, we propose the use of group counseling interventions with adjudicated youth to support the processing of psychological distress.

Group Work With Adjudicated Youth

Ample evidence suggests group work can support adolescents' academics (Goldstein et al., 2015), career (Dispenza et al., 2016), and emotional processing (Marino et al., 2015). Group work can also support adolescents in coping with psychological distress (Edwards et al., 2014), with mindfulness approaches showing efficacy in navigating emotional stress (Wisner & Norton, 2013). In fact, for youth who are incarcerated, mindfulness-based group counseling has shown promise in improving developmental outcomes (Leonard et al., 2013). However, group counseling interventions for youth who are incarcerated appear limited within the literature, with more

group interventions happening at the community level (Karam et al., 2017; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001). In group work with adolescents generally, creative approaches like using music, drama, cinematography, bibliotherapy, visual arts, and/or digital storytelling have emerged as powerful tools for reducing distress (Martin et al., 2018; Sawyer & Willis, 2011). Bibliotherapy and music therapy have been shown to help adolescents cultivate a clearer self-image and develop social and emotional skills to process difficult life events (Levy, 2019; McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013).

Hip Hop and YPAR in Group Work. More recent school counseling research suggests YPAR as a viable approach to group work, to aid youth in processing life experiences while also challenging the larger systemic determinants (Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017). YPAR is a group counseling process where youth traverse (a) identifying a salient issue impacting their lives, (b) researching their identified issue, (c) discussing and sorting through findings, (d) creating a product about their issue, and (e) disseminating their project (Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017). The YPAR group process is inherently malleable because the topics selected and the products generated are wide. However, YPAR is effective because of its ability to honor youth as experts in both processing their lived experiences and developing solutions to systemic issues within their world(s). Staff play an essential role as co-investigators in the group process, in helping guide youth through the YPAR steps, and in leveraging their own resources to amplify the products youth create. A scoping review on YPAR (Levy et al., 2023) found arts-based approaches particularly beneficial in supporting youth's social/emotional, academic, and career development. Specifically, YPAR projects that result in the creation of hip hop music (Levy & Travis, 2020), photovoice (Edirmanasinghe, 2020; Williams et al., 2020), blogs, vlogs, or art galleries (Cook et al., 2020; Enright & Gard, 2018) were particularly effective.

Notable within YPAR and creative approaches to group work are the use of hip-hop-based strategies (Levy, 2021). Broadly, the use of lyric writing, recording, and performing to process and share emotional experiences in a group context have been found helpful in reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among adolescents (Levy & Travis, 2020). Further, the use of these strategies bolsters social/emotional outcomes like increased confidence, a strong sense of community and collaboration, and experiencing joy and stepping out of their comfort zones (Travis et al., 2022). Other hip hop elements or artistic expressions, such as dancing (Levy et al., 2021), graffiti/visual art (Adjapong & Levy, 2021), and recording studio construction (Levy & Adjapong, 2020), can be integrated into group counseling processes to support youth's expression and combating of societal ills. Akin to digital storytelling (Parikh-Foxx et al., 2020), hip hop has long been a pathway for youth to share untold narratives and create new possibilities (Chang & D'Cook, 2021). Most adolescents are heavily influenced by mass media, such as television, social media, and music, making school counselors' attunement to hip hop and its continued

evolution paramount (Chang & D'Cook, 2021). As youth continue to push hip hop forward (particularly through the development of new technologies), school counselors must remain aware of new hip hop modes of expression that can be integrated into their work (Levy, 2021). Therefore, in this study, we explored the potential for a new approach to hip hop counseling that integrates podcasting as an approach to hip-hop-based digital storytelling to support adjudicated youth in self-expression, social/emotional development, and navigating psychological distress to make sense of their experiences within the juvenile justice system.

