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My Culture, My Voice:  
The Impact of Youth Hip-Hop and Spoken Word on  
Adolescent Participants in Positive Youth Development Settings

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

## **Abstract**

Mastering the tasks of adolescence is difficult for all youth, and the journey of African American adolescents and other youth of color is a unique one. This study explored the following research questions: "What is the impact of participation in positive youth development programs that incorporate hip-hop and/or spoken word on youth participants?" and "What components of these programs are important?" Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with youth workers and current or former program participants. This study found that involvement in this type of programming was highly beneficial for youth, particularly youth of color. Participants saw benefits in a wide variety of categories, including their empowerment, community engagement, relationships with adults, academic and technical skills, non-cognitive skills, self-expression and youth voice. The art forms were culturally important for youth in understanding their own strengths and struggles in the context of their community of origin. This study challenges traditional notions of what it means to be a young person and particularly what it means to be a young person of color. There may be elements embedded within these programs and the concept of hip-hop and spoken word as developmental mediums that could help effectively address issues of risk and inequality. Continued research is needed to further understand and substantiate the value of youth development programs that incorporate the creation and performance of hip-hop and spoken word.

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## **My Culture, My Voice: The Impact of Youth Hip-Hop and Spoken Word on Adolescent Participants in Positive Youth Development Settings**

Adolescence, the transition between childhood and adulthood, is a critical time in which youth are in a process of working out their identities and self-concepts (Hara, 2012). Although the literature varies, in general, adolescence encompasses a youth's development between the ages of 13 and 25. Erik Erikson viewed adolescence as the peak time frame in which people must experiment with their personal, occupational, and ideological identities (de Anda, Franke, & Hussey, 2008). Adolescence is a stage when youth are more vulnerable to issues of body image, peer pressure, drug and alcohol use, youth violence, educational demands, and employment issues (Veltre & Hadley, 2012). Therefore, adolescents need to feel control over themselves, and find safe places to express their feelings and beliefs in this time of immense changes and identity work is very important (Ciardiello, 2003; Veltre & Hadley, 2012).

Mastering the tasks of adolescence can be difficult for all youth, however, the journey of African American adolescents and other youth of color is a unique one. These youth face a societal disadvantage which is related to a long and complex history of white supremacy in the United States. Even though many overt forms of racism are generally looked down upon, the consequences of continued racial inequality are very evident in today's society. Racial and socio-economic disparities are daunting and profoundly affect daily reality for youth of color. These disparities can impact the way these youth are treated, as well as their success in school, advancement to post-secondary education, income potential, and involvement in the criminal justice system. In the United States, more than 25% of students do not graduate from high school, and growing research shows the necessity of not only a high school diploma, but also

some type of post-secondary education for future financial success (Richmond, 2013). African American youth have only a 55% chance of completing high school in four years, Hispanic youth have a 58% chance, and Native American youth have only a 51% chance (Seidel, 2011). Furthermore, male students are 8% less likely to graduate than their female peers (Seidel, 2011). On average, twelfth grade reading scores of African American and Hispanic youth in the United States are significantly lower than the scores of their Caucasian peers (American Psychological Association, 2012). Studies have shown that youth of color, particularly boys, are treated differently than their peers, resulting in higher disciplinary infractions (American Psychological Association, 2012).

It is no surprise, then, that many studies centering on urban youth are deficit based (Craig & McInroy, 2013; Roye, Tolden, & Snowden, 2013), and there is an assumption that all urban youth are youth of color and are living in poverty (Lerner, Phelps, Alberts, Forman, & Christiansen, 2007). Positive youth development frameworks can be more helpful than deficit based studies in seeing the strengths and possibilities in youth (Lerner, et al., 2007). To that end, beginning in the 1990s, youth programs have changed their focus from preventing delinquent behaviors to fostering positive youth development and asset building. This has shifted the attention once placed on deficits and problems to youth participants' strengths. Strengths or assets can be found in the individual person, his or her relationships, and his or her community. The benefits of positive youth development programs have also begun to be recognized by foundations and state and federal governments (Gershoff, 2008).

Research has shown that despite the diversity of youth's situations and how youth of color are treated, all youth have the potential to change and build assets (Lerner & Lerner, 2012). Therefore, all youth, including youth of color, can benefit from youth development programs that

foster positive growth, even youth who are facing tremendous adversity. In addition, non-cognitive skills such as curiosity, determination, and self-control are being found to be more important in determining a person's future success than intelligence alone (Tough, 2012). Non-cognitive skills are dynamic and can be nurtured and taught.

Many youth development programs incorporate the creative arts into their programming as a way to engage youth in authentic participation and positive development. Youth development programs are voluntary programs that youth can become involved in that are usually focused on building assets, academic support, passions, interests, and/or non-cognitive skills. Arts programs can include performance art such as theater, poetry, dance, or music, as well as visual arts such as painting, photography, sculpture, or book-making.

A growing number of youth development programs have recently integrated the use of hip-hop and performance poetry art in their programming, and these programs are the subject of national media attention. Examples of these programs include Hip Hop Hope in Seattle, Washington; Kidz Get Kickin' in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and The After School Hip-Hop Project in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These programs utilize hip-hop and spoken word to engage youth and provide a medium for skill development and asset building. Hip-hop is a popular genre of music, selling over twenty four million albums in 2012, and is often viewed as an important part of youth culture (Statista, 2013). In many American cities, there are spoken word readings or hip-hop concerts every night of the week (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Hip-hop music, in its many forms, is a genre that is seen as culturally specific yet is surprisingly universal in its appeal to young people from different cultural backgrounds (Hara, 2012; Iwamoto, Creswell, & Caldwell, 2007).



Hip-hop is typically defined as a culture which incorporates rap music along with film, graffiti, dress, language, and expressions (Ciardiello, 2003). Rap is defined as a genre of music that utilizes a repetitive and grounding rhythm, looping of a melodic line, sampling of recorded music, and/or lyrics that stand out among other elements of the song (Hara, 2012). Rap and hip-hop are used interchangeably in this research paper. Although there is a difference, the genre of rap music and the hip-hop culture are closely related and are often used interchangeably in existing literature. Spoken word, or performance poetry, is another form of expression that is often utilized by young people and is closely related to hip-hop culture. Performance poetry is defined as a poem written to be performed that uses "the dynamic range of the voice and the nuances of vernacular speech" (Parmar & Bain, 2007, p. 131). Spoken word and performance poetry are also used interchangeably in this research paper.

Hip-hop and performance poetry in youth development programs is important to understand because it may provide a medium in which youth are empowered to build their skills and create bright futures for themselves. Grounded in positive youth development frameworks, hip-hop and performance poetry youth programs may have significant impacts on youth. It is also important to understand which components of this programming are effective in shaping positive developmental outcomes for youth. Hearing both youth and youth workers' subjective experiences of this programming is important in understanding its impact and beginning to build theories to support it. An understanding of youth development programs that incorporate hip-hop and performance poetry can help build the body of research in both youth work and social work, and help practitioners understand impacts and best practices in this area.

A positive youth development and empowerment perspective is used as the theoretical framework of this research study. The assumption is that all youth have the ability to change and

build positive assets (Lerner & Lerner, 2012). The researcher believes in the significance of preventive and positive programming in helping adolescents be the best they can be, before formal interventions such as therapy or corrections are needed. By concentrating on empowering youth to build assets, skills and talents, youth workers and youth programs can prevent future adversity and help foster thriving behaviors (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003). The benefits of positive youth development programming are two-fold; not only does this programming have the potential to prevent the unwanted and anti-social behaviors that are often represented in the literature and popular culture, but this programming also helps youth determine the strengths and potential that already exists in themselves (Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003).

This research provides a review of relevant literature, including literature about positive youth development frameworks, the history, perceptions, and impacts of rap music, hip-hop culture, and performance poetry, and the use of hip-hop and spoken word as mediums in youth development programming. It details the qualitative method in which this study was conducted, including participant profiles, data collection, setting, and analysis techniques. Findings from interviews with youth development practitioners as well as current and former youth participants are analyzed and discussed to illuminate the impact of incorporating of hip-hop and spoken word in adolescent programming.

This study explored the following research questions: "What is the impact of participation in positive youth development programs that incorporate hip-hop and/or spoken word on youth participants and practitioners, from their perspectives?", "What components of these programs do they describe as important?", and "What are the subjective experiences of youth participants and youth workers involved in these programs?"

## **Literature Review**

There are many authors who have written about hip-hop, spoken word, and youth development. The first section of the literature review will examine literature about racial inequalities, hip-hop music, culture, and performance poetry, including their history and impact. Next, several positive youth development frameworks will be explored. Finally, literature that connects hip-hop music and spoken word poetry to positive youth development will provide examples of programs where the merging of these two paradigms has taken place.

### **Issues Impacting Young, Black Males**

It has been more than 150 years since President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. However, the trajectories of many young, black males still do not yet resemble the American Dream. Seidel (2011) points out that African American youth have only a 55% chance of completing high school in four years, compared to a 75% chance for United States youth overall. Furthermore, "Incarceration rates are nearly fifty times the national average for African Americans in their twenties and thirties who have dropped out of high school" (Seidel, 2022, p. 101). Anderson (2008) writes: "As young black men talk among themselves, each man has a story of police harassment or public discrimination in which strangers go to great lengths to avoid him" (p. 7). These teenagers are often caught between a seemingly impossible double standard: to either embrace their culture or to deny and reject that culture in order to distance themselves from the public stereotypes about them. Anderson (2008) goes on to say that upwardly mobile males of color tend to try and avoid the stereotype while others embrace the negative images to feel tough and to have street credibility. He explains, "He is caught between 'decent' and 'street'" (Anderson, 2008, p. 17).

