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A Culturally Informed Treatment for the Black Community: Using Rap Therapy and

Belief Systems Analysis Together

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Abstract

Rap therapy and Belief Systems Analysis are both culturally sensitive treatment approaches that were developed to treat African Americans. Both treatment approaches were developed out of strategies that African Americans have used as a means of being resilient in the face of oppressive circumstances. These treatment approaches can be used conjointly to help enhance the well-being of African American clients. Both approaches help clients develop more positive, healthier outlooks and perspectives. Rap therapy can be very helpful in establishing rapport, and helping clients have a comfortable means of expressing their thoughts and feelings. Belief Systems Analysis can provide a framework within which to redirect and reframe perspectives and outlooks. Although literature has not examined the conjoint usages of these therapeutic approaches, they both have been found to have positive impacts independently and can potentially be enhanced by being used conjointly.

Culturally Informed Treatment: Using Rap Therapy and Belief Systems Analysis Together

Rap music has an enormous impact on many African American youth and adults. Rap music can be used within psychological frameworks to enhance well-being and transmit positive messages. In many traditional African cultures, music was used to teach lessons, unify people, inspire people, influence healing, and provide a means of self-expression (Powell, 1991). Rap music is a distant offspring of traditional African music and can be used in conjunction with psychological theory and counseling techniques to help enhance well-being, unity, and positivity within the Black community, and other communities as well. Rap therapy can be used to help youth and adults within counseling, school, and community settings (Ellington, 2004). Additionally, an optimal (African-centered) worldview can be taught, expressed, and examined using rap and poetry. Optimal conceptual theory (OCT) is an African-centered theoretical perspective that promotes the endorsement of an optimal (African-centered) worldview (Myers, 1988). Belief systems analysis (BSA) is a therapeutic approach that was developed within OCT (Myers, 1980). Although the use of rap therapy and BSA together has not been discussed in the literature, both treatment modalities are culturally sensitive therapeutic approaches that can be used conjointly to enhance the therapeutic experience of Black/African American youth and adults.

Music in African Tradition

Rap music, and other genres of music created within the African American culture, developed from the African cultural roots. Rap music is a derivative of an oral tradition that originated in Africa many centuries ago (Powell, 1991). According to writer Gary O. Clement, rappers are continuing to use the oral tradition that was developed in African cultures (Lommel, 2001). Similarities have been identified between rappers and storytellers within African cultures,

an example is storytellers that were called griots. Some countries often associated with griot traditions are Senegal, Mali, Niger, Gambia, and Berkina Faso (Travis, 2016). Griots told stories that were accompanied by drums and other instruments (Powell, 1991). Oral forms of communication were used by griots to praise humans and divine figures, impact the social status of individuals or groups, entertain and educate audiences, and remind people of laws and genealogies (Lommel, 2001). Griots entertained and educated audiences by reciting tribal history and current events, their performances often included satirical asides, proverbs, jokes, praise, and ridicule (Powell, 1991). Participation from community members in audiences was encouraged during griots' performances. Additionally, griots taunted enemies, elicited fear in enemies, and delivered messages of war and resistance. Storytelling within the griot tradition was accompanied by the rhythmic beats of drums which punctuated recited lyrical rhymes. Rap music and other modern forms of music and poetry within Black culture resemble the structure of storytelling that was presented in griot traditions (Lommel, 2001).

Despite generations of enslavement and disconnection from genetic heritage and cultural traditions, rap music expresses an extension of African communication styles that remained and adapted (Lommel, 2001). During enslavement African Americans were forcibly restricted from maintaining a connection to their African culture; however, African Americans struggled to find ways to remain connected to their African culture (Wacquant, 2001). People who were enslaved used call-and-response patterns that resembled that of storytellers in African cultures. Spirituals were songs that were created by people who were enslaved; spirituals expressed sorrowful melodies and provided messages of hope among people who were enslaved (Spencer, 1991); spirituals used the rhythmic patterns that were present in African music. Spirituals laid the foundation for African American music of the 20th century. "Rap is the new thread connecting

the young to the old, the disenfranchised to the warrior, the broken family unit to a powerful African community" (Lommel, 2001, p.11-12). Music has played a central role in the lives of African Americans since their arrival to America and before their capture.