Podcasting as Narrative

Considering the importance of leveraging youth culture in the elevation of practices (Rawls & Petchauer, 2023), podcasting has entered popular discourse over the last decade, by way of hip hop artists and journalists creating their own shows (Griffith et al., 2022). Podcasting has been successfully used in educational settings where students learn to improve their communication skills, collaborate with their peers, and gain confidence in their work (Besser et al., 2021). Guggenheim et al. (2021) suggested that podcasting can create a space for students to uncover their identities as writers and storytellers. Podcasting is beneficial for youth development in regard to making personal, real-world, and thematic connections within their work (Besser et al., 2021). Podcasting can also lead to communication with others, allowing youth to examine and express critical theories on an individual, community, and structural level (Ferrer et al., 2020). Podcasting is especially important for students "who are too often silenced both within and outside of the classroom" (Guggenheim et al., 2021, p. 38). Given the inequities and gaps that continue to exist in most school environments, marginalized students may lack the confidence to thrive in those settings. Thus, within a podcast, students can capture their emotions and thoughts, revealing their vulnerabilities to the world. Personal narratives in podcasting show to listeners the similarities and shared experiences that may exist between the same cultural or ethnic group (Lindgren, 2016). Previous literature on podcasting stresses the importance of sharing personal experiences for listeners and recorders to make sense of their lives, because the stories "open up windows on our universal human struggle" (Lindgren, 2016).

Historically, hip hop shows like *MTV News* or *Yo! MTV Raps* helped to foster an "understanding of hip hop as more than just an entertainment genre but also as deeply embedded in, reflective of, and building with culture, community, and identity" (Griffith et al., 2022, p. 382). Today, podcasting holds a place within hip hop culture in the form of what Griffith (2021) named "process texts," or opportunities for artists to share, dissect, or explain the larger meaning and context behind their creative process. Thus, a hip hop podcast might sound like an artist breaking down their lyrics or interviewing a third party about their lyrics. For example, after the passing of famed rapper Mac Miller, a podcast called *Dissect* offered an in-depth listen to Mac's most recent album, placing individual lyrics in specific contexts to better understand the meaning behind the project (Cuchna, 2021). Both hip hop and podcasting serve as artist-driven processes to both make sense of personal experiences and advocate for social change. Like hip hop, podcasting should be framed as a mental health tool that gives Black and brown youth a chance to create their own narratives that speak back against the dominant, and often problematic, narratives shared about them. We believe in the potential for the integration of hip hop podcasting (creating podcasts about hip hop products) in a group counseling process. Although previous research (Levy, 2021) has shown evidence for hip-hop-based approaches to group work in school counseling, no research has explored the initial use of podcasting.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of youth in a school within a juvenile detention facility, who participated in a hip hop and podcasting small-group counseling intervention. More specifically, this qualitative study sought to understand how a creative small-group counseling intervention supported youth in making sense of their experiences within the juvenile justice system. Two distinct questions guided this study:

1. How does the podcasting intervention support the students' expression of their experience in the juvenile justice system?
2. What was the perceived impact of the intervention by critical support staff and participants?

Methods

Participants

The individuals who participated in the small-group counseling intervention outlined in this study are considered adjudicated youths who were incarcerated at the time of implementation. The school counselor in this study hosts his own podcast, *Lunchroom Cypher*, which explores the intersections of hip hop and youth development in schools. In preparation for the second season of his podcast, he sent a message on Twitter to a network of hip hop educators, inquiring about any group of youth that would be interested in creating an episode that would be featured on his podcast. A principal from a school within a juvenile detention facility in California responded, and independently selected a group of students they believed would be interested in a podcasting project. Thus, in the current study, a school counselor (the lead author) facilitated a YPAR and hip hop small group with incarcerated youth in which they created a hip hop song and podcast episode about their experiences in the juvenile justice system. A total of eight students volunteered to take a 90-minute podcasting elective class once a week for 7 weeks. The students ($N = 8$) all identified as male, were ages 15–17, and

identified as Latinx ($n = 6$), Black ($n = 1$), and American Indian ($n = 1$). The school counselor and teaching artist both identified as White males, and the school principal identified as a White female.

Procedure: A Hip Hop and Podcasting YPAR Process

The seven-session hip hop and podcasting small-group counseling intervention was primarily co-facilitated by a school counselor (the lead author) and the school principal. Each week, the school counselor joined the classroom via Zoom, while the principal provided in-person support for the students in the group. Although the pre-identified goal of this group was to create a song and a podcast, the counseling process was guided by YPAR. This means the group underwent the following:

- Session 1: Students discussed podcasting, listened to snippets of podcasts, and identified a theme (inequities in the juvenile justice system) to explore.
- Session 2: Students researched the juvenile justice system, taking notes on their own experiences and on articles and videos about schools within juvenile detention facilities.
- Session 3: Students began outlining their project, based on research, which included writing and recording a hip hop song titled "Cell Walls" and then recording a podcast about the music.
- Session 4: Students participated in the writing of their song, "Cell Walls."
- Session 5: A guest artist, Josh "Optx" Levine, visited the students to record "Cell Walls."
- Session 6: Students elected a podcast host from the group and co-generated a list of interview questions for the host to ask the group members.
- Session 7: Students recorded the podcast episode, in which the host interviewed each artist about their contributions to the song.