African Americans and other racial minorities disproportionately live in the throes of inner city neighborhoods which often offer only sub-optimal economic opportunities: working only low-wage jobs that provide no real sense of job security and little to no benefits, depending on government assistance programs, or participating in informal economy which encompasses legal activities such as bartering goods and services, and also semi-legal and illegal activities such as under the table businesses, drug dealing, or prostitution (Anderson, 2008).

The expectations and perceptions of masculinity affect both African American males and females. The number of female headed households is steadily on the rise and the media portrays that many children grow up fatherless in these communities (Perry, 2008, p. 175). However, the economic conditions and educational disparities make it difficult for fathers to feel like they can provide for their families. Perry (2008) urges: "The value of fathers, sons, and boyfriends should not be seen as residing solely in their earning potential as long as their income and employment are limited by factors beyond the control of individuals" (p. 175).

In order to shift these hardships in a new direction, Perry (2008) suggests that "Places for being fully human and loved despite our negative characterization in society are essential" (p. 174). Dance (2008) writes that structural changes are essential, especially in the education system, to help African American and Latino males succeed in their academics and their outside lives. She urges: "The most important thing is to connect with young people themselves...We must look at them and see our own humanity reflected back, engage in dialogue, and critically reflect on our shared world and our unique and varied ways of interpreting it" (Dance, 2008, p. 145).

## **Hip-Hop Music and Culture**

The origins of hip-hop come from indigenous African music, in which tribal history was traditionally chanted and recited. During African American slavery, other musical forms emerged, such as the Mississippi Blues and children's chanting and clapping games. African American oral traditions incorporate both the musical and lyrical qualities of the genre, in practices such as toasts, dozens (improvised rhyming word competitions), and civil rights leaders' speeches that showed the power of the spoken word. Furthermore, soul, rhythm and blues, and storytelling exemplify the tradition of teaching life lessons and communicating emotions through music and lyrics (Hara, 2012).

Eligan (2012) writes, "Rap music is different from Hip-Hop. Rap is the music, the beats, and the rhyme of a culture known as hip-hop" (p. 28). Hip-hop is a worldview which addresses power structures that impact communities of color as well as their cultural identity (Veltre & Hadley, 2012). Rap music and hip-hop culture emerged in the 1970s South Bronx, and today is a multi-billion dollar industry. Rap is the only African American genre of music that has both remained primarily created and performed by its people while simultaneously gaining widespread popularity across racial and ethnic lines (Alvarez, 2012; Hara, 2012). Contemporary hip-hop culture includes music, film, graffiti, dress, language, expressions, journalism, activism, and knowledge (Ciardiello, 2003; Veltre & Hadley, 2012). Payne & Gibson (2009) describe hip-hop as a way of life that tends to bring out certain roles and identities: the MC or rapper, the DJ or social organizer, the dancer, the street/graffiti artist, and the knowledge bearer or intellectual (p. 128). Ogbar (2007) writes: "Authenticity, however defined or imagined, has always been central to the culture" (p. 1). Despite the differences between rap music and hip-hop culture, because the terms are closely related, and because of how they are used interchangeably in much

of the literature, they are also used interchangeably in this research paper. For example, Alvarez (2012) refers to his treatment groups with adolescents as both rap therapy and hip-hop therapy.

Many authors acknowledge rap and hip-hop as influential forces in youth culture and youth communities. Although some critics view rap as a destructive force due to themes referenced in the music, for many youth, it is a source of strength. The genre provides opportunities for expression, hope and empowerment (Alvarez, 2012). Alvarez (2012) explains, "Many of the youth I have encountered who rap have dreams of becoming the next rap star. However far-fetched or absurd these dreams may seem, they represent a hope for a better future" (p. 123). Tyson (2005) found that people from a variety of backgrounds have both positive and negative perceptions of rap music, and generally view it in three ways: violent-misogynistic, empowerment-positive, or artistic-aesthetic. Philosopher bell hooks (2006) states, "Rap music is so diverse in its themes, styles and content. But when it becomes a vehicle to talk about in mainstream news, the rap that gets in national news is always the rap music that perpetuates misogyny and that is most obscene in its lyrics, and this comes to stand for what rap is." Travis (2012) found that out of all the groups, African Americans are the racial group most likely to view rap positively. Others believe a paradigm shift is taking place in the genre and focus is moving away from the negative messages in the music and returning to using messages of personal growth and development, common good, and addressing inequality.

Eligan (2012) writes about several different categories of rap music: gangsta rap which promotes crime, violence, sexism, and other anti-social behaviors, materialistic rap which promotes wealth, material possessions, and sex, political/protest rap which takes a stand on and educates others about political issues, positive rap which often inspires others to take pride in their education and ethnicity, and spiritual rap which stems from messages in gospel music.

Eligan (2012) also acknowledges that artists often do not fall in to a single category of rap music, and many songs may not fall into any of these categories (pp. 29-24).

Rap music and hip-hop culture have been shown to draw out a person's emotions and communicate significant messages across racial and ethnic lines (Iwamoto, et al. 2007). People are able to identify with the messages in the lyrical content, and the music can have positive psychological impacts, such as increasing energy and motivation and relieving stress (Iwamoto, et al. 2007). Travis (2012) found that listening to popular rap music had both risky and empowering elements of music engagement, but the individual and community empowerment impacts were far higher than the elements of risky behaviors. Travis (2012) also found themes of esteem, resilience, growth, community, and change in a lyrical analysis of music therapy content and commercial rap music. Tyson, Detchkov, Eastwood, Carver, & Sehr's (2012) analysis of 100 songs which were either randomly selected or identified by clinicians for their therapeutic relevance, found positive thematic messages of social criticism, social empowerment, humanistic values, and negative behavior criticism. Notable subthemes and examples within these categories were love ("Nothing on You" by B.O.B.), praise of family values ("Joy" by Talib Kweli), personal empowerment ("Can't Stop Me Now" by Jadakiss), personal suffering ("Coldest Winter" by Kanye West), and social oppression ("I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto" by 2Pac) (Tyson, et al., 2012).

Feminist authors have also taken on the issues of rap music, misogyny and hip-hop in formal mental health treatment. Hip-hop feminism aims to explore the way women have contributed to the community and how they are represented in the culture. Many of the first African American feminists, such as Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Toni Morrison were also aligned with the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Veltre & Hadley, 2012). Current

mental health practitioners have found that many of the themes in hip-hop culture are complementary to the feminist treatment model. For example, collaboration and community is present in the music as well as in the feminist treatment model. One example of collaboration in hip-hop music is between a DJ who is providing the beats and an MC who is rapping the lyrics (Veltre & Hadley, 2012). The roles and images of women can be used to explore "the healthy and unhealthy ways in which our clients' identities have been shaped" (Veltre & Hadley, 2012, p. 90). For example, the above authors have used Salt-n-Pepa's "Independent" to explore gender roles and what it means to be a woman (Veltre & Hadley, 2012).

### **Spoken Word Performance Poetry**

Performance poetry is a form of oral poetry that dates back to protest songs of the civil rights era, and even to African storytelling traditions. It combines elements of poetic verse, music, and theater. Poets can be influenced by traditional poetic forms, other performance poets, rap, and hip-hop songs (Ingalls, 2012; Parmar & Bain, 2007). "Commonly referred to as simply 'spoken word', the naming of the form itself stands in contrast to the 'written word' in which the verse of the Western literary canon is traditionally composed and experienced" (Parmar & Bain, 2007, p. 131). Performance poetry was influenced heavily from the 1920s to the 1950s by Langston Hughes and other Harlem Renaissance poets, as well as beatnik poets such as Jack Kerouac. Poets of the Harlem Renaissance era did not attempt to write like the Western poetry they had read, but instead embraced their own culture, history, and struggles. Beatnik poets, while not typically black, mirrored improvisation techniques already present in African American writing, and are widely known for their stage presence (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Spoken word grew further during the Black Arts Movement (1965-1975) with influential poets such as Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Other



authors state that the origins of spoken word include the continent of Africa and countries of Greece, Spain, and Japan (Ingalls, 2012).

While spoken word may not be commonly thought of as similar to hip-hop music, the two art forms are closely related and have many areas of intersection. For example, the performance poet and hip-hop emcee use similar vocal techniques to communicate similar themes in their artistic works. Rappers often do not refer to themselves as spoken word artists because of the aesthetic difference in their songs, but the energy and excitement of both live hip-hop shows and spoken word performances are similar (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Parmar and Bain (2007) write: "In a cultural context, both use powerful language to articulate the experiences and marginality that African American and Latino working-class people experience" (p. 131). Hip-hop battles, which emerged in the 1970s, are improvised performances in which two emcees go back and forth in a "lyrical boxing match" (Parmar & Bain, 2007, p. 141). Similarly, poetry slams allow poets to compete by performing their pieces for a few minutes at a time and then are judged by audience members (Parmar & Bain, 2007). The popularity of hip-hop has also influenced young people to write performance poetry to express their feelings and views (Ingalls, 2012).