Rap Music

Rap is a verbal art form that is heard when listening to rap music (Travis, 2016). "Words and rhythm are the heart of rap" (Powell, 1991, p. 245). Rap music does not only entertain, but it also educates. Rap music provides an informal education that extends significantly beyond the confines of classroom educational format (Powell, 1991). Spoken word, or performance poetry, are also forms of expression that are commonly used within hip-hop culture (Brooks et al., 2020). Hip-hop is a culture within which rap music was developed. "Rap music grew out of the intersection of poverty, music, dance, graffiti, and fun" (Ellington, 2004, p. 26).

Rap music is the language of hip-hop culture. Hip-hop is a culture that incorporates rap music, film, graffiti, dress, language, and expressions (Brooks et al., 2020). A "Culture is composed of symbols, language, values, and beliefs" (Ellington, 2004, p. 51). Sociologists suggest that a culture is a combination of tangible and intangible components that provide meaning within the lives of a particular group of people (Ellington, 2004). A culture provides a foundation for uniting within a community. A community is a group of people who are connected through shared interests, values, customs, and identities. Hip-hop culture, for a long time, has been the "voice of the voiceless," it provides alternative means of expression that were created by individuals within the Black community (Lightstone, 2012). Rap music and hip-hop culture are means by which the Black community has shared its experiences with the entire world (although it is important to note that rap music and hip-hop culture do not only present expressions of the Black community). Hip-hop culture provides illustrations of the language,

dress, political views, economic struggles, and successes of the Black community (Brooks et al., 2020).

The Development of Rap Music

Rap music has a history of being used as a means of expressing social, personal, and political struggles (Richards et al., 2019). Rap music emerged within hip-hop culture during the 1970s in Bronx, New York (Lommel, 2001). Hip-hop is a cultural form that was developed within the context of the marginalization, lack of opportunity, and oppression that were experienced within the African American and Caribbean history, identity, and community (Rose, 1994). The tension between cultural fractures developed by postindustrial oppression and creativity with Black cultural expression laid the groundwork for the development of hip-hop culture. Hip-hop culture was composed of graffiti, breakdancing, and rap music. Rap music developed as an art form that expressed the desires, pleasures, and problems within the urban Black community. During house parties and street parties, MCs would entertain crowds by rapping. Unlike many musical forms, rap did not originate in the commercial music industry. Rap music "emerged from the streets of inner-city neighborhoods as a genuine reflection of the hopes, concerns, and aspirations of urban Black youth" (Powell, 1991).

Mass Impact of Rap Music

Rap music and genres related to it appeared to be the most influential musical structure in America between 1960 and 2010 (Travis, 2016). Cable television became extremely popular in the 1980s, this significantly impacted the music industry and the mass exposure of rap music (Rose, 1994). Rap music videos created a creative commercially accessible arena in which hip-hop culture would be exposed to people across neighborhoods, across the United States, in a social environment in which communities were segregated by race and class. In the 2017 U.S.

Music Year-End Report analytics reported that hip hop/R&B had become the most dominant genre of music, it accounted for 24.5 percent of all music consumed that year and accounted for seven out of ten most consumed albums that year (Wilson, 2018). As the consumption of rap music increased, quite naturally the impact of such music increased as well.

Music plays a significant role in the lives of people, especially youth (Ellington, 2004). Believing that music relates to their experiences, challenges, passions, fears, and hopes has consistently been important within populations of youth. Many Black youth, especially in low-income families in inner city environments, identify with rap music, and hip-hop culture, and de-identify with the school environment (Powell, 1991). Many of these individuals view rap music as an informal alternative form of education. Historically, the music enjoyed by youth has frequently been radical and oppositional regarding the cultural values and norms of adults; this has often been the case with rap music as well. The advancement of technology has inevitably impacted the global consumption of music (Wilson, 2018). Today adolescents and young adults in various settings around the world listen to rap music.

Rap music has not only become very popular with youth but has also captured the attention of adults, including scholarly researchers (Ellington, 2004). Numerous researchers have explored rap music in research studies. For example, Tyson and colleagues (2013) conducted a research study of the therapeutic messages in hip-hop songs and found the following themes: social oppression, economic oppression, racial oppression, personal suffering, personal empowerment, praise of family values, praise of work and achievement, importance of education, praise of women, spirituality, love, loyalty, empathy, materialism, and substance abuse. In addition to that, Richards and colleagues (2019) conducted a qualitative study in which they used a rap therapy group protocol with incarcerated individuals; these researchers found that

participants reported an improved sense of self-confidence, conflict resolution skills, autonomy and independence, and overall happiness and contentment, and reduced feelings of anxiety. Also, Brooks and colleagues (2020) used a content analysis design to examine messages that were expressed in conscious or classic rap music. Specifically in the counseling field, bibliotherapy (Byrd et al., 2021) and hip-hop therapy (Washington, 2021) are proposed to enhance counseling sessions. Many people are unaware of ways that rap music influences their communication styles, vocabulary, thoughts, beliefs, values, and actions (Ellington, 2004). Some religious leaders have realized that rap music has the potential to deliver positive messages to individuals. Consequently, rap has been incorporated into gospel music and sermons. For example, Kirk Franklin utilized rap music with traditional gospel music and captured the attention of people who would not generally listen to gospel music (Ellington, 2004). Albums that contain rap and gospel styles can outline physical and mental struggles along with coping strategies and potential resolutions (Price, 2020). Rap music can be utilized to positively impact individuals; Researchers can create interventions to help counselors and community leaders engage in strategies to utilize rap positively.

Creative Therapeutic Approaches

The use of expressive and creative activities such as play, sand tray, art, bibliotherapy, dance, psychodrama, and music has been found to be impactful in therapeutic work with both children and adults (Armstrong & Ricard, 2016). Using expressive and creative activities can be particularly useful in helping people share their inner thoughts and feelings (Stevenson, 2003). The use of creativity and self-expression in therapy can enhance healing by assisting in reframing ideas, changing perspectives, externalizing emotions, and providing a deeper

understanding of experiences (Armstrong & Ricard, 2016). Rap is a creative activity which is also a modality that allows individuals to develop and present a narrative.

Play can be utilized for healing. Research suggests that people learn more and become more relaxed when playing (Elkind, 2008). Even when angry, play can help with communication and soothing (Stevenson, 2003). Rap can be seen as a form of play, when creating and reciting lyrics one is inventing and expressing themselves through a form of art.

Narrative approaches encourage clients to tell meaningful stories that reveal information about their beliefs, values, and perceptions (Armstrong & Ricard, 2016). Therapists can then use the information shared in these stories to help clients reconstruct stories and develop different conceptualizations and perspectives. When clinicians and clients conjointly examine narratives that are presented in rap music it can provide a unique space for clinicians to explore client's values and establish rapport; using rap music as a therapeutic modality provides a way for clinicians to immerse themselves in a culture that provides a direct view of what African Americans experiences on a regular basis (Brooks, et al., 2020). Factors including cultural mistrust and limited numbers of clinician who share their cultural background cause African Americans to limit their usage of mental health services. However, the use of rap in the therapeutic setting helps some clients put their guard down and express their thoughts and feelings more freely (Armstrong & Ricard, 2016). Some client clients feel more understood when their song preferences are validated by clinicians (Brooks et al., 2020). In addition to creativity and the presentation narrative, rap also is a form of musical expression.

Rap music plays a core role in many people's lives and can play a significant role in the therapeutic process as well. Rap music has become a distinct voice of urban youth. The identities of many African American and Latino youth have largely been influenced by rap music

(Armstrong & Ricard, 2016). Therefore, the use of rap music can be a powerful tool in building rapport with youth who identify with that genre of music. Listening to and discussing rap music helps people connect to music, to each other, and their community (Brooks, et al., 2020). Examining lyrics from existing songs or creating their own songs can help people feel more comfortable talking about their life experiences. Rap music has a long history of being used as an artistic expressive tool to discuss and reflect on historical events, and to discuss social, personal, and political challenges in a manner that might be more powerful and accessible to marginalized populations (Richards, et al., 2019). Literature suggests that it is important for therapists to continuously strive to understand clients' cultural factors, to recognize the impact of oppression on clients' experiences, and to be active agents of social change (Brooks et al, 2020; Ratts & Pederson, 2014). Using rap music in therapy can be a culturally adaptive approach when working with Black clients and can be effectively used with any clients who listen to, and value, rap music (Ellington, 2004).

Rap Therapy

Research suggests that there can be numerous benefits to listening to and performing rap music; rap and therapy parallel to each other in their simultaneous freedom of expression (Richards et al., 2019). Rap therapy is the use of rap within the therapy setting to help promote positive behavioral change and enhance insight; rap music can be organized into categories including gangsta rap, materialistic rap, political/protest rap, spiritual rap, and positive rap (Ellington, 2004). Gangsta rap is rap music that promotes negative and/or harmful messages such as violence, crime, and sexism. Materialistic rap promotes messages that value possessions and material gain; for example, the song "Bling Bling" by Cash Money Records is a song that glamorizes spending large amounts of money on jewelry. Political/protest rap is music that has a

political message; political rap demonstrates how rap music can be used as an educational tool. The artist Wyclef's song "War No More" is an example of a political/protest song that promotes peace. Spiritual rap is a form of rap music that addresses spirituality. The rap song "The Prayer" by rapper DMX is an example of spiritual rap. Positive rap is a form of rap that tends to be heavily value-oriented; positive rap songs may promote messages such as family values, healthy diet, happiness, and other positive concepts. Rap artists including De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, Nas, Common, Wyclef Jean, and Talib Kweli have created positive rap songs that promote education, responsibility, and Black pride. Many rap artists and rap songs can simultaneously fit into several categories. The late rapper, Tupac Shakur, is an example of an artist whose rap music crossed several categories; Tupac created rap songs that ranged from gangsta rap to political and positive rap. Positive rap often does not get as much commercial attention as other subcategories such as gangsta rap or materialistic rap. "Positive rap is the benchmark for rap therapy" (Ellington, 2004, p. 44).

Rap therapy uses rap music to help clients work through emotional and behavioral challenges (Ellington, 2004). Rap therapy is most impactful when it is used with individuals who enjoy listening to rap music and are impacted by rap music. A goal of rap therapy is to use a person's interest in rap as a focal point for enhancing communication, insight, understanding, education, and relationship skills; rap therapy is an approach to treatment that validates the experiences, beliefs, and values of people who are influenced by hip hop culture and rap music (Ellington, 2004). When connecting with a community it can be beneficial to understand and utilize their language, and the language of hip-hop culture is rap.

It is common for therapists to use culturally and/or developmentally sensitive modalities of treatment when working with specific clients. Scholars suggest that it is important to provide

counseling in a manner that is sensitive to clients' cultures (D'Aniello et al., 2016). The development of rap therapy was built upon that logic; rap therapy aims to use rap music to help people explore, understand, and communicate their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Scholars within the realms of music therapy and other forms of art therapy have acknowledged that music can significantly impact people's thoughts, feelings, actions, perceptions, and beliefs (Ellington, 2004).

The theoretical model of rap therapy was influenced by social learning theorists because the influence of rap music and hip-hop culture is largely through learning and positive reinforcement (Ellington, 2004). Social learning theorists John Dollard and Neal Miller (2013) suggest that the basic learning principles of stimulus, reward, and response can be used to teach imitation. Albert Bandura's (1986) social learning theory suggests that learning occurs through the observation of models. Social learning theorists provide a foundation for the development of rap therapy. This theory also provides a framework for the use of rap therapy, as the influence and consumption of rap music are often influenced by environments, presented, and promoted socially and through media platforms.

Ellington (2004) provides steps that can be used by therapists using rap therapy, and can also be used by teachers, parents, and counselors working with individuals who are influenced by rap music. These steps include: 1) assess and plan, 2) build alliance, 3) reframe thoughts and behaviors, 4) reinforce through writing, and 5) maintain the change. In the assessment and planning step, a therapist uses questions and observation to assess the client's level of interest in rap music and hip-hop culture. The therapist can ask questions about whether the client listens to rap music, which artists the client likes and dislikes, what songs the client likes and dislikes, and why the client likes certain artists and songs. The knowledge gained about the client during this

step can be useful in developing a plan for using rap music as a treatment modality. During the building alliance step, the therapist encourages the client to talk about favorite artists and songs, listens to songs with the client in a nonjudgmental manner, and has dialogue with the client about the songs. The therapist and client talk about thoughts and feelings that are influenced by certain songs. Research suggests that building a strong therapeutic relationship is a core component of successful therapy. The goal of the reframing thoughts and behaviors step is to help the client broaden their scope of rap music to include the use of songs that do not reinforce undesirable thoughts or behaviors. In the reinforce through writing step clients are encouraged to write their own rap lyrics or poems expressing their thoughts and feelings and talking about their desired change in behaviors or thoughts. The maintain the change step focuses on using ongoing reinforcement to help facilitate and maintain therapeutic change. Clients can be asked questions directly or given questionnaires as a means of assessing the degree of change in thoughts and behaviors that have been developed and maintained (Ellington, 2004).

Rap therapy uses narrative themes in rap music to help clients reflect on their personal beliefs, values, and emotions. In the use of rap therapy, therapists help increase awareness of ways that beliefs and emotions influence behavioral patterns and help empower clients to change (Armstrong & Ricard, 2016). In the use of rap therapy clients can write their own lyrics or can just recite and examine lyrics as a component of the therapeutic process (Richards et al., 2019). The reframing thoughts and behaviors step in rap therapy parallels thought-stopping techniques in cognitive behavioral therapy (Richards et al., 2019). For example, as individuals write rap songs they can discuss situations, thoughts, emotions, physical feelings, and actions specific to one's most personal and challenging experiences. Additionally, through the process of writing and re-writing rap songs, individuals can identify, challenge, and change thought patterns and

perspectives. Rap and writing in depth about these experiences during and outside of therapy sessions and discussing these experiences with a therapist can be utilized to connect rap and behavioral therapy (Washington, 2021).

Rap music contains diverse ranges of content. Content in rap music ranges from messages that are anti-social, sexist, and misogynistic to messages that are prosocial, uplifting, self-empowering, and spiritual (Ellington, 2004). When utilizing rap therapy, therapists can help clients identify what content within rap music aligns with their interests and values. In situations in which clients identify with unhealthy messages in rap music, therapists can utilize that awareness to help clients challenge and change their thoughts and perspectives. In conducting rap therapy, the therapist sometimes sits with the client through the exploration of antisocial messages in rap music to gradually help change the person's interest in utilizing rap songs that are positive and educational.

Researchers suggest that using rap music in therapy can help bridge cultural and generational gaps (Armstrong & Ricard, 2016). Exploring themes that are expressed in music can produce creative interventions that can help therapists impact clients who are not easily reached by traditional treatment modalities. While the use of rap music is not common in the field of counseling, it is increasingly becoming a more popular intervention (Richards et al., 2019). Rap therapy has been found to have a positive impact on mental health outcomes in a variety of settings. Rap therapy can be used in several different ways. Rap can be used to help promote positive peer interactions and can provide a safe mechanism for people to share experiences and challenges (Richards et al., 2019; Alvarez, 2012). Rap therapy can be used to create opportunities for individuals to re-write their stories in ways that instill hope. In situations in which people have internalized negative messages in rap music, as the people become more

insightful of the negative impact that rap lyrics have on their lives and perspectives, the negative

messages in rap songs usually become less impactful (Ellington, 2004). Similarly, to rap therapy,

optimal conceptual theory also identifies value in helping change people's perspectives,

outlooks, and worldviews.

Optimal Theory

Optimal conceptual theory (OCT) is an African-centered theoretical perspective that is

rooted in African psychology and philosophy. It derived from the wisdom tradition within

African deep thought. OCT was developed by Dr. Linda James Myers, and it is built on the

following foundational principles: holistic worldview, spirituality, self-knowledge, diunital logic,

intrinsic self-worth, and extended self-identity (Myers, 1988). According to OCT, a holistic

worldview is a perspective that values inseparable relationships between the balance of physical,

spiritual, social, and psychological realities. Spirituality is in reference to an individual's belief

in, and perceived connection to, the omnipresent creative force. This vitalizing creative force is

sometimes referred to as energy, God, Jesus Christ, Amen, Ra, Buddha, etc. Self-knowledge is in

reference to the process of gaining a deeper understanding of oneself. As individuals gain a

deeper understanding of self and experience the institution of connectedness, they gain more

trust and understanding of themselves. Diunital logic refers to both/and thinking instead of

either/or thinking. This perspective suggests that there is a balance of opposites. Intrinsic self-

worth refers to the belief that people have a divine purpose and experience divine challenges in

life. Extended self-identity is a sense of self that includes ancestors, the yet unborn, all of nature,

and the entire community. This perspective values an interconnectedness with other people, the

inanimate world, and the spirit world. In this perspective, interpersonal relationships are highly

valued. According to OCT, an optimal (African-centered) worldview is a paradigm that values

the foundational principles of OCT. An optimal worldview is a worldview that values a holistic reality in which sensory knowledge and spiritual knowledge are both valued. Interpersonal relationships, cooperation, and harmony with nature are highly valued within an optimal worldview.

A fundamental component of OCT is the contrast between an optimal worldview and a suboptimal worldview. According to OCT, a suboptimal worldview is a worldview that highly values materialism, competition, individualism, and attempts to control nature (Myers, 1988). In a suboptimal worldview, reality is only known through the five senses, and knowledge is primarily accumulated through counting and measuring. Within a suboptimal worldview individuals value dichotomous thinking (e.g., either/or) instead of believing there can be truth in opposing perspectives. In the suboptimal worldview, identity is largely viewed as an individual instead of appreciating a collective identity. Within a suboptimal worldview, people's sense of self-worth is determined based on external factors such as positions and possessions. According to OCT, suboptimal worldviews result in psychological challenges and distress (Myers, 1988).

Researchers have found endorsing an optimal worldview to be associated with experiencing less psychological distress (Montgomery et al., 1990). In African American young adults, an optimal worldview was found to be negatively associated with emotion-focused coping and depressive symptoms; endorsement of an optimal worldview reduced the association between perceived stress and depressive symptoms (Neblett et al., 2010). Endorsement of an optimal worldview was also found to be negatively associated with imposter syndrome in African American graduate students (Ewing et al., 1996). In African American college students, endorsement of an optimal worldview was positively associated with adaptation to college (Hatter & Ottens, 1998).

Development of Optimal Theory

OCT is a theoretical perspective that was developed to understand the endurance and resilience that was evident in African Americans while experiencing years of oppression (Myers et al., 2018). OCT provides a theoretical perspective that explains how health, well-being, and endurance have been achieved and can continue to be achieved, within the Black community. This theory was developed through the examination of strategies that were used within the African American community. These strategies were found to be reflective of traditions that were used in ancient African cultures.

Belief Systems Analysis

Belief Systems Analysis (BSA) is a form of cognitive therapy that was developed in accordance with OCT (Myers, 1988). BSA is different from other cognitive approaches to therapy in that it is based on an Afrocentric model of psychological well-being, and it specifies a worldview that the therapist aims to help the client develop. The goal of BSA is to help clients transition from a suboptimal worldview to a more optimal worldview. The focus of BSA is to help clients develop a way of viewing the world in which the client can achieve the maximum positive experience (i.e., happiness and peace), as defined within ancient cultures.

The first step in BSA is assessing the client's belief system in comparison to an optimal worldview and assessing the degree to which the client desires change (Myers, 1988). The therapist will examine the client by presenting the client with problems within the client's conceptual framework by examining their personal history, goals, and consciousness. An underlying assumption in BSA is that everyone desires everlasting peace and happiness, but one's worldview can either limit or enhance one's ability to attain peace and happiness. By

helping clients compare and contrast consequences associated with different belief systems, therapists help clients gradually transition toward an optimal worldview.

According to Myers (1988), within the BSA treatment approach clients commonly manifest change through enhanced self-esteem, health, resourcefulness, prosperity, and self-determination. Clients' self-esteem is commonly enhanced as their sense of self-worth transitions away from being based primarily on external criteria to an intrinsic sense of self-worth. Health and resourcefulness improve as clients stop allowing their feelings to be defined by reactions to circumstances and situations and feel more empowered to define their own reality. Clients experience increased prosperity and self-determination as they identify more closely with the infinite spirit. Similarly, to other cognitive therapies, BSA emphasizes rational thinking, however, within BSA rational thinking is emphasized within the context of an Afrocentric worldview.

Using Rap Music and Optimal Theory

It can be beneficial to use rap therapy and BSA conjointly, as these treatment modalities are rooted in similar cultural contexts, have similarities in their implementation, and complement each other. Both rap therapy and BSA can be beneficial specifically in treating youth, adolescents, African Americans, and all populations who listen to rap music.

Rap therapy and BSA were created out of similar cultural heritage, rap therapy and BSA are both rooted in African cultural traditions, values, and perspectives. Rap music, and therefore rap therapy, is rooted in the African oral tradition. OCT, and consequently BSA, is rooted in the wisdom tradition in African philosophy. As a result of being rooted in African culture, rap therapy and BSA are both treatment modalities that are specifically designed to meet the cultural

needs of African American clients. Rap music and OCT were both developed within the cultural context of African Americans responding to racial oppression (Ellington, 2004; Myers, 1988).

Rap therapy and BSA particularly complement each other as treatment modalities. Rap therapy techniques can be useful in helping counselors establish rapport with clients, examine clients' values, create a modality for clients to recreate their narratives, and create a pathway for clients to express their thoughts and feelings in a comfortable manner. Rap therapy also presents a methodology to help clients reframe their thoughts and behaviors. BSA provides a paradigm within which clients can reframe their thoughts and behaviors.

Conjoint Use of Rap Therapy and BSA

Previous research has yet to combine Rap therapy and BSA. This is a gap in the literature. These approaches can work well together. Rap therapy and BSA can be implemented conjointly. An example of how these two therapeutic approaches can be used together will be presented. The first step is to assess the client's level of interest and engagement in rap music and the degree to which the client endorses an optimal or suboptimal worldview. The therapist can build rapport with the client by the therapist and client listening to rap songs that the client likes together. The therapist can provide psychoeducation about an optimal worldview and its potential benefits. The therapist and client can explore ways in which selected songs present the endorsement of an optimal worldview and ways in which they present the endorsement of a suboptimal worldview. Additionally, the therapist and client can explore ways in which the client's personal values and perspectives are aligned with an optimal worldview and ways in which they are aligned with a suboptimal worldview. The therapist can then help the client reframe their thoughts and feelings in a manner that is more aligned with an optimal worldview. The therapist can also help the client identify songs that are more aligned with an optimal

worldview. Additionally, the client can be encouraged to write their own rap songs or poems and can explore, with the therapist, ways that their songs endorse an optimal worldview. This use of rap therapy and BSA conjointly utilizes the rap therapy steps described by Ellington (2004) – assess and plan, build alliance, reframe thoughts and behaviors, reinforce through writing, and maintain the change, while also assisting in the transition to a more optimal worldview the is core in BSA.

Case Example

Bo is a 13-year-old Black male who enjoys listening to rap music. Bo does not talk about his feelings very often, and frequently gets into physical altercations with his peers. Bo was encouraged to utilize mental health services after a recent physical altercation with one of his peers. In session, the clinician encourages Bo to talk about rap songs that he enjoys and to listen to those songs with the clinician. Bo plays several gangsta rap songs during the session. The clinician also assesses the degree to which Bo endorses an optimal or sub-optimal worldview. The clinician encourages Bo to talk about the lyrics in the songs and discuss what the lyrics mean to him. The clinician provides psychoeducation about an optimal worldview and its benefits, the clinician also plays some positive rap songs that are reflective of an optimal worldview. The clinician and Bo talk about the lyrics in the selected positive rap songs. The clinician helped Bo realize that he values peaceful conflict resolution, but he did not believe that he would be able to resolve his conflicts with peers in a peaceful manner. The clinician encourages Bo to write some rap songs about his value of peace and harmony. The clinician provides suggestions about ways that Bo can attempt to resolve peer conflicts in a peaceful manner. The clinician encourages Bo to write rap songs about interactions in which conflicts are

resolved peacefully. Within his peer interactions, Bo starts implementing the peaceful conflict resolution strategies that he wrote about his in his rap songs.

Conclusion

Rap therapy and BSA are both culturally sensitive therapeutic approaches that are developed specifically within the context of treating African American clients. Both approaches are rooted in African cultural tradition and utilize techniques that are consistent with Afrocentric values. Both therapeutic approaches were developed in the context of the experiences of oppression endured by the African American population. Although developed specifically in the context of African American culture, both therapeutic approaches can be used with individuals of any cultural identity. As therapeutic approaches that were developed within a similar cultural context, and designed specifically to treat a similar population, these approaches can be used conjointly.

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