The YPAR process described above was facilitated by the school counselor, who created an activity for each week that allowed an organic group process to emerge. YPAR requires school counselors to accept the true essence of group work: going where the group goes. This means that while YPAR itself is replicable, no single YPAR and podcasting intervention will look the same. For example, the second session (when participants research their topic) cannot be planned until the first session (when the topic is identified) is completed. To offer more illustration, during the first week, students were tasked with reflecting on what interested them in podcasting, podcasts they have listened to, and topics they feel impassioned about. The discussion about these reflections enabled the school counselor to pull up podcast snippets for collective listening and to identify the students' interest in sharing their stories of incarceration with the world. In preparation for the second session, the school counselor spoke with the principal to access

data about adjudicated youth (at both the county and national level) to bring to the students to parse through during their research. This included offering students hard data to reflect on and articles that described the conditions of juvenile centers across the country. Students' reflections on their research supported the generation of content for their project, which they then recorded and disseminated. School counselors' attunement to group process and their skills in locating and presenting data to support student growth make them uniquely suited for the delivery of YPAR.

To further explore the impact this process had on students, the school counselor met with the principal and teaching artist after the group had concluded. Together, the school counselor, teaching artist, and principal discussed the process they witnessed youth undergo, listened to the song and student interviews, and then reflected on the students' work. These conversations were recorded and added to the podcast episode, which was subsequently released on the *Lunchroom Cypher* podcast. The podcast episode opens with a conversation between the school counselor, the principal, and the teaching artist, in which they discuss what it was like to work with youth as they created a hip hop song and podcast episode about their experiences being incarcerated. This segment is then followed by the students presenting the hip hop song/lyrics about the injustices they have experienced, and closes with the students interviewing each other about the meaning behind the lyrics they created for the podcast. The podcast is publicly available on streaming platforms: https://bit.ly/3q7VIfI

Data Collection and Analysis

Three forms of qualitative data were collected in this study: a hip hop song created by the students, students' interviews with each other, and the school counselor's conversation with the school principal and teaching artist. In a total of eight student interviews, the students answered three questions regarding the purpose of writing their lyrics, how the lyrics reflected their situation, and to break down the meaning behind a self-selected lyric. The questions and interview format were co-generated by students during the sixth session of the YPAR process, as detailed above. The school counselor held the responsibility of interviewing the principal and teaching artist about observations of the youth's YPAR process, using semistructured questions that sought to understand how the youth interacted and the changes they witnessed. Their observations provided insight into the context for the hip hop song (i.e., the juvenile justice system and school the youth attended) as well as the impact of the podcasting intervention on the youth's development. The podcast, entitled "From Our Cell to Your Block" was created by the students as they collectively aimed to tell their story of being locked up in a juvenile detention center. The making of a song for the podcast further evolved into the students and staff making sense of their lyrics.

Treating students' YPAR project itself as data (Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022), we transcribed the podcast

episode in full for data analysis. This data included quotations and themes generated from the podcast conversation between the school counselor, principal, and teaching artist. With the students' hip hop song lyrics and interviews, we triangulated these quotations and themes to answer the research questions. The entire podcast episode contains all of the data collected (i.e., school counselor, principal, and teaching artist reflections, and student song and interviews in their entirety). To assess how the youth's engagement in the hip hop and podcasting process helped them to understand the juvenile justice system, we chose to employ a narrative inquiry (Josselson, 2011). In this approach, researchers work to gather insight into the participants' experiences through their telling of their 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). The student podcast lends itself nicely to a narrative inquiry because it represents a story within other stories; in this case, the student interviews, and interviews with the school staff, helped to place the hip hop song (the story) in context. Hoshmand (2005) suggests that the meaning of a story is best understood when a privately constructed self-account (i.e., the hip hop song) is placed in context (i.e., the interviews).