### **Positive Adolescent Development**

There are several indicators of positive adolescent development that are universal across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups (Sesma & Roehlkarpartain, 2003). One widely accepted framework used for understanding adolescent development is Search Institute's *Developmental Assets*, which identifies forty indicators of positive development in the categories of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to

learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Search Institute, 2007). These assets can be used to predict both high-risk and thriving behaviors in adolescents. For example, in one study, youth with 23 or 24 developmental assets showed no high-risk behaviors, while youth with less than 15 assets engaged in five or more high-risk behaviors (Sesma & Roehlkarpartain, 2003). Search Institute studies have shown that the more assets a youth has, the more likely they are to do well in school, be persistent when facing adversity, save money and be financially responsible, value diversity, and take on leadership roles. Youth with more assets are able to more effectively resist alcohol use, tobacco use, illegal drug use, youth violence, and anti-social behaviors, such as shoplifting, vandalism, and sexual activity. A higher number of assets has also been shown to reduce depression and suicide risks. Finally, assets have shown to increase youth's college readiness in the areas of math, science, and time management (Search Institute, 2013).

Developmental assets are a framework which can be used with youth who are elementary aged or older, but Scales, Roehlkarpartain, & Benson (2010) also found important additional strengths in teens which helped predict success in school, work, and life. Strong relationships, deep interests and passions (sparks), and teen voice were the crucial contributors to success, but Scales et al. (2010) found that only seven percent of teens measured highly on all three areas, and 50% or less of teens surveyed scored high on each of the individual measures: relationships and opportunities, deep interests and passions (sparks), and the Teen Voice Index, which measured leadership, personal power, comfort with expression, community problem solving, and civic involvement. Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth (2009) studied autonomy, belongingness, and engagement in school as contributing to the psychological health of teens. They utilized self-determination theory alongside positive psychology theories to examine adolescent well-being.

Van Ryzin et al.'s (2009) study found direct correlations between autonomy and feelings of belonging with both teachers and peers had positive impacts on adolescents' engagement in learning and their hope for the future.

Another positive youth development framework utilizes the 6 Cs of development, which include competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution (Lerner & Lerner, 2012). These authors found that after reviewing the literature, the three main components of youth programs that were effective in developing the 6 Cs were positive and sustained relationships between youth and adults, activities that build important life skills, and opportunities to use those skills as participants and leaders in their community (Lerner & Lerner, 2012). Lerner, et al. (2007) also found adolescent girls themselves described the 6 Cs when asked to talk about successful youth they knew. Similar studies conducted by the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine found that the programs that most consistently showed positive outcomes in youth development included those that provided physical and psychological safety, structure and appropriate adult supervision, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill-building, and integration of family, school, and community efforts (Gershoff, 2008).

While many authors included non-cognitive skills in their positive youth development criteria, Tough (2012) specifically argued that non-cognitive skills are more important for future success than intelligence alone, and can be developed despite exposure to adverse childhood events. The seven strengths Tough found that were likely to predict high achievement and life satisfaction were grit, self-control, zest, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism, and curiosity (Tough, 2012).

Kia-Keating, Dowdy, Morgan, & Noam (2010) created an integrative conceptual model for healthy adolescent development which combined resilience research with healthy youth development and asset building theories. These authors determined that there are two means in which adolescent development is fulfilled: the protecting pathway in which they are protected from risks by support and intervention, and the promoting pathway where building youth's assets directly aids in their development. Individuals, families, schools, communities, and culture are all involved in adolescent development, and adolescents need to master eight developmental domains: social, emotional, behavioral, moral, psychological, cognitive, educational, and structural. In each domain, positive youth development principals are explored along with elements of risk and protection. For example, in the moral domain, character building youth development programs are recognized along with the risk of delinquent values and the protection of prosocial values (Kia-Keating, et al., 2010).

### **Hip-Hop and Spoken Word as Youth Development Mediums**

Velture and Hadley (2012) write: "Hip-Hop is a culture that encompasses so much of youth culture today. For many youth, male and female, hip-hop is bigger than the culture. It is a dream, a way out, an emotional outlet, a learning tool, a listening friend, a way of communicating, a political statement, a way to build relationships, and a consistent presence" (p. 95). Listening to and discussing existing hip-hop music and poetry, as well as creating original pieces has shown to connect youth to music, each other, and their community (Clay, 2006). Audiences of these performances connect with the performer and both parties feel validated in their experience. For example, a 2Pac song about police brutality resonated with one youth, while an Erykah Badu song about being a young mother connected with another (Clay, 2006). By listening to, performing, and creating their own music, youth are able to be activists in their

community and address racism and other inequality in order to affect social change (Clay, 2006). Lyrics from existing or newly created hip-hop songs can also help youth talk about their life experiences (Ciardiello, 2003). Ingalls (2012) writes, "For urban youth, hip-hop is the predominant language" (p. 103). Furthermore, hip-hop and spoken word can help preserve indigenous knowledge, which are long-standing practices that help preserve and communicate culturally specific wisdom and teachings. This knowledge and expression can be used as stratagems to empower oppressed communities (Biggs-El, 2012).

Performance poetry and hip-hop are relevant mediums to help teens develop their voices and positive assets, particularly in the areas of support, empowerment, constructive use of time, and positive identity (Search Institute, 2007). They are cultural art forms that have been shown to engage, empower, and motivate the adolescent population (Clay, 2006). Hip-hop can create physical and psychological spaces for youth that are conducive to community building and resiliency (Payne & Gibson, 2009). A school-based intervention with African American males showed that incorporating hip-hop to illustrate both individual and community empowerment contributed to improvements in several of their developmental assets as well as their energy and enthusiasm (Travis & Ausbrooks, 2012).

The top three sparks (deep interests and passions) of teens surveyed by Scales, et al. (2010) were creative arts, sports, and technology. Twenty-eight percent of teens reported creative arts as one of their sparks and fifteen percent of teens identified technology as a spark (Scales, et al. 2010). The production of hip-hop often involves combining these two passions to create songs, and is accessible to students with little or no prior experience in music (Hara, 2012). Hara (2012) also writes: "The most effective music therapy for adolescents is engaging,

active-oriented, and structured to provide a holding environment, with as much freedom as possible for improvisation and creativity" (p. 16).

A participatory research program with female adolescents combined the creation of spoken word poetry with researching issues that were important to the group. They created a performance piece called "Echoes" which was about *Brown vs. the Board of Education* Supreme Court case. Another youth wrote a spoken word piece about things she witnessed in her life, such as a peer being arrested and being taken away in squad car (Torre, Fine, Alexandre, & Genao, 2007). Through this program, youth were able to stand up for what they believed in and start conversations between themselves and audience members. They created a space to talk about social injustice and collective responsibility (Torre, et al., 2007). Furthermore, Ingalls (2012) argues, "Spoken-word requires its participants not only to write, but also to show up, to stand behind their perspectives in the spotlight, and to receive immediate audience response" (p. 100). She believes that spoken word helps youth not only express themselves and their experiences, but become "poet-citizens" who have an ability to express their political and social beliefs to others (Ingalls, 2012, p. 101). Youth learn that they can influence their communities with their writing and performances and learn to collaborate with other youth artists. The increase in local and regional poetry slam competitions as well as The National Poetry Slam shows both the interest and significance of performance poetry to young people (Ingalls, 2012).

Lozenski & Smith (2012) used performance art forms such as spoken word, hip-hop, and popular culture to help Somali immigrant youth build their literacy skills in a way that was interesting and relevant to them. They described this program as a culturally relevant pedagogy, which has been successful in helping students from low income households or cultural minorities to succeed in school. As experienced performing artists themselves, Lozenski & Smith (2012)

worked with primarily young Somali females by helping them create spoken word and hip-hop pieces. Programmatic components included tutoring, open gym, open mic sessions, and interactive learning activities which often involved composing and performing a poem, rap, or essay. These activities not only successfully helped students develop literacy skills, but also allowed them to reflect upon and develop their identities. Students also took part in meaningful discussions about parts of their identities that mattered to them, such as gender, religion, ethnicity, and language (Lozenski & Smith, 2012).

Hip-hop has held a prominent place in many clinicians' treatment settings (Alvarez, 2012; Donnenwerth, 2012; Veltre & Hadley, 2012). Donnenwerth (2012) writes: "Time after time I have witnessed young people put their guard down when they have been validated through their musical preferences...with this in mind I have validated clients who have chosen rap music" (p. 276). In Donnenwerth's song-communication therapy, she asked youth clients to share recorded songs that relate to their lives. After listening to the song, she and the youth discussed how the song connected with him or her (Donnenwerth, 2012). Song-communication sessions have helped clients achieve their goals in expressing emotions, problem solving, communication skills, self-esteem, impulse control, social interactions, academic skills, addictions, family issues, trauma issues, anger management, and gang issues (Donnenwerth, 2012). In adolescent females, thinking critically about race and gender through a therapy utilizing a feminist hip-hop framework helped to increase their confidence and secure identities and relationships (Veltre & Hadley, 2012).

Rap therapy offers a modality that is both strengths-based and youth-centered. It integrates elements of hip-hop culture into therapy to facilitate development (Alvarez, 2012). Alvarez used performance-based groups to engage young men of color in therapy. He writes,

"Participants learn to use rap as a springboard for discussion and as a conduit for positive peer interaction. Youth also learn to use the program to talk about their struggles, seek advice from peers, problem solve, and re-author their narratives from a strength-based perspective" (Alvarez, 2012, p. 124).

A longitudinal study of eighteen African American youth showed that a school curriculum which centered around studying hip-hop music, music production, and other related skills created a culture of excellence, taught applicable skills in music, technology, business, communication, and networking, and "made things I thought about come true" (Anderson, 2011, p. 165). Students involved in the after-school and summer hip-hop programs moved from being in a stage of aspiration to a stage of professionalism. Their grades improved and they realized the importance of school in their real lives (Anderson, 2011).

## **Summary**

The review of the literature showed several positive youth development frameworks and programs which shared certain themes and measures of what adolescents need to be successful in school and in life. Many authors emphasized the importance of non-cognitive skills as well as cognitive skills that can be applied to the real world. Interests, passions, relationships, and a community presence were also important in predicting the success of youth. In youth development settings, formal interventions, and casual listening situations, hip-hop and performance poetry mediums have been proven to be both engaging and effective in helping to build assets and healthy coping behaviors (Alvarez, 2012; Anderson, 2011; Biggs-El, 2012; Ciardiello, 2003; Clay, 2006; Donnenwerth, 2012; Gershoff, 2008; Hara, 2012; Ingalls, 2012; Iwamoto, et al., 2007; Kia-Keating, et al., 2010; Lerner, et al., 2007; Lerner & Lerner, 2012;



Lozenski & Smith, 2012; Payne & Gibson, 2009; Search Institute, 2007; Sesma & Roehlkarpartain, 2003; Scales et al., 2010; Torre, et al., 2007; Tough, 2012; Travis & Ausbrooks, 2012; Travis, 2012; Veltre & Hadley, 2012).

The strengths of the literature review were that it explored several positive youth development frameworks which viewed youth as having the potential to grow and change as people. It also helped illustrate the relevance of hip-hop and spoken word to both the youth development field and popular culture in general. However, with the exception of Anderson (2011), the literature did not utilize interviews with both youth and youth workers to understand the impacts of hip-hop and spoken word on participants in prevention or positive youth development settings. Most of the literature showed the positive impacts of using hip-hop in formal therapeutic intervention settings, or used quantitative methods to determine the impact. Quantitative methods only have the capacity to measure certain types of impact, and a deeper meaning and understanding of the impact is potentially lost. A qualitative method would help keep adult leader and youth participant voices in the forefront of the research. This literature review is also not exhaustive. There may be other pertinent information about this topic that is not present.

Further qualitative research is needed to develop an increased understanding of how the merging of positive youth development frameworks with hip-hop and spoken word poetry has impacted youth. It is also important to explore which components of this programming are important in achieving positive youth development outcomes from the perspectives of the participants themselves. This study addressed these research questions by interviewing both youth and youth workers using semi-structured interviews.

## **Empowerment Conceptual Framework**

The empowerment perspective is useful in understanding power imbalances and the benefits of helping marginalized populations experience genuine power over themselves and their communities. It is a helpful framework for this research study because the art forms of hip-hop and spoken word historically emerged out of oppressed populations. In this section, the principles of the empowerment perspective will be discussed and applied to social work and youth work.

In an increasingly multi-racial and multi-ethnic society, there are significant power imbalances between Caucasians and ethnic minorities, men and women, and vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly. These power imbalances are particularly problematic for youth of color (Gutierrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998). Power is "The ability to influence the course of one's life, an expression of self-worth, the capacity to work with others to control aspects of public life, and access to the mechanisms of public decision making" (Gutierrez, et al., 1998, p. 8). Power occurs on three levels: personal, interpersonal, and environmental, and in the empowerment perspective, it is essential to focus on all three of these levels. The empowerment perspective involves helping people who are facing adversity to gain power in themselves, their families, groups, or communities. The first goal of empowerment is influencing a person or community's attitudes, values, and beliefs about their own self-worth and sense of control.

Gutierrez et. al (1998) found several components to be significant in the literature. One important component of empowerment is people receiving validation through their collective experiences. Not only can this validation make people feel that their own perspectives and

experiences are legitimate, but it can also inspire and motivate people to seek change. The next step in the empowerment model is helping people build knowledge and skills so they are able to take action. Guitierrez et. al (1998) write: "Increasing power includes learning to think critically, learning how to access information and take action, actually taking action, and assessing the outcome" (p. 5).

A unique aspect of the empowerment perspective is the relationship between people and helping professionals. In the empowerment perspective, people and practitioners are partners and problems are viewed on a structural basis. It is important to recognize the power imbalances between the person seeking help and the helping professional (Guitierrez, et al., 1998). As with most professional relationships, in the case of youth development programs, the youth and youth worker have power imbalances. The most obvious is the age difference between the youth and youth worker. However, there are also imbalances related to race, income, ability, and gender. It is important that these imbalances are addressed in order to achieve an authentic relationship between a youth and their youth workers. Furthermore, there may be power differentials between youth participants themselves in the youth program.

Solomon (1976) as cited in Guitierrez et al. (1998) listed some possible goals for empowerment enhancing interventions, including helping people see themselves as change agents and helping them use the practitioner's knowledge and skills (p. 14). Positive youth development programs, while not formal intervention programs such as therapy or juvenile detention, have the opportunity to help youth see themselves as change agents and use youth workers as resources and connectors to knowledge and skills they need. This research paper embraced the empowerment perspective because of its natural fit with the research questions and the literature. Empowerment will be explored further in the discussion section.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

The sample participating in this research consisted of both youth and youth workers identified as participating with a youth development program that incorporates the creation of hip-hop music or spoken word poetry. The youth development program criterion is one way the sample was selected; formal intervention programs, such as therapeutic or correctional settings, were not explored in this study. The criterion for a positive youth development program (as opposed to an intervention program) was that the youth participants had the opportunity to choose to be a part of the program and participated out of their own interest.

The author interviewed youth participants and youth workers from several youth development programs in the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota metropolitan area. A youth participant was any youth aged 13 to 21 who currently participated in or recently participated in the youth development program. A youth worker was considered an adult who facilitated, educated, and/or coordinated a youth development program on behalf of young people. A practitioner could be considered (but was not limited to), a social worker, youth worker, resident artist, teacher, or program coordinator. Practitioners did not need to have any academic background in social work or human services to participate. The youth programs needed to involve the creation of hip-hop music or spoken word poetry to be included.

This study used purposive sampling (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2008). The researcher's prior knowledge was used to determine programs and participants that were relevant to the study. The author was also informed of relevant programs by others involved in this study or other professionals in the field. This offered a form of snowball sampling.

## **Protection of Human Participants**

Participants in this study provided their consent to participate. Adult participants were given consent forms that outlined background information, procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality, the voluntary nature of the study, and contacts. The author was available to answer any questions or address any concerns. A copy of the interview questions was available upon request. A copy of the consent form was given to participants to keep for their records. In the case of youth participants, both parent/guardian consent forms and youth assent forms were provided. The youth assent form was in simpler language to ensure youth comprehension. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board reviewed the study, including the consent forms and questions to ensure that human participants were adequately protected, and this study was approved.

Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn about the benefits, successes, purposes, and challenges of programs that incorporated youth creating and performing hip-hop songs or spoken word poems. They were informed of the procedures which included the interview itself, audio recording and transcription, the presentation of findings in both an oral presentation and written report, and the possibility of using the data in future writings. They were informed that their name and program name would be removed from the transcription to protect their confidentiality. The study had the potential risk of invading youth or youth worker's privacy, and the participants were informed of this. A benefit of the study to youth participants was a \$5 gift card which was provided at the completion of the interview. There were no direct benefits to youth workers.

The records of the study were kept confidential and potentially identifying information was removed from the transcripts, including the participants' names and program names. The audio file on the tape recorder was deleted once the transcription was complete. The transcript will be kept on a password protected computer indefinitely. The study was completely voluntary and participants could choose to withdraw from the study until one week after the interview by contacting the researcher by phone or email and requesting their data not be used.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four youth workers and five youth program participants. The interviews were conducted at a time and location of each participant's choice. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. There were two different sets of questions that were tailored to either a youth worker or a youth participant. Both sets of questions were informed by the literature and addressed program structure, how participants became involved, perceived importance of the hip-hop and spoken word art forms, role of race and culture, creative process, community involvement, positive youth development outcomes, and unique benefits and challenges of programs of this nature.

Examples of youth worker questions included "How does the program help support youth development outcomes?", "What do you think is important about youth accessing either hip-hop music or spoken word poetry or both?", and "What are some challenges in facilitating a program of this nature?" Examples of youth participant questions included: "What is your creative process and what do you like to write about?", "In your opinion, has creating music or poetry helped you in any way? How?", and "How do you think your art or program has influenced the community?" The complete list of questions can be found in the appendix.

## Data Analysis

**Grounded theory and the phenomenological perspective.** The researcher was primarily guided by a phenomenological perspective in this research. This perspective valued the lived experience of youth participants and adult practitioners. A phenomenological perspective sought to "reduce filtering and distortion that can undermine authenticity" (Padgett, 2008, p. 141). The phenomenological perspective contained several components. The first was learning about participant's experiences. Second, the context and setting of these experiences was explored. Finally, major themes were determined from the interviews and the findings and were supported by quotes from interview participants (Padgett, 2008). The phenomenological approach was specifically used in the first round of coding using grounded theory methods, in which the researcher was grounded in the data itself rather than pre-determined codes.

Data were transcribed from the audio recordings and then coded twice by the researcher. The first round of coding used grounded theory and the phenomenological perspective. In this approach, data were coded in a way that "lets the meaning, concepts, and theories emerge from the raw data rather than being imposed by the researcher" (Monette, et al., 2008, p. 219). This helped the author explore each participant's lived experience in the coding without limiting the content in the data. The data were coded line by line and then codes were determined by themes in the data itself.

**Teen Voice.** The second round of coding used pre-determined codes drawn from the research on Teen Voice from the Search Institute (Scales, et al., 2010). The author coded each interview a second time and specifically looked for references to Teen Voice based on the following codes:

- Leadership: "Has had a leadership role in the past year."
- Personal power: "Has the ability to make good things happen in his or her life."
- Comfort expressing voice: "Feels comfortable suggesting activities, sharing ideas, and helping to organize activities."
- Community problem solving: "Believes he or she can help solve community problems."
- Civic involvement: "Plans to be involved, or has already been involved, in political and civic life" (Scales et al., 2010, p. 5).

