Therapeutic Uses of Rap and Hip-Hop

SAMPLE CHAPTER

Edited by
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The Importance of Hip-Hop for Music Therapists

Aaron J. Lightstone

In 2003–2004, I was a student in the Master of Music Therapy program at Wilfrid Laurier University. While studying there, I was continuing to work in private practice as a music therapist. I had a contract working with home-less youth on a drop-in basis in a residential youth shelter. The experience acquired by working in the residential youth shelter became the basis of the research I conducted as a Master of Music Therapy student (Lightstone, 2004). The more I learned about Hip-Hop culture and the history of rap music, and the more I engaged with these youth through the medium of rap music, the more amazing and unconscionable it became to me that this popular, powerful, and transformative musical form was barely even mentioned during my music therapy training and was rarely mentioned or discussed in professional music therapy circles; I was shocked that I had never met a music therapist who actively developed specific skills related to the production or facilitation of rap and Hip-Hop. This chapter explores the potential importance of Hip-Hop for the field of music therapy.

As a music therapy clinician, I believe in the importance of facilitat-ing the creative act of music-making with my clients. My training in and approach to clinical work is reflective of a music-centered approach. Music-centered approaches to music therapy emphasize the importance and pri-macy of cooperative music-making in the therapeutic process within the

context of a client-centered therapeutic relationship. My clinical approach relies on improvisational music and is influenced by the theories of Aesthetic Music Therapy (AeMT) as formulated and described by Colin Lee (2003), Creative Music Therapy (CMT) as formulated by Nordoff and Robbins (1977) and Ansdell (1995), and the diversity of musicians and music cultures that I have studied.

With the exception of Aigen (2002) and Wigram (2004), significant texts on improvisation in music-centered music therapy (Ansdell, 1995; Lee, 1997, 2003; Nordoff & Robbins, 1977; Robbins & Robbins, 1998) make little mention of the potential importance of contextualizing clinical improvisation in popular music forms. None discuss rap music as a clinical resource for collaborative clinical music-making. This may be due to the fact that creating Hip-Hop music requires the use of technological devices with which most music therapists may not be familiar. Those who do have the skill and technical facility generally gain the requisite knowledge in their lives as musicians outside of their music therapy training courses.

Also, the musicological thinking behind rap operates under musical paradigms that are inherently non-Western. Rap is rooted in and informed by African musical worldviews that are drastically different from the European musicology in which most (Western) music therapists are raised and trained.[*] Music therapy that is culturally sensitive to the needs of clients involved in contemporary youth culture should use the musical vernacular of the clients. Engaging in music therapy that is culturally sensitive to the needs of youth culture requires knowledge of popular music styles. As such, there is no way that Hip-Hop can be ignored or neglected by music therapists. In the last two and a half decades, the culture of Hip-Hop, and its musical expression of rap music, has made an indelible mark on global culture. As a music therapist, I am all too familiar with the cliché that music is a universal language. When it comes to youth culture, Hip-Hop *is* the universal language. My personal travels have taken me from the shores of the Arctic Ocean in Canada's far North to the Jungles of Cambodia, and to the deserts of the Middle East. Everywhere I have been I have heard Hip-Hop in the local languages.

While Hip-Hop has been examined by a very wide diversity of academic disciplines, references to Hip-Hop in the music therapy literature are noticeably and shamefully scarce. Music therapy theorists such as

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[*] A complete discussion on the differences between the musical paradigms of European and African music is beyond the scope of this chapter. One significant example is that in many music cultures from Africa there is an absence of functional harmony as it is understood in European-based music. This absence of harmony and the primacy of what are often complex polyrhythms require flexibility and adjusted thinking on the part of musicians who are trained in a European worldview. For a more complete discussion on Afro-centric musicology see Perkins (1998), Rose (1994), and Keyes (1996).

Ruud (1998) and Stige (2002) have eloquently argued that music therapy is inseparable from music and culture. Music therapists must keep themselves up to date not only on the recent developments in psychotherapy and its related disciplines but also on the latest developments in contemporary music and popular culture. As powerful forces in contemporary culture and music, Hip-Hop and rap music have an important place in the music therapy literature. Furthermore, I believe that rap is not just relevant to music therapy because of its popularity, but also precisely because of its social power. Music therapists are interested in the transformational power of music. From the earliest days of rap music, important subgenres have acknowledged the ability of music to facilitate group experiences and to catalyze personal and social transformation.

Note on Terminology

Rap and Hip-Hop

> We can say what makes it hip-hop is this black, urban experience da-da-da. But no! Hip-hop is no longer that. I mean, hip-hop has existed in … Japan for at least 10 years—has existed where there are no African American experiences. So what is hip-hop?
>
> Saul Williams (2001)[*]

There is often confusion over the terms *rap music* and *Hip-Hop*. The general trend in the academic literature defines Hip-Hop as a specific cultural group or youth arts movement, while rap is the musical expression of that social group. In terms of its genesis in the 1970s, the original creators and members of Hip-Hop culture were young, urban, African Americans (Keyes, 2002). As the popularity of Hip-Hop culture grew, more and more youth from other ethnic and socioeconomic groups began to identify with the message, style, and culture of Hip-Hop, which could also be described as a countercultural movement. The disenfranchised Inuit youth that I encountered in extremely remote communities in Canada's Eastern Arctic (Nunavut) could not be more remote from the urban origins of the movement. Yet many of these youth identify very strongly with the message and culture of Hip-Hop. Hip-Hop culture expresses itself artistically in four main modes: music, dance, visual art, and fashion (Rose, 1994). The musical expression of Hip-Hop culture is primarily rap music and DJing.[†]

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[*] Quoted in Chang (2001, p. 2).
[†] Sometimes spelled deejaying. Referring to the musical activity and contribution of the turntablist.

Hip-Hop culture is expressed through the body in a dance style known as break dancing. Visually, the culture is expressed through urban graffiti art and its own rules of fashion, which tend to favor oversized clothing, accessories originally designed for outdoor/wilderness activities, and prominent displays of large jewelry.

Keyes (1996) prefers to define Hip-Hop as a youth arts movement that engages in "'cultural revisioning'—the foregrounding (both consciously and unconsciously) of African-centered concepts in response to cultural takeovers, ruptures, and appropriations" (p. 224). She further explains that as a youth arts movement, Hip-Hop is an "expression that embodies those attitudes, language, dress, and gestures affiliated with street culture" (Keyes, 1996, p. 231). Because many regard it as a culture, I will use capital letters when referring to Hip-Hop.

To the extent that rap music is the music of Hip-Hop culture (or the Hip-Hop youth arts movement), the terms *rap music* and *Hip-Hop music* can be used interchangeably. It is worth noting, however, that some aficionados use the term *rap* music to refer to music that has been co-opted and commercialized by the big record companies. These individuals reserve the term *Hip-Hop* for music that they consider to be the authentic expression of Hip-Hop culture and not tampered with by record company executives.

Aesthetics of Hip-Hop

First of all, let me tell you that the music (beats) that makes up Hip-Hop, comes from different nationalities and races, especially from black people.... It comes from many categories in music, for example: Hip-hop music is made up from other forms of music like funk, soul, rhythm & blues, jazz, rock, heavy metal, salsa, soca (calypso), TV shows, kiddie shows, horror movies, techno, pop, disco, african, arabic, reggae -etc.... you will see that the music is made by people from different races or nationalities from all over the planet, but its roots start with black people.

Afrika Baambatta (1995)

As a music therapist trained in music-centered music therapy and particularly in Aesthetic Music Therapy as described by Colin Lee (2003), it is important to me to understand as best as possible the aesthetic qualities of any musical form I am attempting to use in music therapy. A deep understanding of the aesthetics of a form might mean that while I may not achieve mastery of the form (something that could take years of dedication and practice to achieve), I certainly need to acquire the skills to approximate or to be competent in that form, and be able to conduct therapeutically meaningful/valuable work.

As an American art form with Afro-diasporic roots, rap deviates sharply from musical aesthetic conventions that listeners and musicians from European-rooted traditions take for granted. In its purest form, rap consists of a programmed rhythm (sampled turntabling, or drum machine and bass line generator) and a syncopated rhyming chant. Melody and functional harmony (as they are understood in Western music) are de-emphasized (or nonexistent). The text is usually in a vernacular or slang that can be difficult for listeners from outside Hip-Hop culture to decipher (Salaam, 1995). Rap performances highlight black language, rhetorical style, and music-making practices. The lyrical content is often the most English misunderstood and controversial aspect of the genre (Keyes, 1996). Most rap music is based on "black street speech" (Baugh, 1983, in Keyes, 1996). In this vernacular, words can have a double meaning or an altered meaning depending on the tone or inflection of the speaker.

Rose (1994) identifies three defining characteristics of artistic expression in Hip-Hop culture. These characteristics are all found in rap music, break dancing, and graffiti art. The three characteristics are flow, layering, and rupture in line. "In Hip Hop, visual, physical, musical, and lyrical lines are set in motion, broken abruptly with sharp angular breaks, yet they sustain motion and energy through fluidity and flow. . . . Rappers speak of flow explicitly in the lyrics, referring to an ability to move easily and powerfully through complex lyrics as well as of the flow of the music. The flow and motion of the initial bass or drum line in rap music is abruptly ruptured by scratching" (Rose, 1994, p. 39). Layering is an aesthetic feature that takes place mostly in the instrumental parts where different rhythms and textures are layered to create a polyrhythmic texture. Some scholars (Rose, 1994; Keyes, 2000) trace this aesthetic feature back to the polyrhythmic drumming of West Africa that is at the root of many African American forms of musical expression.

Salaam (1995) adds to the discussion of Hip-Hop aesthetics by identifying four key aesthetic features: lyrics, style, flow, and sound. *Lyrics* refer to the words used in the song and to the subject matter and construction of the song. *Style* refers to the tonal quality of the rapper's voice and the delivery of the lyrics. For example, some rappers have a style that could be described as a seamless monotone, while others are very emotional and dynamic.

Keyes (1996) adds the concept *time* to the discussion of rap music aesthetics. She considers the construct of time to be one of many *Africanisms* that remain in rap music. According to Keyes, the Western concept of linear time is not useful in understanding African music. She references a number of ethnomusicologists who have shown that the concept of time in African and African-derived musics is a network of layered structures. One of the most important distinctions to be made between Afro-centric and Euro-centric conceptions of time is the importance, role, and meaning of

repetition. Keyes compares her studies of rap music to Chernoff's (1979, in Keyes, 1996) study of Ghanaian drumming where

> the repetition of a well chosen rhythm continually reaffirms the power of music by locking that rhythm, and the people listening or dancing to it, into a dynamic and open structure. The power of music is not only captured by repetition, it is magnified. Similarly, rap DJs are revered for their sustaining prowess on the turntables; however they do not sustain their music by repeating the same record, but rather by selecting a danceable tempo with the pitch control, then spinning a succession of records for a long period of time. (Keyes, 1996, p. 236)

Sampling is perhaps the most controversial aspect of Hip-Hop aesthetics as it stands in opposition to Western music's notions of copyright laws and ownership of intellectual property. According to Porcello (1991), sampling is not coincidental in that rap musicians intentionally use the sampler in a way that is oppositional and countercultural as it challenges capitalist ideals by using tabooed modes of quotation. Fricke and Aheren (2002) describe the origins of Hip-Hop in the impoverished urban ghettos of America. Few had the economic means to afford music lessons. Many of the original Hip-Hop artists were electronics repair technicians. They were able to modify and manipulate the conventional record player into a musical instrument of quotation and reinterpretation. Turning the conventional record player into a musical instrument of reinterpretation made the music-making experience accessible. The turntable is still an important instrument in Hip-Hop performances, but the sampler is perhaps the most important instrument in creating the sound track for rap music. During production the sampler allows the musician to create many complex levels of flow, layering, and rupture in line.

In recent years, therapists trained in different disciplines have come to realize the importance of culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate therapy techniques. Contemporary thinking considers multiculturalism the "fourth force" in therapy, following the forces of psychodynamic, behavioral, and humanistic movements in psychotherapy and counseling (Pedersen, 1991, in Bula, 2000). "Street youth" in a multicultural environment, such as Toronto, represent a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Cultural identity is made up of more than ethnicity. For most youth it includes gender, level of education, musical tastes, and a variety of group affiliations. While the youth involved in my clinical work came from a variety of ethnic groups, they are united by varying degrees of identification with contemporary youth culture. They are further united by varying degrees of affiliation to the subculture of street-involved youth. Moreno

(1988) discusses the common practice of music therapists who use the ethnic music of clients to establish trust and relationship. I argue that for many individuals who identify with contemporary youth culture, Hip-Hop music functions as their "ethnic music," often irrespective of their national, racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds.

Though rap music began as the specific musical expression of young African Americans in the Bronx (Keyes, 2002), it is well documented that the genre's popularity quickly spread to most other African American communities in North America, then became popular with youth in many diverse parts of the globe (Shabtay, 2003; Osumare, 2001; Lusane, 1993).

According to Elligan (2000), rap's appeal to young Black men is partially due to the fact that the "lyrical expression represents the realities of their lives and struggles" (p. 30). However, he does not discuss its wide appeal beyond this group. Though I have worked with many Black youth, none were African American. My clients were Canadians of varied ethnic backgrounds. It is important to note that my many clients of African heritage are of a different demographic than their African American counterparts. Most of my Black Canadian clients are recent immigrants (second or first generation) from the West Indies or Africa. Their families have not been in North America for multiple generations. Furthermore, rap music was a useful therapeutic modality for many clients who were not of African heritage or ethnicity. An example is First Nations[*] youth. Many First Nations youth in Canada identify with the culture and message of Hip-Hop (Leafloor, 2011).[†]

Hip-Hop and Music Therapy

Oppressed people across the world were like, "Wait, we're gonna speak up through this art form, because it's fucking powerful. In this way, we can just deliver speeches over beats." And since we nod our heads to beats, that's instant affirmation.

Saul Williams (2001)[‡]

It is remarkable that the most commercially successful genre of popular music of the previous two decades (Rose, 1994; Tyson, 2002) is scarcely

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[*] The term *First Nations* refers to the indigenous peoples of Canada, except for the Arctic-situated Inuit, and peoples of mixed European–First Nations ancestry called Métis. First Nations peoples used to be referred to as *Indians*, a term that is now reserved for people from the Indian subcontinent.

[†] For examples of this, see Stephen Leafloor's chapter and my other chapter in this book.

[‡] Quoted in Chang (2001, p. 1).

mentioned in the music therapy literature. The existing literature on rap music in therapy focuses on receptive rather than active techniques (Elligan, 2000; Tyson, 2002; Wyatt, 2002; Tenny, 2002).

The idea that musical expression or exposure can initiate personal or social transformation is alluded to in the literature on rap and Hip-Hop. A number of writers (Sylvan, 2002; Keyes, 2000; Pinn, 1999; Lusane, 1993) discuss the transformative power of rap music and other related African American genres. Tyson (2002) uses the widespread popularity of rap music as a rationale for its inclusion in therapy. He cites the "social, cultural, and political lyrical content and underlying themes" as useful therapeutic tools (Tyson, p. 132). His findings demonstrate that by utilizing the clients' strengths and interests, he was able to engage a challenging client population in a therapeutic process. Although I do not dispute his findings, it should be noted that he studied clinical techniques based on lyric analysis of existing material and not the *creation* of rap songs.

An important component of therapy with oppressed and marginalized people is working toward feelings and realities of empowerment and learning to use the sense of empowerment to overcome the oppression they suffer (Bishop, 2002). Forty-seven percent of street youth report a background of physical or sexual abuse (Delivering Health Care to the Homeless, 2003). Achieving mastery and learning to trust others are the pillars of recovery from trauma (Buchele, 2000). Engagement in group music experiences can be one means of learning to trust others and coming to feel a sense of mastery, particularly when this occurs within a genre to which the participant feels a connection. Furthermore, rap music can act as an empowering transformative agent by offering challenges to the politics and ideology of the dominant culture (Stephens & Wright, 2000; Pinn, 1998).

Groove-Based Music Therapy

> It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing.
>
> Irving Mills

Aigen's (2002) work, *Playin' in the Band,* provides a qualitative look at the use of popular music in clinical improvisation. He documents a single case study with a nonverbal, severely disabled client, working with two music therapists. Despite the important and obvious differences[*] in our clinical

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[*] Aigen's study examined his work with a mentally disabled, nonverbal individual using acoustic popular music intervention facilitated by two music therapists. I am working with groups of highly articulate street youth using electronic instruments, recording equipment, and Hip-Hop aesthetics.

work, many of his conclusions apply to the clinical recording of popular music styles with highly verbal clients including youth in urban shelters. In his conclusions, Aigen touches upon some key ideas that are particularly relevant to work with popular music styles and street involved youth.

> These observations on the function of style point to the value of music therapy processes occurring within popular music styles. They also provide insight into the role that relating in these styles can have in creating identity, or more accurately, in engaging participants actively in the ongoing, never-ending process of identity formation and evolution. . . . A form of expression that might be a consequence of motor regularity has taken on stylistic significance and all of its implications regarding participation in social life and individual identity. One can imagine Lloyd's [the client] internal sense of self as articulated by thoughts such as, *I am someone who plays rock and roll, who enjoys its boldness, vitality, rebellion, bodily and sexual energy, and life affirmation* [italics in original]. (Aigen, 2002, p. 111)

Aigen further suggests that different human attitudes are manifested by different popular music styles. "Cool jazz expresses sophisticated restraint and subtle sexuality" (Aigen, 2002, p. 111). I suggest that Hip-Hop expresses rebellion, overt sexuality, confidence, and outsiderness. "These are gratifying and self-affirming experiences for all those who participate in these forms of music, *but particularly so for clients in music therapy for whom this may be the only connection to these essential, foundational experiences* [emphasis mine]" (Aigen, 2002, p. 111).

Groove-Based Music Therapy, Rap Music, Hip-Hop Aesthetics, and Musicing

Rap is a musical style that is highly groove-oriented. Groove*-based musical styles have properties that make them particularly well suited to therapeutic applications. Feld (1994) notes the comfort that is often felt by members of a music community when people are "in the groove." Aigen (2002) notes that the rhythms of groove-based music invite movement, dancing, and other forms of participation that have therapeutic relevance:

> One becomes more comfortable within one's own body as control over it becomes a source of enjoyment; this comfort extends to social acceptance as one becomes a valuable member of one's peer group; and one also

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* According to Feld and Keil, groove is what defines style. It is the subtle rhythmic discrepancies between the various parts that create the groove and invite participation.

becomes comfortable within the larger culture as one becomes accultur-ated through participation in the groove. (Aigen, 2002, p. 35)

Aigen (2002) writes about the inability of drum machines to groove because they do not texture their expression. I argue that drum machines *can* be part of a groove experience, especially when they are capable of creating *participatory discrepancies (PDs)** by also playing bass lines, or when they can be *part* of a groove that invites participation. It has been my experience in doing clinical improvisations with street youth that the presence of a drum machine can facilitate the musical process. Although the drum machine can be limiting because it locks in the tempo and rhyth-mic patterns, the familiar musical framework and timbres it provides are potentially liberating, because the comfort and familiarity it provides allows the participants to engage in rhythmically intense, life-affirming, and expressive musicing that invites movement. The data collection in my research was carried out almost entirely to the accompaniment of a drum machine or loop sampler. The data analysis demonstrated that a high degree of musical and lyrical creativity and self-expression occurred within the Hip-Hop aesthetic, which is by definition technologically medi-ated and groove based. Instruments such as the drum machine played a crucial role in the creation and collection of the data. In recent years, I have witnessed performances of groups such as the Balkan Beat Box and oth-ers who integrate drum machines, samples, and live drumming into their performance. These experiences show me that drum machines can very certainly be part of the creation of a very compelling groove. The strong rhythmic nature of rap makes it a potentially important groove-based music therapy intervention. However, clinicians need to use these powerful musi-cal forms with care. This point is illustrated by two interesting and related processes that occurred in the sessions that I studied. The participants gen-erally attempted to express some important stories, ideas, or emotions. At times, this became difficult because of the technical demands of the strong rhythmic and rhyming structure of rap music. In improvised rap music, it

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* Participatory discrepancies (PDs) is a term used by ethnomusicologists (Feld & Kiel, 1994) to describe the rhythmic characteristics of music that invite participa-tion through the very subtle variations in performance, and micro-rhythmic and tonal inconsistency between complementary parts. PDs give music its social power and the power to move people. It involves both process and texture. The textural aspect involves musical concepts such as "'inflection', 'articulation', 'creative tension', 'relaxed dynamism', or 'semiconscious or unconscious slightly out of syncness'" (Keil, 1994, p. 96). The process aspect of PDs is reflected in the vernacular of various music styles. They are commonly referred to as *swing*, *groove*, or the *beat*, *vital drive*, *pulse*, or *push*. As music technology becomes more sophisticated, computer musicians are able to *humanize* their music by programming PDs into the music (Progler, 1995).

is particularly challenging to stay in this structure. Participants often and temporarily lost their ability to both conform to the structure *and* produce meaning. As a result, sometimes content was very meaningful but it fell outside the rigid structures of conventional rap music. At other times words were strung together only because they rhymed or were loosely associated, or nonsense words were made up to keep the rhythmic scheme going. When this happened during the early stages of this work, I was concerned that the lack of representational meaning might make these experiences un-valuable or not therapeutic. On reflection, I realized that taking such a position was contrary to the music-centered values that I was developing as a practicing music therapist.

Music-centered therapy finds inherent value in musicing (Elliot, 1995; Aigen, 2002; Aasgaard, 2002; Stige, 2002). Therapists working in a music-centered theoretical framework frequently engage clients in instrumental improvisations, acknowledging that these experiences can be therapeutic when there is representational meaning behind the music *and when there is not.* The participants in this study did not use instruments but rather they used words, a medium that creates an *expectation* of representational meaning. Yet I realized in the course of this work that the concept of musicing can apply also to words, and that participants can *music* with words and vocal sounds in a nonrepresentational and potentially therapeutic way. When music therapy clients engage in rap music improvisations, their voices and the microphones are the instruments. Thus, the experience can be therapeutic both when the words have representational meaning and when they do not. Even when the clients are engaged in wordplay[*] and not intentionally "meaning" anything with their words, they are still using engagement in the musical experience to foster communication and group cohesion, and to bring joy into a difficult environment. They are also using music involvement to elevate mood, and their acts of musicing are part of a process that keeps the music going.

Despite this exciting finding, I suspect that sometimes a purely improvisational approach to rap music production in music therapy may not always be the most appropriate choice. For some clients who are resistant to self-expression, the opportunity to engage in wordplay can provide a convenient cover for them to continue avoiding themselves and their issues or otherwise manifest therapeutic resistance. Some clients may want to

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[*] I am tempted to write here "even when the clients are *just* engaged in wordplay," but like Aigen (2002, p. 9) I recognize that the word *just* implies that there is something missing or inadequate about the experience, when, in fact, the experience of *just musicing* can be an extremely socializing, life-affirming, uplifting, and mood-enhancing experience even when there are no other therapeutic objectives attached to it. For an important and complete discussion of the role of musicing with nonverbal clients refer to Aigen (2002).

express ideas, thoughts, or stories but feel unable to do so within the rigid structural confines of rap music. Clients such as these may benefit from improvised singing in related genres. Because of the greater possibility for lyric repetition, melisma, and other singing devices, musical structure may be less restrictive in other popular genres. Alternatively, some participants were very willing and able to precompose rap but were less able in the improvisation of rap music. A number of clients kept journals and wrote down their original rap songs. These clients tended to be more musically able when working with precomposed material. An allusion to this occurred in one of the improvisations:

> I don't have my book with me
> I'm all outa saliva[*]
> Yo, it's not getting that brighter

—Bill: Group Improvisation #1

Music therapists working with youth populations need to be alert to the importance of an individualized approach, just as music therapists working with any other population do. The data suggests that even for some clients who may want to do their musicing through the genre of rap, the genre may be too structured to allow for truly free self-expression. This point becomes more complicated when I examine the pieces that could be labeled *spoken word*. These are pieces where the individual is speaking with rhythmic cadence over a musical accompaniment. In these examples, the individual is not as concerned with adhering to the strict rhythmic and rhyming structure that the aesthetic of the background music suggests. Perhaps these examples imply a higher level of cognitive maturity because the individual tacitly realizes that they can be more creative and step outside of the structure. These examples do not fit in the *wordplay* category as there is clear meaning in the words.

The analysis of lyrics in my research did not include any attempt to determine the originality of the participants' lyrical expression. Although the phenomenon of cover songs does not exist in Hip-Hop, and rappers are generally expected to create their own lyrics, singing familiar songs is a useful technique in music therapy (Amir, 1997). I was not particularly interested in whether the lyrics were original or if they were quotations from the Hip-Hop canon, because the singing of familiar songs can be a nonthreatening way to express emotions, as it offers the singer symbolic distance from his/her thoughts or emotions. When people sing cover songs they can

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[*] *Spittin'* or *spittin' on the mic* is a frequently heard expression for rapping. So when he says that he is "*outa saliva*," he is suggesting that without the aid of his journal, he does not have much more to say.

still channel their emotions through the lyrics, especially if the content is meaningful to them.

Having the opportunity to conduct my master's research allowed me to understand and to become more comfortable with my emerging clinical techniques. I found myself moving toward a clinical approach where, as a musical facilitator, I listened deeply to the clients' music to match their expression to appropriate grooves. Aigen (2002) writes:

> The creation of vital, alive, quality music does not derive from the ability of musicians to link with each other around perfect tunings and precise co-temporal musical events, merging their identities into some perfect unity. Instead, music is created by an ability to connect with others in unique ways that preserve their separateness. (Aigen, 2002, p. 54)

Linking Music-Centered Music Therapy and Music Psychotherapy

Music-centered approaches to therapy are occasionally at odds with the music *in* therapy* approaches that emphasize using music as a tool or catalyst to initiate therapeutic verbal exchanges. Hip-Hop music therapy provides insight into a middle ground. For the therapy clients, there is generally more creative improvisation and expression in the words than the music. This seems to resemble a music *in* therapy approach, but the verbal expression all occurs in a musical context and so I conceptualize the work in a music *as* therapy framework. Music-centered thinkers such as Lee (1997) often advocate that at times the music can speak for itself and may not need verbal processing. In my work with rap music and "street youth," I often felt that they had said what they needed to in the song, and to process it further would diminish the experience. At other times, I felt that there may be a need for verbal processing and discussion of the lyrics and experience. This was sometimes welcomed and sometimes resisted. Because of the need to build trust in such a short and unpredictable amount of time, and my belief in the music-centered approach, I developed the personal policy of generally not initiating further verbal processing following a musical experience.

In music psychotherapy (Ahonen-Eerikainen, 2002), the therapist is much less directive in the music, and words play a much more important

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* Bruscia (1998) broadly classifies music therapy systems by an orientation toward music *as* therapy or music *in* therapy. When music is used *as* therapy the musical experiences and interactions may be a sole or dominant focus of the therapy. When music is used *in* therapy the musical experiences are used to facilitate other therapeutic processes.

role. These two approaches sometimes seem mutually exclusive or at least opposite points on a theoretical continuum. The data suggests that the clinical recording and analysis of rap songs may begin to provide a theoretical bridge between these two approaches. I believe that Hip-Hop aesthetics in the music created the conditions for the creativity of this specific client group to flourish. Unlike most other music-centered models of music therapy, most of the clients' creativity took place through words. Yet the words of the clients are not regularly spoken words; they are spoken in the context of a musical experience.

This is why music therapists working with rap as a clinical resource have the responsibility to create music that comes as close as possible to the Hip-Hop aesthetic. I suggest that when we do so, we will engage our clients in what is for them a richer and more engaging therapeutic experience. When a client from this culture-sharing group hears the heavy rhythms of a drum machine with samples of record scratching, the deep bass lines, and they are holding a handheld microphone, they are absorbing a Hip-Hop aesthetic. This kind of approach to therapy communicates acceptance and tacitly creates an expectation that it is the time to engage in authentic self-expression.

In Creative Music Therapy (Nordoff & Robbins, 1997; Ansdell, 1995; Robbins & Robbins, 1998) and Aesthetic Music Therapy (Lee, 2003), music therapists are trained to listen to the music of their clients and use various improvisational techniques to meet them in their music. Lee (2003) emphasizes the importance of giving form and structure to the client's music. From my own experiences as a performer and listener, and as a reader of Feld and Keil (1994), I realized that what is generally inviting about music is "the groove." I also realized that groove is a microstructure that can give clients' music shape and meaning and invite further participation. Whether creating composed or improvised songs, or playing music therapy improvisations, the youth residents/clients seem to engage in longer, more frequent and involved improvisations when the structure was a clear groove provided by the drum machine, and/or by the guitar and bass through a loop sampler.

Clinical Applications

For many years, music therapists have used a variety of related disciplines to inform clinical practice. For most of the history of music therapy, our attention has been on psychology, social work, medicine, and other clinical disciplines. I do not downplay the importance of knowledge of these disciplines to our clinical practice. I agree with the growing body of academics (Lee, 1997, 2002; Ansdell, 1995; Aigen, 2002; Nordoff & Robbins, 1977;

Stige, 2002) that suggests that more attention needs to be paid to music and musicology in music therapy. As the field of musicology expands its scope to consider the role of music in culture (Stige, 2002), music therapists must also increase their cultural fluency, particularly as it pertains to the musical manifestations of the cultures we work with.

Rap music and Hip-Hop aesthetics must become relevant to music therapists, not only because of the popularity that rap artists enjoy (and have been enjoying for the last 30 years) but also because rap is a social form that "voices many of the class, gender, and race related forms of cultural and political alienation" (Rose, 1994, p. 184). I would add that the data demonstrates that the alienation expressed in rap music is not just limited to the types mentioned by Rose. Rap, particularly in the context of group therapy, can be used to express any form of alienation. Alienation has always been an important theme in existential psychotherapy approaches (Yalom, 1980). Yalom wrote 30 years ago that problems with meaninglessness are an increasingly common cause of psychopathology and emotional crisis, and that as society gets increasingly fast paced, technologically dependent/ sophisticated people lose touch with that which previously gave purpose or meaning to life. For youth in therapy, Hip-Hop is a natural way to confront, express, and begin working through those frustrations, because it has always served that purpose for its creators.

> Black music has always been a primary means of cultural expression for African-Americans, particularly during especially difficult social periods and transitions. In this way, rap is no exception; it articulates many of the facets of life in urban America for African-Americans situated at the bottom of a highly technological capitalist society. . . . As more and more of the disenfranchised and alienated find themselves facing conditions of accelerating deterioration, rap's urgent, edgy, and yet life-affirming resonances will become a more important and more contested social force in the world. (Rose, 1994, p. 184)

Lee (2003) has lamented a general lack of skill and knowledge of important trends in contemporary music among music therapists. One of the central aims of this chapter and this book as a whole is to begin to add an important form of contemporary popular expression to the music therapy dialogue. The nature of Hip-Hop as a clinical intervention is full of potential benefits and potential difficulties. By sharing thoughts about my work, I hope to add missing voices to the new and exciting dialogue that has been initiated by Aigen (2002), Lee (2002), Stige (2002), and Keil (1994).

The flexibility of rap as a mode of expression, and the universal themes that are expressed in both commercial rap music and the data that I collected, suggest that the findings of my original study (Lightstone, 2004)

may have a high degree of *transferability* (Smejsters, 1997) to other clinical contexts. Every clinical context is different, but I would expect that other music therapists using similar techniques with verbally articulate youth would come to similar findings. The power of groove-oriented aesthetics to invite listeners into participation is powerful. This is demonstrated by how much transferability there was from Aigen's (2002) study on groove in clinical improvisation to my research study, despite the vast differences in our clinical context and client population.

The time for music therapists to pay serious attention to the study of Hip-Hop culture, rap music, and other forms of groove-based popular music genres is long overdue. Hip-Hop began its life as a countercultural movement around 35 years ago and has long since become part of mainstream popular culture. I have spoken to a number of young, novice, classically trained music therapists who have endeavored to work with youth populations. They generally feel ill-prepared to confront the musical and clinical challenges of this work. I hope this book will go a long way toward giving music therapists and music therapy students more tools for doing this valuable and powerful work.

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