Analysis of emergent themes within a narrative is one appropriate strategy for narrative inquiry (Hays & Singh, 2011). Following a thematic coding process outlined by Josselson (2011), we downloaded transcriptions of the qualitative data sources (the podcast audio recording) into a Word document to be read multiple times, individually, by the lead author and second author. We each took this initial step independently to begin to compile the central themes of the narrative. Next, each author sought to identify subthemes that were representative of detailed meaning assigned to various parts of the narrative. We then engaged in multiple readings of the transcripts to attempt to view the story through the various identities of the participants, in an effort to further contextualize the meaning of the narrative. Finally, we compiled a list of central themes that collectively represent the meaning behind the participants' lived experiences (Josselson, 2011).

Positionality and Trustworthiness

The lead author identifies as a White male counselor educator and former school counselor, who constantly grapples with his privilege as a researcher and cisgender, heterosexual man. The combination of his experiences as a hip hop artist, podcast host, and practitioner of hip hop and school counseling interventions informed the development of the intervention in this study. He used trustworthiness strategies (detailed below) to ensure that his belief about the utility of hip hop as a developmental tool did not impact his appraisal of the youth's podcast. The second author identifies as a bilingual, bicultural, White, Latina, cisgender, heterosexual, female psychologist and professor, and as a mother, wife, and daughter; navigating all roles with an awareness of her privilege and an awareness that she has blind spots to her privilege. As a systems therapist and thinker, she is

naturally drawn to exploring the ways broader systems and relationships in which youth exist impact their functioning. She used trustworthiness strategies (detailed below) to maintain awareness of how her previous experience as a forensic psychologist within the New York City Family Court system could impact her perceptions about the youth participants and the intervention.

We used various trustworthiness strategies identified as important for improving the credibility and reliability of the data (Hays & Singh, 2011). After each of the two researchers developed two separate lists of themes, we met to compare our analyses, discuss differences in interpretations, and reconcile lists of central themes and subthemes (Patton, 2015). This is one process through which we sought to ensure the trustworthiness of the results. The act of discussing different findings in search of consistency and verifying condensed lists attempted to ensure rigor and agreement about the meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Together, we also sought to thoughtfully practice bracketing and intentional reflection on our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of student data. The aim was to critically consider what could cause bias and otherwise affect our epistemic stances and conclusions (Carpenter, 2007). This critical reflexivity process occurred primarily through a reflexive diary, where we could record thoughts, feelings, and biases regarding how the research process was impacting us, our reactions to participants, and any anticipated findings (Hays & Singh, 2011). Although a formal member check was not included in this study, a formal piece the of podcasting process did allow youth the opportunity to provide reactions/feedback on the podcast episode. Specifically, during the final YPAR group session, the youth and staff listened to the full podcast episode together and discussed the quality/validity of the final project (including the content that was utilized to develop the themes).

Results

The results of this study were generated from a narrative inquiry of the students' podcast episode. Our first question, regarding students' expression of their experience, was analyzed via the students' music (i.e., hip hop lyrics) and interviews on the podcast episode. Our second question, regarding staff perceptions of the impact of the podcasting intervention, were answered via the reflections of the school counselor, teaching artist, and principal on the podcast episode. The results from our data analysis are organized below, by research question.

Research Question 1: How Does the Podcasting Intervention Support the Students' Expression of Their Experience in the Juvenile Justice System?

Our first research question was answered by two themes, containing a total of five subthemes. The first theme, a personal struggle, contained three subthemes: isolation, regret, and trapped. The second theme, owning the narrative, contained two

subthemes: offering advice and sharing their story. Pseudonyms (Student Host, Student A, Student B…) are used to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

A Personal Struggle. Youth in the podcasting interviews were offered an opportunity to grapple, out loud and with their peers, about their social and emotional experiences while incarcerated. Within their song and podcast interviews, students attending this school within a juvenile detention facility reported enduring a personal struggle, composed of feelings of isolation, regret, and being trapped. Feeling left alone or forgotten during their incarceration, students experienced regret about the choices they made, while also feeling mentally trapped while trying to find a way through their struggle. As we explore the results for each subtheme, we present example quotations and lyrics.