These five codes addressed a variety of characteristics that teens benefit from. Teens who scored high on Teen Voice are more likely to do well in school, have a sense of purpose, have a positive ethnic identity, and volunteer. However, only 22% of all fifteen year olds scored high on these characteristics (Scales et al., 2010).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There were several strengths to this study. One of the strengths is that it utilized the voices of both youth participants and youth workers. It examined from both the youth and adult perspectives, the benefits, challenges, and successes of youth programs that incorporated hip-hop and spoken word. Another strength of this study was including two stages of coding. The first stage of coding let the data speak for itself and shed light on adult and youth experiences in these types of programs. The second stage specifically explored themes pertaining to the empirically supported Teen Voice Index from the Search Institute (Scales et al., 2010). It showed if participants described programs incorporating the creation and performance of hip-hop and spoken word had an impact on youth's leadership, personal power, comfort expressing voice, community problem solving, and civic involvement. This study was well-rounded by utilizing



both youth and adults, as well as grounded theory and pre-determined codes pertaining to Teen Voice.

The limitations of the study included its limited time frame and its small sample size of nine participants. Because of the limited time frame and lack of funding, the researcher was not able to utilize a second data analyst to enhance coder reliability. In the ideal study, the data would be coded by at least two data analysts.

## **Results**

This study utilized the experiences and wisdom of both adult program leaders and youth participants. A total of nine participants were interviewed (Table 1). Four adult program leaders and five youth participants were interviewed. Among the adult leaders, three of the leaders were African American and one of the leaders was Caucasian. Two of the leaders were male and two were female. Many of the leaders were the founders or co-founders of the programs. The leaders worked in a variety of settings, including schools, non-profits, universities, community based programs, and self-employment or contractual work.

The youth who were interviewed all identified as African American, although one also identified as multi-racial. Three were males and two were females. All of the youth participants interviewed were either eighteen or nineteen years old. Both the youth and adult participants represented a total of at least four programs in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. The programs represented a variety of neighborhoods. Programs consisted of community based programs, after school programs, alternative schools, and programs operating within public schools.

**Table 1. Description of Sample.**

	<b>Type of Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>
#1	Leader	Female	32	Caucasian
#2	Leader	Male	20	African American
#3	Leader	Male	53	African American
#4	Leader	Female	31	African American
#5	Youth	Male	18	African American/Multi-racial
#6	Youth	Male	19	African American
#7	Youth	Female	18	African American
#8	Youth	Male	19	African American
#9	Youth	Female	18	African American

### **Themes**

The interviews focused on a range of topics, including how the participant got involved in the program, the subject matter and content of their art, the creative process, the performance experience, youth development outcomes, and the impact of race on the program and the individual participant. During grounded theory analysis, many positive impacts were found in the data, as well as important programming components. These impacts and components can be summarized by the following six themes: (1) Youth were given the time and space to be themselves, (2) Programs provided authentic adult support, (3) Youth engaged in important art forms, (4) Youth voices were at the center, (5) Youth became empowered community change agents, and (6) Youth built translatable skills.

In the second round coding, a basic thematic analysis was done to connect themes in the data with the five indicators of the Search Institute's Teen Voice Index: leadership, personal power, comfort expressing voice, community problem solving, and civic involvement (Scales, et al., 2010). Each of the youth interviews was analyzed to see if the youth spoke about these concepts. The adult interviews were not analyzed a second time.

## Grounded Theory Analysis

**Giving youth time and space.** In the four programs, adult leaders expressed that the program provided a safe space for youth and gave youth adequate time to be themselves. Youth also spoke about believing this to be true, and talked about the programs giving them a safe haven in which to be open about who they are. In particular, several participants spoke about their belief that gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered youth were accepted and could be themselves in program spaces. In addition, youth reported joining with others who they might have not usually accepted or found things in common with. Every program, while they did not censor the content of the music or poetry youth created, had a no swearing or disrespectful language policy. The following quote is an example of an adult leader who spoke about the program being a safe space:

*"It's a safe space, it's free of drugs, free of crime, and they're safe to be themselves. There are not many places...we have a lot of safe zones in buildings and in schools that we say are safe for young people, but they can't truly be themselves for fear of the other people around them and how they will react."*

Youth participants also spoke about feeling that safe spaces were important for youth in general, as well as youth of color and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth. They reported being able to be themselves and being able to do something productive in a safe space instead of engaging in less positive behavior. One youth said:

*"In terms of reaching out to other African Americans, I would say like I said before, giving them a place to go, a safe space. Because in this city you need that. The city will eat you up and spit you out. And definitely [the program] is that place where you have that safe guard, you can take down your walls and talk to people who are willing to listen."*

Giving youth the time to be themselves and create poetry or music was another key concept within this theme. Many leaders in particular talked about how youth are simply not

given the time to create art, do things they like to do, or think critically about things. One leader stated:

*"Especially in high school, the education system is operated around a bell schedule, and you literally get five minutes before you're in another desk. And in after school programming you get two and half hours with nothing but writing and talking. So I think with time, kids can write a poem about screaming at a police officer or a poem about someone they're falling in love with, you know...I think time is a revolutionary concept. You know, to give kids time to just respond to things."*

Another program leader talked extensively about youth he met who had taken it in to their own hands to create the time to make music. He and the co-founder of his program said that he met many youth who decided to drop out of high school because rapping seemed like a better use of their time. He explained:

*"When they didn't get the time, they just opt out, and make the time themselves. It's important for us to try to stay in that mix."*

**Authentic adult support.** Many adult leaders and youth talked in depth about the negative ways in which adults perceive and interact with youth in the community. Generational gaps were a focus as well as how young people are typically perceived by the public, and more specifically, how young people of color are perceived by the public and the media. Many interviews touched on adults' negative perceptions of young people. One youth participant said:

*"With [my friend], due to some of the events that happened in his life, people thought, 'Oh, he's done,' but then, he comes out on top. He's working right now, he's going to college, taking care of his family, his mom, brothers and sisters and stuff like that. He's on top of things although when I first met him people were writing him off."*

Each of programs that are represented in this research provide intentional authentic adult support.

The adults involved in the program were passionate about working with youth and genuinely

cared for them. Through these relationships, young peoples' lives were impacted greatly. One adult leader said:

*"One of our [students] who started in the program probably the year after I started it, did a song called 'The Dedicated.' And he talked about, literally everything I told him that I wanted to happen for him as a young person."*

The programs also provided a medium in which to bridge generational gaps between adults and young people, allowing adults to see the youth as people who had value and something to offer to society. The performances have allowed adults in the community to see the skills and talents of the young people. An adult program leader explained:

*"I see a lot of bridging the gap between generations. Whenever my students do a poetry showcase, the parents of those kids are like 'Man, I'm just..that was wonderful, I'm just so surprised, I wish I had something like this when I was growing up.' So there's a lot of surprise. One, from the youth because old people showed up and two from the old people that this came out of the young people."*

**Engaging in important art forms.** Music was viewed as powerful art form and hip-hop and spoken word were identified as culturally relevant ways to reach young people and young people of color. Both youth participants and adult leaders talked about hip-hop being central to youth culture and being culturally relevant to youth of color in particular. The mediums of hip-hop and spoken word were logical and nearly effortless ways to engage youth in positive programming, as one adult leader explained:

*"I feel like it's a medium that is culturally relevant. And so they feel comfortable, it's something that is valued in their culture. I think just the art of it, they're speaking what they care about and what they're interested in."*

Another adult said it this way:

*"That's how the program started, me attempting to give a young person something they truly had an interest in."*

In addition to hip-hop and spoken word being relevant in youth culture and something youth were interested in, the art forms reflected the traditions and culture in their racial and ethnic backgrounds. It was pointed out that youth grew up listening to hip-hop in their families, and often the content is reflective of the African American experience. One adult leader stated:

*"Hip-hop is much more than music in our young people's lives, it really is their culture. And no matter how you see hip-hop either positively, negatively, some of both, it's a true mirror in a lot of respects to the way the lives our kids live, how they live it, and how they express themselves."*

Furthermore, youth were able to relate to the content of hip-hop and spoken word pieces because they were authentic in their experience. One adult referred to this as "speaking their language." By creating hip-hop and spoken word pieces, youth were able to create art that connected to others and reflected their own experiences. One youth explained:

*"It's like, me breathing air, really. Because I have something in me that I need to give out and if it's through music and if it's through hip-hop, that's what I feel I need to do. I need to put that message out, to change, to help change whatever is going on in this world."*

In connection to the adult opinions about youth interest, youth spoke to the same concept. They were strikingly passionate about the music they created as well as their level of investment in it, as this youth illustrated:

*"Music is my life, I could talk all day about the music, it's in me."*

**Youth voices at the center.** Creating hip-hop music and spoken word poetry was at the center of each of the four programs, and at the center of hip-hop and spoken word is the artist or poet's voice. Youth processed their feelings, examined their beliefs, and spoke about their experiences through their art. One youth said:

*"I feel like when I write, I'm writing my true feelings. And when I perform I'm letting it be known. So that's why spoken word, I mean I bet I could get the same release as if I*

*just wrote...I don't know, I love spoken word though. I just love that passion behind it and the deliverance of people when they are doing their pieces as well as the release I get."*

Participants often talked about specific trying times in their lives, such as dealing with relationships, living in poverty, experiencing grief and loss, and depression, and how making music or poetry was directly healing to them. The very act of expression helped the youth handle the stresses and pains of life. Here is one example of this from a young woman:

*"One incident in my life, my little brother passed, so my mom put me in group therapy, but it wasn't really helping. So what I did was, I just wrote. It was like writing a letter to my brother but I made it in to a song. Writing music helps me from being all mad, me hurting somebody or doing something to myself. I could just write it down or I can go to a poetry slam and put it out there. I feel like that's my therapy."*

An adult leader also talked about the content of the pieces and how this helps them process the highs and lows of life:

*"We have students that respond to the fact that most of their friends aren't in good places in their lives. We have students respond to that they're not in good places in their lives. But it's not all negative, we have students respond to something that's good that's going on in their lives, or an ambition that they have."*

**Empowered community change agents.** Hip-hop and spoken word provided youth with a vehicle to speak about issues in their community, educate the public, facilitate social change, and give back to the younger generation. Adult leaders spoke about the opportunity for youth to envision the world as a better place and the role they can play. One adult said:

*"It's really important for our kids to see how lyrically they have an opportunity to really be change agents and affect change. A lot of times they're rapping about what they think they see or what they want, but when they begin to think deeply about it, the question we challenge them with is 'Do you just want to put a mirror to what you think you're seeing or do you really want to change something? Could it be better?'"*

Adults also tended to speak about the benefits the community reaped because of the art the youth created. Youth were often doing public performances at community events, and were at times featured on local radio or television stations. Many of the programs involved intentional writing around issues youth identify as important. Youth in these programs have done thematic hip-hop and spoken word pieces about war, the environment, the high school drop-out rate, and discrimination. One adult leader explained:

*"The community sees that they have youth that are doing something positive. Definitely the songs that are more issue focused, they show the community that people that care about it, and they become an anthem around those topics."*

In addition to creating awareness about issues in the community, youth inspired others to live fulfilling lives and were passionate about giving back to the younger generation. Almost every youth interviewee spoke about their volunteerism in the community, which mostly involved teaching younger kids the skills they have learned about music and poetry. Numerous youth talked about creating their own entertainment companies that incorporated service elements and social justice components. They talked about giving youth the opportunity to participate in arts programming with other youth from around the country, and helping to create similar programs to theirs in other neighborhoods, cities, and states. One quote from a young man demonstrates several of these points:

*"I'm going to rep my hood and make my hood, the lower class people, come to middle class, and realize if I can do it, you can do it. I came from the bottom just like you, there wasn't nothing different, I used to make the same mistakes, you know. I just want to give back, that's what inspires me really. I want to give back, my ultimate goal in music is to give back, start my own foundation, praise the lord, you know what I mean?"*



Youth participants and adult leaders also spoke about the leadership positions that the youth assumed in their communities and their power to role model and influence others. One young woman said:

*"I've influenced more girls to open up. Just because you're a girl doesn't mean you can't rap, you can do as much as any other guy can do. I'm like, putting out, pushing out there, like, 'Aww come on ladies, let's show them we can do anything they can do.' And making sure it's positive music. You can have a bad day, but you can take that negative and turn it in to a positive through your music."*

**Youth built translatable skills.** Youth participants' involvement in hip-hop and spoken word programs built skills that they were able to bring to other areas in their life. Regardless of their future ambitions or success as an artist, they learned skills in technology, business, public speaking, and communication. One adult leader explained:

*"Young people are learning the intricacies of software like Pro Tools, Garage Band, they're learning how to go and set up for a show, play music for a massive amount of people, building confidence, learning leaderships skills, and these are all young people we are going to send in to the world. They are the future for all of us."*

The youth participants were very aware of these skills and how they would serve them well in the future. One youth stated:

*"I used to think I was the best rapper until I realized there is a business to this. And this [program] teaches you business, I'm not going to lie."*

The programs also helped youth build important non-cognitive, "soft" skills that allowed them to be successful in society. Participation helped many youth realize the importance of their educations, and how important college is even if they aspired to be professional artists. One youth said:

*Like, on top of the ventilation that happens with it, [hip-hop] gives me direction. For example, I'm able to go to college for journalism and have a minor in art education or graphic design, which is still undecided, but I can use those skills to help me be an artist*

*and make music. Because I already have those skills. But why not employ different skills that I can retain and get from college?"*

The programs also helped youth build important skills such as independence and persistence in the face of adversity. Even for students who were not college bound, program leaders felt that their programs allowed youth to practice skills to help them be independent people who did not need to rely on society. One leader stated:

*"One of the things in the program that I've tried to instill besides the hip-hop stuff is independence is a key thing. You want to be able to support yourself and so in some of the situations where the family issues come up, navigating through some of that stuff but with the end goal of eventually you'll be able to be an independent, successful adult."*

### **Teen Voice Index Analysis**

The five youth participant interviews were coded a second time to determine the presence of the Search Institute's Teen Voice Index indicators: leadership, personal power, comfort expressing voice, community problem solving, and civic involvement (Scales, et al., 2010).

**Leadership.** Leadership was present in four out of the five youth participant interviews. Leadership was defined as "Has had a leadership role in the past year" (Scales, et al., 2010, p. 5). The youth talked about working with younger children, role modeling, performing for others, founding programs, and participating in projects that included leadership opportunities. The following quote is an example of leadership:

*"As far as like, stepping up and being a leader, since they've seen me and [another youth participant] who were like two of the people who founded the program and were in it since the beginning, since they've seen us taking the leadership role, as in answering all the questions about [the program's] history and knowing how to shape the image of [the program], a lot of African Americans stepped up and said "Ok, I may not do music, but maybe I can be the head ref for all of these games and be a leader and mentor some of these kids."*

**Personal power.** Personal power was present in all five of the youth participant interviews. Personal power was defined as "Has the ability to make good things happen in his or her life" (Scales, et al., 2010, p. 5). The youth mentioned their plans for the future (including going to college and having successful careers), their ability to avoid making poor decisions, setting and achieving goals, turning negative things in to positive things, and taking direction in life. Here is an example of personal power found in one interview:

*"I'm not gonna just rap to rap, a lot of people are doing hip-hop nowadays because it's a trend. It's what inspires me, it's just this music, being able to live my dream. I may not have had made it yet in everyone else's eyes, but great things take time."*

**Comfort expressing voice.** Comfort expressing voice was talked about in all five youth participant interviews. The definition of comfort expressing voice was: "Feels comfortable suggesting activities, sharing ideas, and helping to organize activities" (Scales, et al., 2010, p. 5). Youth talked about voicing their opinions on their feelings, experiences, and community issues. They also had a big part in deciding the topics their group was going to discuss and planned out and managed their projects in the programs. Here is an example of a youth who felt comfortable expressing her voice:

*"Yesterday I performed and I had one called 'Team Dark or Light Skinned' and a lot of people have heard that, I'm pretty sure because it's common in our community right now. I mean, when they can relate to it, I feel like it's something they need to hear. And they can't say I didn't know or care because I just told you."*

**Community problem solving.** Five out of five youth indicated that they were involved in community problem solving. Community problem solving was defined the following way: "Believes he or she can help solve community problems" (Scales, et al., 2010, p. 5). Youth spoke about forming positive groups in the community, doing something productive instead of

engaging in behavior that is problematic in the community, addressing pertinent issues such as community violence, and rising out of poverty. Here is an example of a youth who talked about community problem solving:

*"Well, being African American, I think it has [changed a perception]. Like right now since we're youth, I think it's changing. We're still trying to break that barrier of us killing each other. So that's what I think my peers are trying to do right now instead of shooting, just putting it in to music so we don't do that."*

**Civic involvement.** All five youth also spoke about civic involvement. Civic involvement means "Plans to be involved or has already been involved in political or civic life" (Scales, et al., 2010, p. 5). The youth were involved in volunteering with numerous organizations in the community, and hoped to create businesses and foundations that would give back to the community. The following shows an example of civic involvement:

*"On top of that, we also did a lot of volunteering in the community where we would work with youth ages six to thirteen or fourteen. With them, we would employ the same things, teaching them the same things we were learning, which in turn also made us better at it. Because when you are able to teach something to someone that means you are nearing a level of mastery or proficiency."*

## **Summary**

Two levels of data analysis were used to determine themes from the data. The first round of coding used grounded theory method and allowed six themes to organically emerge from the data: (1) Youth were given the time and space to be themselves, (2) Programs provided authentic adult support, (3) Youth engaged in important art forms, (4) Youth voices were at the center, (5) Youth became empowered community change agents, and (6) Youth built translatable

skills. Both youth and adults spoke about these themes and provided several examples and contexts for them.

The second round of coding utilized the Search Institute's Teen Voice Index and analyzed the youth participant interviews only to determine if the following indicators of Teen Voice were present in the data: (1) Leadership, (2) Personal power, (3), Comfort expressing voice, (4) Community problem solving, and (5) Civic involvement. In four out of the five youth participant interviews, all five of these indicators were present. In one youth participant interview, four out of the five indicators were present. Below is a table that illustrates the summary of the second round of coding.

**Table 2. Youth Participants' Teen Voice Index Indicators Present in Interview**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Personal Power</b>	<b>Comfort Expressing Voice</b>	<b>Community Problem Solving</b>	<b>Civic Involvement</b>
#5 - Male, 18	•	•	•	•	•
#6 - Male, 19	•	•	•	•	•
#7 - Female, 18	•	•	•	•	•
#8 - Male, 19		•	•	•	•
#9 - Female, 18	•	•	•	•	•

### **Discussion**

The findings of this research showed that adolescents, in the programs sampled, who have been involved with programs in which they write, create, and/or perform original hip-hop or spoken word pieces reported gaining a multi-faceted, beneficial experience. From their perspective, their involvement allowed them to have the time and space to create art and be themselves. It connected them with authentic, caring adults and engaged them in art forms that

were important and culturally relevant to them. The young people's voices were at the center of the programs and their work, and the programs allowed them to become confident community change agents. Finally, their involvement in the programs helped them build many translatable skills, including knowledge about business and technology, as well as non-cognitive, "soft" skills such as communication, determination, and independence.

Furthermore, this research also showed that adolescents who have been involved in these hip-hop and spoken word programs reported gaining what the Search Institute has determined is needed for them to be more likely to do well in school, have a sense of purpose, have a positive ethnic identity, and volunteer (Scales, et al., 2010). Without prompting, the young people in this study spoke about the five indicators of Teen Voice as determined by the Search Institute: leadership, personal power, comfort expressing voice, community problem solving, and civic involvement (Scales, et al., 2010, p. 5). All five youth who were interviewed spoke about a minimum four out of the five indicators, and a majority of the youth spoke about all five of these indicators.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

In the literature, Anderson (2008), Dance (2008), and Perry (2008) outlined some of the hardships that members of racial and ethnic minority groups face, including poverty, increased chances of dropping out and/or becoming incarcerated, identity confusion, and the pressures of masculinity and female-headed households. Dance (2008) suggested that a way to address and improve these hardships is structural changes that allow young African Americans the opportunity to succeed in academics and their outside lives. Perry (2008) also wrote, "Places for being fully human and loved despite our negative characterization in society are essential" (p.

174). This research project showed that adolescents being involved with hip-hop and spoken word programs addressed many of these issues. The youth were very motivated to succeed in high school and their post-secondary education, and were given the opportunity to "just be" - to be themselves, to be artists, poets, and rappers, and to be valued human beings in their programs and in their communities.

The programs in this study, while many were stand alone, independent, grassroots types of programs, showed the beginning of some structural changes that allowed the young people to be successful in academics and their outside lives. For example, one of the programs was a high school that focused on allowing students to pursue their passion in music and poetry, while helping them to achieve a high school diploma and learn valuable skills to help their success in their art and life after high school. Another program was embedded in a traditional high school, which allowed students to participate in hip-hop, spoken word, and theater arts during their normal school day. Another similar program was embedded in some elementary, middle, and high schools. Others were out-of-school time and summer programs that gave young people opportunities that were not available in their regular school day.

Many authors acknowledged rap and hip-hop as influential forces in youth culture and youth communities. The genre provides opportunities for expression, hope, and empowerment (Alvarez, 2012). Many youth talked about how rap, hip-hop, and spoken word were central to their lives. Youth called it "like breathing", "in my veins and in my blood", "my language", and "home". Adults spoke about how it was naturally something youth wanted to do, and a way to authentically engage young people in something they were already interested in and a central part of their culture. Because of its relevance, the young people felt a tremendous amount of pride in their art, which may have contributed to their success with the art itself, as well as the

successes that translated in to different areas of their lives. The adolescents simultaneously became successful as artists, rappers, and poets, while also becoming more successful in their motivation in school, feeling connected to adults and peers in their community, and expressing their experiences for themselves and others. The young people themselves made these connections in their interviews, as well as the adult leaders who developed and staffed the programs.

This research strongly supported the idea that hip-hop and spoken word can be effective developmental mediums for youth participants. The youth and adults who were interviewed spoke about concepts that were featured in the Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets* as well as the Teen Voice Index (Scales, et al., 2010; Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003). This research could have alternatively compared interviews with Lerner & Lerner's (2012) 6 C's of development and would have found many parallels between the experience of youth in their programs and their development of competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution. Likewise, this research could have also strongly connected youths' experience in hip-hop and spoken word programming with Gershoff's (2008) positive youth development criteria: physical and psychological safety, structure and appropriate adult supervision, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill-building, and integration of family, school, and community efforts. Finally, this research could have demonstrated strong connections between hip-hop and spoken word programming and Tough's (2012) non-cognitive skills that predicted success and life satisfaction: grit, self-control, zest, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism, and curiosity. No matter which of the positive youth development frameworks one might choose, the findings in this research would likely support it.



This study utilized the empowerment conceptual framework to provide some guiding and grounding principles. The empowerment perspective was a logical fit for this research as the participants tended to be members of two traditionally marginalized and oppressed populations: African Americans and youth. The empowerment perspective emphasizes helping people who are facing adversity to gain power in themselves, their families, groups, and communities. In doing so, traditionally marginalized populations, such as racial and ethnic minorities and youth, are able to work to overcome power imbalances in their own lives and in society. Guterrez et al. (1998) wrote that power is "The ability to influence the course of one's life, an expression of self-worth, the capacity to work with others to control aspects of public life, and access to the mechanisms of public decision making" (p. 8).

The empowerment perspective became even more of a natural fit for this study as empowerment-related themes emerged from the data. Guterrez et al.'s (1998) definition of empowerment was also a complement to the Search Institute's Teen Voice Index (Scales, et al., 2010). The table below shows a comparison between the definition of power and the Search Institute's Teen Voice index:

**Table 3. Empowerment Perspective vs. Teen Voice**

<p>Guterrez, et al. (1998):          Power: "the ability to influence the course of one's life, an expression of self-worth, the capacity to work with others to control the aspects of public life, and access the mechanisms of public decision making" (p. 8).</p>	<p>Scales, et al. (2010):          Teen Voice: " leadership, personal power, comfort expressing voice, community problem solving, and civic involvement" (p. 5).</p>
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This table shows that Guterrez et al.'s (1998) definition of power is very similar and includes many of the same aspects as the Teen Voice Index (Scales, et al., 2010). This means that the youth participants in this study, who all experienced a majority of the criteria for Teen Voice (which is much higher than the 22% who scored high on Teen Voice in Scales, et al.'s study),

could also be considered to be empowered individuals. The programs they participated in created opportunities for teens to develop the power within themselves and their artistic expression, which in turn, translated in to different areas of their lives.

### **Practice and Policy Implications**

This research shows the benefits of adolescents, and specifically, African American adolescents, participating in programs that attend to their interests, strengths, and needs as people in a critical stage of their development. Adolescence is a trying time for all youth, but youth of color face greater risks. The literature spoke about the increased risks for African American males especially because of the societal and structural barriers in place. However, in the tradition of Lerner & Lerner's (2012) belief that all youth have the ability to build assets, even those facing tremendous adversity, hip-hop and spoken word programs have succeeded in supporting and empowering youth who are members of racial minority groups. The youth participants and adult leaders who were interviewed in this study simultaneously spoke about how several adults and society as a whole have failed at educating youth of color, failed at protecting youth of color, and failed at valuing and empowering youth of color as community members. But in these programs, these youth are thriving. They are becoming educated, they are building skills, they feel a part of a group, they feel valued by adults and the community, and they are expressing their voices.

Furthermore, they are looking to the next steps in their empowerment by giving back to their community and the next generation. The youth participants time and time again talked about giving voice to issues in their lives and issues in the community, teaching younger youth the skills they need to create music and poetry, showing others their potential to rise up beyond

their current circumstances and social status, and creating businesses and non-profits that will keep the momentum going in their community.

This begs the questions: Where is the community support of these programs? Why are they so limited in number? Why are these programs not in more schools, community centers, and out of school time programs? Social workers have a unique opportunity to not only provide high quality individual work with youth, but also must advocate for effective programs that incorporate best practices. Based on this research, youth hip-hop and spoken word programs incorporate a number of best practices in youth work and social work, while engaging young people in something that is meaningful to them. As professionals who have historically given voice to those without power, social workers must help young people find the avenues to express their important voices in the community.

In social work and youth development practice, this study reminds practitioners about the importance of engaging people in authentic, mutually respectful, empowering relationships. It shows practitioners the importance of letting young people "just be" and giving youth the time and space to explore their talents and passions. It exemplifies and normalizes thriving youth in spite of systems that often fail them. It gives hope for the future because youth are given the chance to become themselves - their skillful, creative, and passionate selves. This study challenges traditional notions of what it means to be a youth and particularly what it means to be a youth of color. It changes the perspectives about who youth of color are and what their potential can be. It shows concrete examples of adult relationships that are conducive to youth's development, and how to engage youth authentically in something that is culturally relevant and valuable.

Practitioners and policy-makers should take note of these things. There are elements embedded within these youth, these programs, and the concept of hip-hop and spoken word as developmental mediums that could help effectively address issues of risk and inequality for youth of color. These programs are success stories that must be supported, financed, enhanced, researched, and respected to a greater degree. They could also be adapted for other communities in need of a program to support youth to become themselves in a positive, expressive, and authentic way. Programs like these should be created and supported in every community where there are interested youth.

### **Strengths & Limitations**

There were several strengths to this study. The first was that it utilized both youth and adult voices to help understand how hip-hop and spoken word programming impacted its participants. Youth seemed enthusiastic and comfortable talking about their art, the programs, and their lives. This made sense to the researcher, given that the art forms youth were engaged in heavily relied on them being articulate with their words. Likewise, adults seemed eager to participate in the study. One adult provided youth with rides to and from the interview because the adult felt the study was important to them and to the field. The programs, while concentrated in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, represented a variety of communities and neighborhoods.

Another strength to this study was that the data were coded using both grounded theory and a pre-determined set of codes from the Search Institute's Teen Voice Index (Scales, et al., 2010). If the study only utilized one of these levels of coding, the other level of meaning would be lost. Youth and program stories and data both emerged naturally and also were compared to

empirically supported youth development best practices from the Search Institute, a well-known and widely respected youth development research entity.

One limitation of this study was its limited sample. Several youth and adults had to be turned away due to the limited time frame of this study. Therefore, several programs who wanted to participate were not represented in the study. The sample was also limited in youth's ages. It was more difficult to reach youth who needed to bring home and return signed consent forms from their parents. Therefore, the youth represented in the study were eighteen and nineteen year olds who could sign for themselves. The sample was limited in race and ethnicity, and took place in an exclusively urban area. It would have been beneficial to have a more diverse representation of youth of color.

Another limitation of the study was its limited capacity of having a sole researcher. Due to this limitation, the interviews were not able to be coded by multiple researchers to check coding reliability. The sole researcher working on this project was a Caucasian female with a high level of formal education. This created a potential power imbalance which may have influenced the comfort level of the participants. It may have been beneficial to the study to have an interviewer who was a member of a minority group, for example.

### **Unanswered Questions & Future Research**

Further research is needed to understand and substantiate the value of youth development programs that incorporate the creation and performance of hip-hop and spoken word. This research method was one out of several that could have been utilized. It would be valuable to the field to use a variety of research methods to examine this issue so that new layers of its complexity could be understood. This issue is indeed complex as it deals with not only youth

development and social work, but also education, politics, historical trauma, social welfare, criminal justice, poverty, positive psychology, history, culture, community, creative and performing arts, and empowerment. It would be valuable to utilize case studies, focus groups, quantitative data, and further qualitative data with youth, adult practitioners, community leaders, parents, elders, artists, and others. A program evaluation could be done on some of the programs with pre- and post- tests and possibly utilize the Teen Voice Index tool itself (Scales, et al., 2010).

The findings of this study were hopeful yet thought-provoking. There are many questions that remain unanswered, but two questions that come most to the forefront is: Given how beneficial the programs are, how talented and skillful the youth are, and how authentic and culturally rich the art forms of hip-hop and spoken word are, then why are there such negative public perceptions of this art and these youth? How can these perceptions be changed? Answers to these questions may be what is needed in the field to begin to change the current paradigm of attitudes and opportunities for youth of color for the better.

## **Summary**

This study found that for the youth and adult leader participants who were interviewed, involvement in positive youth development programming that incorporated the creation and performance of hip-hop or spoken word was highly beneficial. Participants saw benefits in a wide variety of categories, including their empowerment, community engagement, relationships with adults, academic and technical skills, non-cognitive or "soft" skills, self-expression and youth voice. The art form was also culturally important for youth of color in understanding their own strengths and struggles in the context of their community of origin. As one adult leader put

it, youth accessing hip-hop or spoken word "...is really youth accessing themselves. It's really a self-exploration."

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**ADULT CONSENT FORM**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**  
**GRSW682 CLINICAL RESEARCH PROJECT**

**The Impact of Youth Hip-Hop and Spoken Word**

I am conducting a study about youth development programs in the Twin Cities that incorporate the creation of rap, hip hop, or spoken word pieces. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because I became aware of your program as one which incorporates rap, hip hop, or spoken word. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Emily M. Johnson, LSW, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and supervised by Dr. David Roseborough, Ph. D., LICSW.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the purposes, benefits, successes, and challenges of youth development programs in the Twin Cities that incorporate the creation of rap, hip hop, or spoken word pieces from both the perspective of adult leaders and the experience of youth program participants.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a 45-60 minute interview about the program you are associated with at a time and location of your choice.
2. The interview will be audio taped and will be transcribed and coded by myself.
3. The findings of my project will be presented in my clinical research paper and will be disseminated during an oral presentation in May, 2014. Your name or organization will not be shared in the paper or presentation.
4. The findings of my project will be published in my clinical research paper. Quotes may be used but will not be linked to you and your name will not be used.
5. The findings of my project may be used in the future for further scholarly writing or presentations. Your name or organization will not be shared in any such writing or presentations.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has no known risks. The study has no direct benefits.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file at my home. I will also keep the electronic copy of the transcript file on my password-protected computer indefinitely, but will destroy the audio file of the interview by deleting it off of my audio recorder. The

audio file will not be downloaded to my computer. I will delete any potentially identifying information from the transcript (name, program name, locations, etc).

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the University of St. Thomas, or the School of Social Work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you may be used to complete my project unless you state otherwise. You will need to withdraw no later than one week after the interview is conducted.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Emily M. Johnson, LSW. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-242-5276. You may also contact my instructor, David Roseborough, Ph. D., LICSW at any time at (651) 962-5804. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and to be audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**



**PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**  
**GRSW682 CLINICAL RESEARCH PROJECT**

**The Impact of Youth Hip-Hop and Spoken Word**

I am conducting a study about youth development programs in the Twin Cities that incorporate the creation of rap, hip hop, or spoken word pieces. I invite your child to participate in this research. Your child was selected as a possible participant because I became aware of his or her involvement in a program that incorporates rap, hip hop, or spoken word, such as a program leader suggesting your child as a candidate for the study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to your child's participation.

This study is being conducted by: Emily M. Johnson, LSW, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and supervised by Dr. David Roseborough, Ph. D., LICSW.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the purposes, benefits, successes, and challenges of youth development programs in the Twin Cities that incorporate the creation of rap, hip hop, or spoken word pieces from both the perspective of adult leaders and the experience of youth program participants.

**Procedures:**

If you agree for your child be in this study, I will ask your child to do the following things:

1. Complete a 45-60 minute interview about the program you he/she is associated with at a time and location of your choice.
2. The interview will be audio taped and will be transcribed and coded by myself.
3. The findings of my project will be presented in my clinical research paper and will be disseminated during an oral presentation in May, 2014. Your child's name or organization will not be shared in the paper or presentation.
4. The findings of my project will be published in my clinical research paper. Quotes may be used but will not be linked to your child and your child's name will not be used.
5. The findings of my project may be used in the future for further scholarly writing or presentations. Your child's name or organization will not be shared in any such writing or presentations.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has no known risks. The study has no direct benefits.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file at my home. I will also keep the electronic copy of the transcript file on my password-protected computer indefinitely, but will destroy the audio file of the interview by deleting it off of my audio recorder. The

audio file will not be downloaded to my computer. I will delete any identifying information from the transcript.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

You and your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your child may skip any questions he or she does not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the University of St. Thomas, or the School of Social Work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about your child may be used to complete my project unless you state otherwise. You would just need to let me know of your request not to have your child's interview used by phone or email within one week after the interview itself.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Emily M. Johnson, LSW. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-242-5276. You may also contact my instructor, David Roseborough, Ph. D., LICSW at any time at (651) 962-5804. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to my child's participation in the study and to be audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant's Parent/Guardian**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name of Study Participant's Parent/Guardian**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**YOUTH ASSENT FORM**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**  
**GRSW682 CLINICAL RESEARCH PROJECT**

**The Impact of Youth Hip-Hop and Spoken Word**

I am interested in learning about programs in the Twin Cities where youth write and/or perform of rap or hip hop songs or spoken word poems. My name is Emily Johnson and I am a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas and I am supervised by my teacher, Dr. David Roseborough.

**Background Information:**

I am hoping to learn about your experience in programs writing or performing rap or hip-hop songs or spoken word poems. I would like to learn about what you thought is important about these programs and how they have impacted you.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a 45-60 minute interview at a location that you and your parent are comfortable with.
2. I will audiotape the interview and will use this to write down a script of what you said.
3. I will make a presentation about my project in May, 2014. Your name or program name will not be shared in my presentation. I will also write a paper that talks about my project. Quotes may be used but will not be linked to you and your name will not be used.
4. I might continue writing about rap, hip-hop and spoken word programs in the future. I might use this study in these future writings. Your name or program name will not be shared in any such writing or presentations.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has no known risks. The study has no direct benefits.

**Confidentiality:**

I will not share the tape of your voice or a script of the interview with your name on it. The script will be kept in a locked file at my home or on my password protected computer. I will erase the audio file of your voice from my recorder. Your name or program name will be erased from the script.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

It is your choice to participate in this study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time. If you choose to stop, data collected in the interview may be used to complete my project unless you tell me I cannot use it within a week after your interview. Please let me know by phone or email. I will need your parent or guardian's written permission for you to participate as well.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Emily Johnson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-242-5276. You may also contact my teacher, David Roseborough, at any time at (651) 962-5804. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and understand it. My questions have been answered. I would like to be in the study and it is okay for me to be audio taped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Appendix C. Youth Worker Interview Questions

### **YOUTH WORKER INTERVIEW**

1. What is the mission and goals of the program? What is the structure/format of the program?
2. How did you get involved with the program? How do youth typically get involved?
3. What do you think is important about youth accessing either hip-hop music or spoken word poetry, or both?
4. What is the creative process and what do the songs typically end up being about?
5. What are some of the benefits of this program to the greater community?
6. What role does race, gender, or other cultural identity play in the program?
7. How does the program help support positive youth development outcomes? How have you seen positive youth development take place in the program?
8. What is unique about a program that incorporates rap, hip hop, and/or spoken word compared to other youth development programs?
9. Broadly, what are some challenges you see youth facing?
10. What are some challenges in facilitating a program of this nature?
11. Please share a success story? Or, common successes you've seen across several youth?
12. Anything else you would like to share?

## Appendix D. Youth Participant Interview Questions

### **YOUTH PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW**

1. Tell me a little bit about the program. What is a typical meeting like?
2. How did you get involved with the program?
3. Why hip-hop music or spoken word poetry? What is important about this art form to you?
4. What is your creative process and what do you like to write about?
5. In your opinion, has creating music or poetry helped you in any way? How?
6. How do you think your art or the program has influenced the community?
7. What is your race? How has music/poetry/the program impacted you and others in your racial group? Other groups?
8. