Addressing Social Injustice with Urban African American Young Men Through Hip-hop: Suggestions for School Counselors

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Abstract

In this manuscript, the author discusses how hip-hop and rap music can be used to as a tool for social justice advocacy to stimulate urban African American young men's sociopolitical empowerment to combat educational barriers. The manuscript includes a historical examination of the environment in which hip-hop culture was conceived. The focus then shifts to how particular hip-hop artists' lyrical content is germane to the social justice advocacy orientation mandate of 21st century professional school counselors working in urban settings. Finally, practical suggestions are be provided for how social justice oriented professional school counselors can apply this content when working directly with urban African American young men.

Keywords: hip-hop culture, rap, urban African American young men, urban professional school counseling, social justice counseling

Introduction

Supporting urban African Americans young men, socially and educationally, requires a conceptual framework and interventions that account for the multiple forms of interfacing institutional and systemic oppression that envelop them (Anderson, 2008; Baldridge, Hill, & Davis, 2011; Love, 2013; Nocella & Socha, 2013; Payne, 2006; Prier & Beachum, 2008; Wilson, 2009). This web of institutional and systemic oppression, some examples more flagrant than others (e.g., stop and frisk, etc.), literally surrounds urban African American young men in ways that narrow their immediate and long-term social and educational opportunities (Henfield, 2013). Perhaps nothing exemplifies this tightening of urban educational opportunities more vividly than the disparities in funding between poor and affluent schools and school districts, the accelerated disinvestment of urban K-12 public schools, educational redlining that re-segregates schools, and the zero-tolerance disciplinary policies that usher young African American

men out of school and into the prison industrial complex (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Love, 2013; Nocella & Socha, 2013; The Schott Foundation, 2012). In sum, funding disparities, the mass closing of urban schools, school resegregation, and the school-to-prison pipeline - all issues that disproportionately impact students of color in very profound ways - represent legitimate civil rights and social justice violations because of the immediate and long-term social and economic ramifications they have on urban students, their families and communities.

It is ironic, indeed, that as The United States commemorate the 60 year anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), issues of racial and class inequality in education persist for urban young African American men today in much the same way as they did at the time of the passage of that landmark piece of legislation. Because present day injustices exacerbate preexisting educational inequality and reproduce the educational status quo, educational adults including professional school counselors must intervene (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Toldson & Lewis, 2012; Toldson, 2008, 2011).

Disrupting the educational status quo in relation to urban African American young men, however, demands a willingness among urban school counselors to have ongoing conversation with these students about why racially-biased educational injustice is antithetical to the ideals of democracy and equality, and how they can work to become more empowered (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). This approach exemplifies what it means to be a social justice school counselor and serves functional purposes (Griffin & Steen, 2011). When deliberately engaging young African American men in this type of conversation, urban school counselors can reiterate and reinforce the racial socialization messages African American parents have been known to communicate to their children, messages which are thought to mitigate potentially deleterious impacts on a number of psychosocial and cognitive domains for African American children and adolescents (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin & Cogburn, 2008; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Stevenson, 1995).

Rather than broaching these issues with conventional counseling theories, methods, and resources, Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007) believe the empowerment of marginalized students like urban African American young men should ideally include "the art, culture, and history of ethnic groups" (p. 330). Similarly, Goodman and West-Olatunji (2010) posited that rap music represents such an artform that can assist in school counselors' endeavors to empower African American students. Prior to Goodman and West-Olatunji, many other counselors and counselor educators endorsed the idea of incorporating rap music into therapeutic interactions with African American boys and young men as well (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Lee & Lindsey, 1985; Lee & Simmons, 1988; Lee, 1987). What we see, then, is that across several decades, there has been a recognition within the counseling profession of the utility of hip-hop culture and rap music.

It may come as a surprise to many that the application of rap music, and hip-hop culture, more generally, to the cause of social justice in education is not new. In fact, hip-hop has been championed by many as an effective way of engaging youth in conversation about becoming active participants in transforming the social spaces and educational institutions that have historically worked to marginalize them (Akom, 2009; Baszile, 2009; Bridges, 2011; Land & Stovall, 2009). Land and Stovall assert that rap music and hip-hop culture can serve as catalysts for social justice because:

> Since its inception, hip-hop has been and continues to be a constructive and contested space for the historically oppressed and marginalized to both resist and challenge social ideologies, practices, and structures that have caused and maintained their subordinate position. (p. 1)

Conducting a search for literature on hip-hop will, indeed, yield seminal works that articulate a vision of social justice within education and other settings urban African American young men must navigate (e.g., Kitwana, 2002; Rose, 2008).

What is interesting, though, is the conspicuous absence of the voices of urban professional school counselors and counselor educators from this discourse. This is particularly odd for two reasons. First, hip-hop culture has historically been a mode of expression for urban African American and Latino young men that decried injustices that frequently occurred within their communities at the time of hip-hop's inception. These situations are not unlike those currently witnessed in many communities of color across the nation. Second, given urban school counselors' physical proximity and consistent contact with African American young men, it would be difficult to identify another education profession better positioned to effect change with this group of students.

Have there been periodic references to hip-hop and rap vis-à-vis counseling African American young men in academic settings (e.g., Lee, 1987, 1991)? In a word, certainly. However, as a discipline and profession, professional school counseling has yet to consistently inject itself into the discourse on how hip-hop and rap music can be applied to the work of 21st century professional school counselors. This does not mean that the work from writers representing other disciplines and professions cannot be informative and instructive (e.g., education, teacher education, etc.). On the other hand, it does reflect a dearth within the school counseling literature. Considering the fact professional school counselors are encouraged to be vanguards of educational social justice especially for students who have historically been marginalized (Education Trust, 2003; Griffin & Steen, 2011; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007), explorations of how hip-hop culture and rap music might engender student empowerment seem warranted. This foundational premise, that professional school counselors can use hip-hop and rap music as a tool to advance educational social justice on behalf of urban African American young men, serves as the primary rationale for this manuscript.

In this article, the author sets out to accomplish three primary objectives that reflect a belief that hip-hop and rap music are culturally relevant tools that can empower and support the holistic development of urban African American young men when they are grounded in principles of social justice. First, the author will recount the manner in which African American young men have historically been described through the practice of cultural/intellectual imperialism. Concomitantly, literature will be highlighted to demonstrate how these categorizations of African American young men have informed educational and counseling policy and practice. Third, the author will explore hip-hop culture, and highlight certain lyrics that can serve as a culturally relevant instrument for facilitating empowerment and social critique. Finally, a set of suggestions for professional school counselors; these suggestions will include hip-hop lyrics that have direct relevance to urban African American young men lived experiences and strategies for using lyrics collaboratively with these young men. Before this, though, a clear understanding of how the educational experiences of African American young men have and continue to be disparagingly framed must be achieved.

The Framing of African American Young Men in Scholarly Literature

Despite their many significant contributions to humankind, much of the work conducted in traditional Western sciences (e.g., eugenics and intelligence testing, psychiatry, etc.) and academic disciplines comprising the liberal arts (e.g., anthropology, psychology, etc.) has been wielded for the purpose of oppression. The positivist quantitative paradigm and the etic researcher position it required became the 'golden standard' of scientific inquiry and a driving force in the accumulation of data on the colonized racial and cultural 'Other.'

The framing of the African as cultural 'Other' was far from benign and typified the practice of cultural/intellectual imperialism. The legacy of early cultural/intellectual imperialism informed subsequent research on groups perceived to differ in some substantive manner from what was seen as the standard of measurement (e.g., wealthy, land owning, Christian White men). This research paradigm sought to legitimize the notion of White male supremacy through the creation of a racial hierarchy with Whites situated firmly at the top. This was accomplished, in part, by framing the cultural 'Other' as an oddity juxtaposed against White cultural and behavioral norms. This, consequently, precipitated the portrayal of cultural 'Others', African American men included, as genetically flawed and culturally deviant (Howard, 2013; Gibbs, 1988; Polite & Davis, 1999).