Isolation. Students in the hip hop podcast group spoke about feeling left behind or forgotten once incarcerated, explained here as isolation. For example, in one lyric, Student A recited: "How you say you're real if you're not answering my phone calls?/ Ain't talking to no calls rather talk to my cell wall." In this lyric, Student A is questioning the loyalty or thoughtfulness of family and/or friends he attempts to contact, given their consistent failure to respond to his outreach. Feelings of isolation appear to leave Student A choosing to speak with his cell wall instead. The youth chose to name the song "Cell Walls," and this lyric is the hook/chorus for the song. This suggests that the group shares, and is unified by, this same message of isolation. Further, when reflecting on their lyrics, Student C stated:

> A part that I don't think they understand is you know, we're in here and everyday we're thinking about everyone on the outs but everyone on the outs probably ain't thinking about us. You know when we come in here, I feel like our lives get put on pause, and you know for however long we're in here for.

Reporting on similar feelings of isolation, Student C indicates that they feel the world has moved on without them. With their life on pause, Student C wonders if those on the outside are even thinking about them. The group process of identifying shared emotional experiences to compose a song and podcast about it allowed participants to find commonality and collectively support each other through their shared experience—the anthesis of isolation. The ability to find camaraderie within that felt isolation underscores the essential nature of group work.

Regret. During the podcast episode, students also described a sense of regret they experienced while incarcerated. As they attempted to reconcile their choices, students referred to feeling personal responsibility for their situation. In a lyric, Student E alluded to this personal responsibility when reciting: "And I did this to myself I got no one to blame/ And I'm locked in these cell walls I got nothing to gain/ And I'm locked in this cell all I feel is this pain." Lyrically, Student E explores the pain he experienced

while processing feelings of regret, which generated the immobilizing thought that he was locked up and had nothing to gain. Similarly, during their interview, Student B stated, "This is our view of being up in here, this is how we living. You know this ain't the place to be, but I put myself up in here." In his interview, Student B sought to describe a difficult circumstance, illustrate the conditions to listeners, but also take accountability for the situation he was in. The students' ability to explore difficult and often silenced thoughts and feelings through lyrics and podcast interviews was powerful. This happened within the context of small-group counseling sessions where youth were literally able to step out of isolation (i.e., their cell walls) and express regret that they would otherwise grapple with alone.

Trapped. The feelings of isolation and regret students reported during incarceration help explain why they also communicated emotional distress or felt trapped in their own emotional experience. Rhyming about being stuck physically and emotionally, Student C recited: "Locked in these cell walls, I got nothing to gain/ And I'm locked in this cell and all I feel is this pain./ All these problems in my head and it feel like the rain." In this quotation, Student C suggests that the physical nature of being locked in a cell parallels his experience of feeling stuck. Within that context, he spoke of emotional pain that continued to flood his mind like rain. Commenting on their experience writing rhymes about incarceration, Student D said:

> Just, being here, just sucks, you feel me? Like you go nowhere. I feel like I'm going nowhere. Every time I come here, it just makes me more angry. Makes me just not care. Longer I'm here, makes me not care. And then when I'm just locked in my room, you know sometimes could be for being in trouble more here. I just let my emotions get to me and that's where the pain starts to come in. I hate it. I let my mind get to me.

Student D explains how frustrated he is that he continues to find himself back in a juvenile detention center and locked in his room, placing blame on his own emotional state (allowing his mind to "get to" him). Students' reports of feeling trapped are not just merely being incarcerated, but physically being locked in the cell. It is within the cell that the pain, and the idea that they are stuck with no way forward, is amplified.

Owning the Narrative. Youth within the hip hop podcasting group worked collaboratively to explore their own narratives, beyond the dominant narratives told about them. The podcasting intervention offered youth a medium where they could tell their stories, on their own terms. Through their song and interviews, youth offered advice and ensured that their story was shared to challenge misconceptions. As we explore the results for each subtheme, we present example quotations and lyrics.

Offering Advice. Various students used this podcasting opportunity to offer advice to those also incarcerated and to their friends and family on the outside. In his lyrics, Student E

promoted the need for both taking ownership of the time (not allowing the time incarcerated to have a further negative impact on their mental states) before offering positive encouragement to his mother: "Like brother said, free our brothers out the cell walls,/ We doing time, time ain't gonna do us./ We gonna make it happen momma, just wait and see./ We gonna make it happen momma, just wait and see." In his own interview, the Student Host shared a message with the audience about the purpose of his lyrics:

> I just want you to know if you're in my situation, if you're in my shoes, for those who can't rap around anything, listen to this song, this is for you, you know if you're living in my shoes, this is for you.

Part of the students' experience being incarcerated is wanting to encourage and support others who might be in similar situations. They are calling on hip hop traditions to treat their own lived experience as knowledge, and using hip hop products to share powerful messages with a target audience. Through the hip hop podcasting process, youth not only explored their experiences being incarcerated, but channeled those experiences through creative avenues in an attempt to uplift others.

Sharing Their Story. Youth participating in this group also composed lyrics and engaged in interviews for the purpose of sharing their story. The group held a common understanding that people told stories about them, without really knowing who they were or what they'd been through. In this sense, via sharing stories through a song and a podcast, the students thoughtfully challenged public perceptions of those who are incarcerated. Student D offered a perfect example of this type of counter-narrative when he rhymed:

> When you see me do you see me against you, is that all you see?/
>
> Are you seeing a demon? We're trying to see some peace?/
>
> Thinking bout that last get I can not sleep./ Thinking bout that last get I can not sleep.
>
> Thinking about that last get I can not sleep.

In this lyric, Student D asks the audience whether they see him as a person or as a threat. Much like the stereotypes projected on hip hop music, the students are communicating that they feel they are viewed as violent or dangerous, and that no one is able to see their humanity. Further exploring this reality, Student C described how his lyrics clarify why he engaged in the act that led to his incarceration:

> Basically, you know, I found a tough time in my life where I had to get it on my own and basically, just, I did start selling, you know, just to have shoes on my feet you know, so like I said in the beginning, I did what I had to do. I had to really get out of the mud.

The youth in this group found it imperative to make people on the outside understand why they did what they did, and to see them as human. Having access to a hip hop podcasting intervention facilitated a storytelling process where youth could tell their authentic story and combat deficit narratives.

Research Question 2: What was the Perceived Impact of the Intervention by Critical Support Staff and Participants?

Our second research question was answered by one theme, an organic counseling process, containing a total of three subthemes: youth driven, relating to each other, and sharing vulnerability. Data within this section is composed of quotations from staff (i.e., the principal, teaching artist, and school counselor) who participated in the intervention and were interviewed on the podcast. Analyzing this data, we were able to explore the youth's story through the lens of the staff members' reflections on the impact of the hip hop podcasting group intervention.

An Organic Counseling Process. As the staff reflected on youth's participation in the hip hop podcasting small-group intervention, they mutually agreed that it functioned as an organic group counseling process. In particular, they each described how the counseling process was youth driven, and allowed for youth to develop strong relationships with each other. We detail these three themes with quotations and lyrics as illustrative examples.

Youth Driven. The staff were impressed with how much of a lead the youth took in creating their group's song and podcast. On his visit to the school to record the hip hop song featured on the podcast, the teaching artist offered the following explanation of the group process in that session:

> A snowball effect, meaning it started slow, they heard one person rap, they heard another person rap, they heard two or three be put together on one song and you can tell there was an energy in the room like, this is sounding good, and then content they were putting into it, it was as real as it could be, they were talking about like trying to call home and no one's answering it.

The teaching artist perceived a very genuine group interaction among youth, in which they accessed a level of group cohesion and collaboration to collectively record their music. From the perspective of the teaching artist, the youth's authentic engagement with hip hop music making allowed the group to collaborate together on processing a difficult emotional challenge. In this sense, their cohesion in the music-making process mirrored the desired interactions among young people who take ownership of the group counseling process. The teaching artist was describing an ideal moment in group work: bearing witness to a self-sufficient group process.

In another example, results further suggest youth actively collaborated with each other to complete their project. The teaching artist described seeing this collaboration in action:

We would be stuck at one point and everyone would kind of chime in—boom, we would get it, move on. So it was almost like a group effort to kind of begin, like an open floor to wherever anyone wanted to jump in and help with the lyric we were stuck on. And so the feeling wasn't sad, even though the topic was like a very strong emotion. But there was definitely a feeling of, like, group. This was like a group that was banding together.

The process made evident that the youth supported each other lyrically, helping to generate rhymes when their peers got stuck. Harkening back to youth feeling stuck emotionally, or that their minds got the best of them, this group process was quite the opposite. Through the group process, the youth expressed their emotions, were heard by their peers, and tapped into skills that served them well as leaders and collaborators.

Relating to Each Other. During the youth-driven group process, staff also witnessed youth develop new relationships with each other. Specifically, the principal spoke about being very surprised that youth who were in rival gangs put aside tensions to work on this project. She stated:

Yeah, it's just really incredible when they come together in this sort of way because they build these shared experiences both in the process of writing and recording but also they've had similar experiences just being in those shoes, and some of those students in that room are in rival gangs but that's not how they act when they come together on a piece like this, so they're able to see the humanity in each other, I think, and find what's common, which is important.

The staff perceived youth being able to see their peers more fully and authentically, and to cultivate empathy with each other around their shared experience of being incarcerated. The staff further validated the aforementioned data that suggested students were able to share their personal and emotional struggles during the song and podcast creation. The staff also reported that youth celebrated the talents and skills of their peers during group work. Specifically, the group corralled around the host, who was able to learn of his innate ability to write interview questions, ask open-ended questions to his peers, and to lead a recorded interview. The principal reported the host "is just a natural so that was a really cool thing to see that talent he didn't even know he had, come out." In sum, not only did the podcast group allow youth to overlook prior relational tensions and see the humanity in each other, but it helped youth to see themselves, their talents, and to share their stories.

Sharing Vulnerability. The students' collaboration may also have supported their emotional expression, as staff further observed increases in emotional vulnerability among the group members. The principal, who has spent ample time individually with students in this group, stated:

They don't talk about these things with each other often enough, I think. So that's the power of sitting down with one another, asking questions and really listening to each other's answers. A lot of times they're worried about appearing weak or vulnerable or whatever with each other, so it's always good when they can take that wall down even if it's just a little while.

Youth in this group experienced a unique opportunity to speak with each other about shared emotional stressors. The staff described how the hip hop podcasting group helped youth to formulate questions to each other to more clearly share their stories. The principal's comment, about the cultural and social acceptability of sharing vulnerabilities and demonstrating empathy through a hip hop song and podcast, adds to youth data that illustrates the importance of stepping out of isolation to collectively share their emotions.

Discussion

Salient results from this study demonstrate that the hip hop podcasting group supported youth in emotionally processing their experience of being incarcerated. In their song and podcast interviews, youth named their time incarcerated as a personal struggle that encompassed feelings of isolation, regret, and being trapped. The students' feelings of isolation mirror research suggesting that a lack of outlets for expression (i.e., having to talk to one's cell wall) can generate feelings of disengagement, powerlessness, and decreased self-worth (Kearley et al., 2021). In the current study, as in extant literature, hip hop group work offered a means to step out of isolation and collectively process and challenge shared experiences with social, political, and economic inequities (Levy, 2021; Travis & Maston, 2014; Washington, 2021).

Given this experience, youth actively used their song and podcast episode to own their narrative, where their rhymes and interviews attempted to offer advice and share their story for those that needed it. Prior literature suggests that hip hop podcasts are "process texts" that allow artists to illustrate how their stories transcend entertainment and are intimately connected to their culture, identity, and community (Griffith, 2021; Griffith et al., 2022). Relatedly, various studies have explored the use of hip hop cultural processes like lyric writing, mixtape making, dancing, and studio construction as group work processes for students to explore their stories (Levy, 2019; Levy & Adjapong, 2020; Levy & Wong, 2022). Youth were able to be creative via this hip hop podcasting intervention, which is aligned with how Black and brown youth have historically leveraged hip hop as a tool to build resilience and combat racial inequities (Anyiwo et al., 2022). Youth processed their internal experience (isolation, regret, feeling trapped) to "express themselves authentically, promote cultural pride, and critique the social ramifications of structural inequity" (Anyiwo et al., 2022, p. 611). This current study demonstrates the congruence between hip hop and YPAR, in which an ideal outcome is that youth learn about their strengths and assets to reject deficit labels placed on them, and to advocate for the amelioration of the negative social phenomena (Edirmanasinghe et al., 2022).

Corroborating the youth's reporting of their experiences, data from staff reported benefits for youth who participated in the hip hop and podcasting group. Namely, staff saw the hip hop podcasting intervention as an organic group process that was youth driven, supported youths' ability to relate to each other, and allowed for vulnerable sharing. These findings aid the claim that the hip hop podcasting group functioned as an innovative approach to YPAR in group counseling, where youth are co-investigators and draw from their internal knowledge (Levy et al., 2023). Like the current study, general podcasting research with youth has indicated improvements in communication skills, collaboration, and self-confidence (Besser et al., 2021). The results in this study support prior claims that hip hop cultural processes (like music sharing or recording) organically serve as a communal and cathartic experience for participants, amidst a lack of traditional counseling services (Emdin et al., 2016). Part of the origin story of hip hop is about leaders from rival gangs in the Bronx banding together to unify the community, combat larger systemic issues, and heal (Chang, 2005); this is also reflected in the ability of the youth in this study to put aside gang-related tensions to build relationships with each other.

The intervention also demonstrated specific benefits for adjudicated youth who are incarcerated. This study extends research showing hip hop and group work interventions can support social/emotional wellness (Levy & Travis, 2020). Reflecting further on the results, the group appears to have fostered a positive environment among youth and staff, in which the youth were able to engage in sharing their emotional distress. These findings indicate a possible benefit for youth who participate in a hip hop podcasting group intervention because studies show that incarcerated youth with positive experiences in institutions are at decreased risk for recidivism (Shepherd et al., 2016; Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). This study offers a rationale for the use of hip hop podcasting group work interventions at schools within juvenile detention facilities, where too often social/emotional development services are overlooked (Walden et al., 2019). Youth who enter juvenile detention centers tend to have elevated ACEs and higher levels of psychological distress (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019), and youth participating in this study's intervention were able to explore their own stories on their own terms. This study added to the literature both on podcasting and on hip hop and school counseling by offering support for the use of hip hop podcasting in group work to aid youth in processing and sharing their stories.

Implications

The implications of this study are manifold. First, qualitative data now supports the use of hip hop and podcasting as a school-counseling-based group intervention. Although more evidence is needed to evaluate the impact of this type of group work quantitatively on youth outcomes, this article offers curricular support (in the Methods section) for those looking to integrate podcasting into their practice. Second, for school counselors looking to assist the students they serve in discovering new skills or talents (assets), YPAR groups like podcasting are recommended. Although not the specific focus of this study, some of the data suggests that students might have gained skills related to their career development (e.g., writing, interviewing, public speaking); therefore, such an intervention could be useful for school counselors engaging in postsecondary preparation. Although this study occurred within a school in a juvenile justice facility, we have no reason to believe that hip hop podcasting interventions cannot be used in traditional schools to support youth in telling their own stories and growing in various developmental domains. That is, youth across public and private schools are in need of group work interventions to process emotions and challenge systemic issues impacting their well-being, particularly Black and brown male youth, who may benefit from participating in gender and culturally congruent interventions. Hip hop and podcasting interventions offer one possible method for those very services.

Limitations

A few limitations to this study exist. The small sample size led to an entirely qualitative inquiry, whereas a mixed-methods study might have helped to triangulate results. Tracking the growth of the youth in this study longitudinally would be valuable, to assess whether the reports of protective factors (social/emotional development, a positive environment) have a tangible impact on recidivism rates. Another limitation is that our research team had access to a local teaching artist to assist with the audio recording process and a school counselor who had experience with lyric writing and podcasting; necessity for these particular skills among staff might be a threat to the replicability of this method. However, we encourage school counselors to consult or form new community partnerships to fill any gaps in their arts-based facilitation skills.

Conclusion

This hip hop podcasting small-group intervention was implemented with youth within a school in a juvenile justice facility. Utilizing a narrative inquiry study design, we analyzed data collected as part of a YPAR project with incarcerated youth. Findings indicate that the hip hop podcasting intervention is an organic group process that may be helpful for incarcerated youth in processing their personal struggles, sharing those experiences, and having a positive experience within their institution. This type of intervention may also assist incarcerated students with social/emotional development (e.g., relating to others, processing emotions, vulnerability). Possible benefits of this intervention include youth having a positive experience within the institution and processing difficult experiences, both which have been shown to decrease recidivism, and fostering peer relationships, which may help decrease psychological distress for youth with high ACE exposure.

Future research is recommended within this area to further assess the benefits of hip hop and podcasting group work with this population and beyond.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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ORCID iD

Ian P. Levy https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4798-0224

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Author Biographies

Ian P. Levy, Ph.D., is an associate professor of counseling and therapy and chairperson with Manhattan College in the Bronx, NY. Email: ilevy01@manhattan.edu

Michelle Bell, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of counseling and therapy, also with Manhattan College.