Painted as the cultural and racial 'Other', African American men had to take proactive measures to create intellectual spaces where candid dialogue about their unique experience here in America could unfold. As a counterhegemonic strategy, the centering of the voice of the cultural 'Other' - as will be illustrated later urban African American young men' mobilization of hip-hop - has and continues to be a fundamental epistemological tenet of liberatory praxis against cultural and intellectual imperialism.

Through the lens of Young's (2005, p. 44) conceptualization of cultural imperialism one can observe "how the dominant meanings of society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it as the Other" applies to the lives of urban African American young men. Over time these stereotypes have become reified within the social and educational narrative to inform the manner in which individuals and institutions operate toward the culturally 'Othered' urban African American young man (Dale & Daniel, 2013).

Unfortunately, within the educational and counseling literature, African American young men are usually positioned as the object under examination rather than competent subjects participating in the dialogue about the variables impinging on their life circumstance (Howard, 2013). In other words, African American young men are the "topic of conversation" within the educational and counseling literature rather than "conversation participant" which leaves their 'voice' conspicuously absent. Paternalism rejects and silences this 'voice' from critiquing the cultural imperialism that undergirds racialized common sense notions which inform the way social institutions (e.g., K-12 educational system) perceive and respond to it/them. Inviting urban African American young men as participants into the conversation about how the legacy of cultural imperialism reverberates in their lives, as opposed to their being relegated to the position of sidelined object, represents a paradigm shift espoused within the counseling profession for its social justice praxis possibilities (Shin et al., 2010). Historically, the centering of the voices and experiences of the dispossessed and a precursor to empowerment has epitomized hip-hop culture and rap music.

Hip-hop Culture: Historical Background, Evolution and Contemporary Status

If one is to gain a true understanding and appreciation for hip-hop's socially transformative potential, it is important to first understand the turbulent sociopolitical context in which it first originated. What is now known as hip-hop culture can be traced to distinct Afro-Caribbean cultural and musical roots and influences. Hip-hop culture has been theorized as a composite of four fundamental performative elements thought to reflect the unique worldview, heritage, values and beliefs of people of Afro-Caribbean ancestry dispersed throughout the Diaspora (Love, 2010). The importance ascribed to spirit and immateriality, improvisational creativity, the griot and the art of oral storytelling, collaboration, interdependence, and symbiosis are just a few of the Afro-Caribbean characteristics constituting the essence of hip-hop culture which manifest in the aforementioned four elements. The individuals most commonly identified as hip-hop's progenitors and early contributors (e.g., D.J. Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, KRS-One, and Grandmaster Flash) embodied these influences and those from older musical genres, particularly jazz, blues, funk and spoken word poetry, to conceive a unique cultural form of expression that emphasized harmony and unity, first and foremost.

Hip-hop historians and scholars assert hip-hop culture, particularly the visible components of hip-hop culture (e.g., MCing, breakdancing, DJing, graffiti) were first performed by young African American and Latino men in the Bronx, New York during the late 1970's. At its genesis, hip-hop culture was a mode of expression that served as an outlet for these young men to express their collective frustration about the social environment in which they lived (Prier & Beachum, 2008). At the time, the Bronx, much like other urban American cities, was experiencing seismic socioeconomic shifts. Unlike historical periods when an industrial, manufacturing economic system enabled cities like the Bronx, Chicago, and Philadelphia to flourish, during the 1970's these same cities literally deteriorated as the obsolete industrial economy of the past was quickly supplanted by an increasingly technologically based economic system (Wilson, 2009). As a consequence, large numbers of urban city residents particularly marginalized racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., African Americans, Latinos, etc.) who had relied on industrialization to provide economically stable middle class lifestyles were left ill-equipped to create decent lives in this new economy. In addition, the profound implications of the upheaval precipitated by this economic shift (e.g., joblessness, depleted economic infrastructure) were later compounded by the conservative politics of the 1980's, the proliferation of mass incarceration among minorities, police hostility, and drug use (Alexander, 2012).

Against this backdrop, hip-hop's formative years were overwhelmingly dedicated to offering vivid depictions of the urban existence to which many African American young men were subjected. Perhaps no other hip-hop song typifies this uninhibited social commentary more than Grandmaster Flash's 1982 magnum opus "The Message." In the lyrics, Grandmaster Flash portrays the deep economic oppression and bleak social conditions endemic to the urban New York City landscape of the 1980's and the mentality it creates:

> (Chorus) It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder
> How I keep from going under
> It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder
> How I keep from going under
>
> (Verse One) Broken glass everywhere
> People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don't care
> I can't take the smell, I can't take the noise
> Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice
> Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
> Junkies in the alley with the baseball bat
> I tried to get away, but I couldn't get far
> Cause a man with a tow-truck repossessed my car – The Message

Far from the exception, this type of social commentary was the norm for many of hip-hop's earliest and most seminal contributors (e.g., KRS-One, Queen Latifah, etc.).

Not long after hip-hop emerged, most mainstream media outlets sought to delegitimize it as an art form by deeming it nothing more than a passing fad unworthy of any legitimate attention. For instance, Music Television aka MTV outright refused to include hip-hop music videos in its programming rotation. Hip-hop was lambasted for its violence and disparaging remarks about women and femininity. Numerous critics, regardless of race, such as Senator Bob Dole and C. Delores Tucker were relentless in their criticizing of hip-hop and galvanized Americans in a campaign to censor or completely stifle hip-hop artists' creative freedom (Giroux, 1996). One memorable public demonstration held by a group of hip-hop detractors culminated in the destruction of multiple hip-hop compact discs by a steam roller operated by a member of the group. As Ogbar (2007) suggests, public demonstrations like these reflected a palpable concern among politicians and concerned parents about hip-hop's ability to subvert young and impressionable minds. By focusing narrowly on those artists presumed to reflect and reinforce prevailing beliefs about hip-hop (e.g., a culture consumed by self-absorption and hedonism) a negative consequence was the blatant disregard for what is and was:

> … a core group of Hip-hop artists whose major purpose was to provide social commentary and awaken a somnambulant generation of young people from their drug, alcohol, and materialistic additions. Some of these artists sought to contextualize the present conditions of the African American and other marginalized communities of color and call for action by making historical links to ideas (e.g., Black Power), social movements (e.g., cultural nationalism), and political figures (e.g., Malcom X, Che Guevera) (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005, p. 293-294).

From a practical standpoint, the problematization of hip-hop culture, and the hasty dismissal it precipitated, has brought about a premature foreclosing of critical analysis on how the culture can be of use with and for urban African American young men. Perhaps nothing reflects the under-theorized problematization of hip-hop quite like the belief among adults, teachers included, that African American young men's identification with hip-hop culture promotes and reinforces a hegemonic masculine trope as well as a devaluation of education as a tool to achieve upward social mobility.

African American Young Men and Hip-hop Culture

Couched within the discourse on African American young men and their school experiences is the recognition that myriad of personal/social variables affect academic performance. Perhaps none of these variables is as important as gender and racial and ethnic identity development and how these aspects of identity development inform African American young men' perception of the utility of educational attainment. Noguera (2008), to this point, affirms

> The processes and influences involved in the construction of Black male identity should be at the center of analyses of school performance since it is on the basis of their identities that Black young men are presumed to be at risk, marginal, and endangered in school and throughout American society (p. 27).

Operating from this rationale, it is believed some African American young men may seek to preserve their racial/ethnic identity by avoiding educational attainment and the assimilation it connotes (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Thus, a priority for researchers and educators is to understand the mechanisms through which African American young men become socialized about racial and ethnic group membership (Noguera, 2001) and what that group membership means in respect to education in general and, maybe more importantly, how education is perceived as a means of upward mobility. In the 21st century, it would be hard to argue popular culture, which would include hip-hop culture, does not exert considerable influence on adolescents' personal and social development (Giroux, 1996; Kitwana, 2002; Noguera, 2008).

While hip-hop has certainly transcended geographical borders and arbitrary racial/ethnic and class demographics within the past twenty years, no other group has a more deeply entrenched and ubiquitous presence within hip-hop culture, whether as performers, executives or consumers, as young African American men (Prier & Beachum, 2008). Additionally, given the marginalized social context which precipitated hip-hop culture, innumerable urban African American young men have gravitated towards and appropriated aspects of hip-hop culture (e.g., vernacular, attire, music, etc.) as part of their identity and a way of contesting the often inhospitable social environment that confronts them (Nocella & Socha, 2013; Love, 2010).

Because of hip-hop's heightened visibility in a period dominated by social media, it has unquestionably become a form of expression with tremendous applicability to the lived experiences of young African American young. Given this, several counseling professionals have posited that it would be wise to consider the utility of hip-hop culture to the interactions conducted with African American young men (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010; Henfield, Washington, & Owens, 2010). In many ways hip-hop can provide insights into the cultural experiences of many urban African American young men and how they perceive themselves and their environment (e.g., Bell, Jones, Roanne, Square, & Chung, 2013). This awareness would encompass an understanding of how African American young men have historically been represented in scholarly educational (Brown, 2011; Brown & Donnor, 2011; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011) and psychological literature (Katz, 1985), and how that representation has been used to legitimate and reinforce systematic forms of oppression and discrimination.

A Hip-hop Framework for Social Justice Advocacy in School Counseling

> *To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce.*
> Freire (2002)

Before articulating the framework itself, two intertwining positions must first be stated. First, it is critical that the reader understand that a significant portion of what hip-hop exemplified at its inception in the late 1970's and early 1980's - empowerment of some of the most vulnerable and disenfranchised Americans - is consistent with the aims of social justice work; thus social justice can serve as the fundamental philosophical thread permeating this framework. For school counseling, the pursuit of educational equity and social justice is indivisible from the role and expectations of 21st century professional school counselors (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Griffin & Steen, 2011; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). Marbley, Maloot, Flaherty and Frederic (2010) go so far as to assert that school counselors' orientation towards social justice advocacy work "is an essential and necessary tool for working with children who are marginalized" (p. 60). While educational equity and social justice are germane to school counseling in general, these concepts are critical to counseling work with urban African American young men who encounter multiple forms of oppression as they pursue educational attainment (Toporek, 2013). Second, the author contends if this framework is to be maximized practically, the presupposition inherent to this framework—that scores of Americans have and continue to be disenfranchised on the basis of race and class—must be embraced by those who employ it. With respect to the academic achievement of African American young men, especially in urban settings, this disenfranchisement is inexorably linked to the disparities in educational resources and rigorous learning opportunities between white and affluent and poor and racial/ethnic minority students (Ladson-Billings, 2013; 2006). Thus, too much schooling (Shujaa, 1994) as opposed to sufficient opportunities for "learning how to decode the system" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 13) has comprised education for an overwhelming majority of African American students in this country.

Hip-hop Empowerment Foundation - Awareness of Historical Legacy of Oppression

The legacy of racial oppression in this country reverberates in our present-day social practices and our collective psychosocial and historical consciousness whether it is acknowledged or not. Some of the most pressing and persisting issues impacting large numbers of African Americans are the direct result of racially discriminatory practices which transpired decades earlier. Intergenerational urban poverty, for instance, in many ways is attributable to sanctioned social practices including, but not limited to housing, education, and employment discrimination. What ensued as a result of Post-World War II housing discrimination, for instance, was a relegation of innumerable numbers of financially qualified African Americans to the least desirable segments of American

cities. Therefore, the injustices of the past are inextricably connected to the experiences of African American young men in general, and those residing in urban ghettos particularly. Because this is precisely the ecological setting where hip-hop was conceived and forged it serves as the foundation for this framework.

The fundamental assertion/foundation of this hip-hop framework, that a long-standing hierarchy exists within this country that has privileged some and marginalized others, is found in the early lyrics of seminal artists from the late 1970's and early 1980's. Chuck D, lyricist and frontman for the critically acclaimed group Public Enemy often opined on this hierarchy, its historical roots and present day ramifications. For instance, Chuck would highlight how people of African ancestry in this country had yet to experience fully the ideals of justice and democracy espoused by this country when he said "…here is a land that never gave a damn, about a brother like me and myself because they never did…". Therefore, young African American young men who emulate the cultural practices of hip-hop culture and also suffer under the oppression instrumental in hip-hop's formation must first understand how the hierarchical social system, in large measure, contributes to their ongoing marginalization. Take as an example, the oft-discussed prison industrial complex which houses a disproportionate number of African American young men usually for non-violent drug offenses (Alexander, 2012; Love, 2013; Nocella & Socha, 2013). It may astonish and irritate, quite frankly, young African American young men to learn of the shrewd business practices employed by corporations funding their continued incarceration and the significant financial rewards they amass. This frustration may only be amplified when these young men learn that determinations about how many penitentiaries to construct and how many inmates can be housed are derived from elementary school educational data.

Hip-hop Empowerment Approach - Practical Application of Historical Insights

If one accepts the notion this country was forged through an unequal and racially biased historical past, it seems logical the following two statements would be accepted as well. First, this country's sordid racial past (e.g., legalized segregation and subsequent socioeconomic stratification, physical violence, cultural genocide, etc.) has very different present day implications on people's lives depending on their racial and ethnic identification. Second, social change agents should undertake the necessary strategies to advance the cause of social justice and combat racial marginalization. Social justice and social change are human ideals to be pursued and are, therefore, imbued with the presumption of active participation. As Freire (2002) has expressed lucidly, the toil between interests of oppressors and purveyors of humanity, justice and fairness is never ending, meaning power concedes nothing without struggle.

Below the author details two interrelated examples of social injustice salient in the lives of so many African American young men. Afterwards, suggestions for how urban school counseling professionals can use certain rap lyrics to stimulate dialogue about these issues are provided. A requisite part of this dialogue would be for young African

American men to think critically about the amount of power and influence global multinational corporations wield within hip-hop culture (Love, 2010; Rose, 2008). Having harnessed this power and influence, these corporations, interested primarily in maximizing profit, "create representations embedded with essentialized notions of Blackness" (Love, 2010, p. 223). Because these essentialized notions of Blackness are stigmatizing and rigidly stereotypical, urban professional school counselors can urge African American young men to critically unpack these images and critique the corporations responsible for their development and circulation.

Predominant Stereotypical Representations in Hip-hop. The presence of negative representations and portrayals of Black maleness and Black masculinity within popular media are not at all new (Parks, 2004). Moreover, not only have these characterizations of Black young men as lawless, morally depraved and intellectually incompetent been predominant in this society, they have been strategically deployed to engender fear and justify the subjugation and violent mistreatment of Black young men (Love, 2010). Nevertheless, despite this ubiquity, African American young men can counter this hegemonic narrative through active resistance (Love, 2013; Prier & Beachum, 2008). For instance, a group counseling session initiated with urban African American young men might include conversations about the enduring nature of the negative Black man trope in the media and popular culture. One activity urban professional school counselors might use to explore this issue would be to compare and contrasting historical and contemporary depictions of Black young men in print and video media. Afterwards, group members could then be asked to shift their focus to the predominant representations of Black maleness and masculinity within commercialized hip-hop and discuss whether they believe these representations are a fair and accurate reflection of the diverse nature of the Black male experience in this country. From here group members could muse about initiatives to combat these images, which might alter how others perceive them and how they perceive themselves.

Mass Incarceration. Mass incarceration has had a catastrophic impact on countless African American communities across the country (Alexander, 2012). Rates of incarceration for African American young men began to escalate to unspeaking heights as The War on Drugs was initiated under the Nixon administration in the 1970s. Occurrences of imprisonment seemed to increase in lockstep with the proliferation of state and federal legislation which severely penalized drug possession and distribution. However, there were several flaws in how these laws were composed and implemented perhaps no flaw was as detrimental as the major racial discrepancies in policing and sentencing which had a disproportionate adverse impact on Black and Latino offenders from poor and working class backgrounds.

Rather than merely examining rates of incarceration for African American young men, urban school counselors might initiate a group activity with urban African American young men that examines the antecedents to incarceration. During this activity, the

subject of discussion could be how the War on Drug accelerated the mass incarceration of African American young men. Jackson Mississippi emcee Skipp Coon's lyric "…look at the monster oppression has made me, a witness to street gangs, crack in the 80s, cousins in the state, in the fed, in the navy…" could be used to facilitate discussion, along with Alexander's (2012) seminal text, to examine the sociological variables which contributed to the explosion of the prison-industrial complex (Nocella & Socha, 2013). This activity, rooted in the principles of social justice and advocacy, can be framed as a strategy to make urban African American young men aware of the interrelationship between commerce and incarceration which seeks to make these young men more adept at navigating their terrain more effectively.

Implications

As articulated earlier in this manuscript, sporadic conversations within counseling about how hip-hop culture can be used with African American young men have occurred. A legitimate question to ask now as is "when and how quickly do in-service professional school counselors utilize these conversations to inform our theory and practice?" If the answer to this question is "soon," then it is safe to anticipate the possible implications hip-hop culture may have on not just the social justice canon within counselor education but also the efficacy of practical counseling strategies using hip-hop with urban African American young men. Some of the potential implications moving forward are listed below.

Urban Professional School Counselors:

- Ideally, the commitment to social justice is seen as an indisputable characteristic of 21st century urban school counselors. According to Griffin and Steen (2012), social justice oriented school counselors consider themselves agents of social change who actively contest the barriers impeding marginalized students' pursuits of educational and social success. Given this mandate, school counselor educators should work diligently to evaluate applicants in terms of their desire to function in this capacity prior to their admission and periodically through their graduate school counseling matriculation. While these measures certainly cannot guarantee school counseling students will eventually maintain a promise to function as social justice advocates and change agents, these evaluations do empower faculty to intervene and remediate students should the need arise.

- By deeply unpacking the legacy of the social climate that begot hip-hop culture professional school counselors can think critically about how they perceive African American young men and the urban context in which they reside, learn and socialize. Thus, hip-hop, as a derivation of society, acts as a critical lens for understanding the forces which created the "urban" context, how those forces are unalterably connected to our understanding of the people who do and do not occupy this "urban" landscape, and how an aversion for such analyses can be

construed as complicit in maintaining the existing status quo. As Dale and Daniels (2013) point out this means recognizing that:

> most of us in the United States (both White persons and individuals who belong to ethnic minority groups) were socialized to view Black male adolescents and adults as inferior and dangerous, stereotypes that have negative and in some cases deadly consequences for Black male adolescents and adults and other ethnic minorities (p. 39-40).

- Achieving a comprehensive understanding of hip-hop culture can equip school counselors with insights into the ways urban African American young men perceive themselves, others, and the viability of various social and educational pathways in their lives. As a highly visible and dominant cultural and economic force, there are a number of avenues school counselors can access to sharpen their understanding of hip-hop culture and its relevance to urban African American young men's lives. Urban school counselors intrigued by the idea of utilizing hip-hop but who are relatively uniformed about its utility have a number of educational resources to consider. For instance, interested school counselors could access Harvard University's Hiphop Archive, which is an extensive catalogue of art, music, and hip-hop scholarship. Early in 2015, The Ohio State University hosted its Hiphop studies conference where session attendees could learn about a wide-array of issues relating to hip-hop. These are just two of the many resources urban school counselors have at their disposal to develop an authentic understanding of hip-hop, its contours, and how it is pertinent to their clinical work with urban African American young men.

- Clinical practitioners have illustrated how the integration of hip-hop and rap music assists in promoting positive interpersonal behavior (DeCarlo & Hockman, 2004). Therapists have also lauded hip-hop for how it engenders empathy and helps facilitate rapport and functional counseling relationships with urban youth (Kobin & Tyson, 2006; Levy, 2012). In terms of actual pedagogy, numerous researchers have used hip-hop within the classroom to promote engagement and performance (Hill, 2009; Moore & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Hill (2009) and Emdin (2010) have effectively used hip-hop to captivate their students and successfully teach literature and science respectively. Borrowing from these scholars, urban school counselors can examine how they could use hip-hop to stimulate discussion or teach content about critical domains/student outcomes (e.g., personal/social development, academic achievement, post-secondary exploration). For instance, with regards to post-secondary exploration urban school counselors could point out that several current hip-hop artists, including J-Cole, Skipp Coon, and Killer Mike, all attended college. Equipped with this information urban school counselors could use any of these artists as culturally relevant case studies when conducting classroom guidance or group counseling about any of the aforementioned student domains.

African American Young Men:

- On a day-to-day basis, urban African American young men can utilize hip-hop culture as a device to stimulate dialogue and cultivate relationships with other African American young men and allies locally, nationally and internationally. By engaging in this type of discourse, urban African American young men actively partake in efforts to resist and transform the multitude of interfacing micro and macro level variables which constrain educational, political and economic possibilities.

- Because hip-hop currently has such mass appeal, urban African American young men can utilize hip-hop as a way of heightening public awareness about salient social issues impacting the lives of urban residents in much the same way hip-hop is used commercially to generate interest in a particular product or device. Rather than utilizing hip-hop to promote public interest in a gadget, urban African American young men can use hip-hop as a way of calling attention to issues that impact them directly. For instance, urban African American young men in places like Chicago, Illinois or Milwaukee, Wisconsin can use hip-hop to challenge the inherent contradictions in closing schools and terminating teachers while making funds available to subsidize collegiate or professional sports teams. At a time when post-secondary educational success is as essential to economic viability in adulthood as it has ever been in this country's history, raising awareness about such contradictions through hip-hop is likely to resonate with large numbers of people. This is just one way hip-hop can be leveraged in a transformative nature by urban African American young men.

- It is important for school counselors to redirect urban African American young men away from the prevalent sexism, misogyny and hegemonic notions of Black maleness within hip-hop. These messages can be dehumanizing and alienating to women and Black men who operate outside of the prescribed and socially accepted boundaries of masculinity in this society. In working to liberate themselves from the constraints of racism, urban African American young men must avoid and eschew equally oppressive ideas and behaviors from within hip-hop that marginalize others.

Conclusion

Hip-hop culture represents a platform where urban African American young men have not been prevented from expressing points of view about forms of oppression that limit their life opportunities. Here the author is imploring of urban professional school counselors to envisage hip-hop as a transformative power rather than being preoccupied by narrow characterizations of hip-hop as a maladaptive subculture devoid of any redeemable value. As an African American man, the author has experienced hip-

hop's consciousness raising potential first hand and has worked, through his scholarship and presentations, to make others aware of this as well. If teachers and other educational leaders have been seriously examining hip-hop's role in achieving educational social justice (e.g., Akom, 2009; Baszile, 2009), it would seem wise for social justice oriented professional school counselors and counselor educators to do the same.

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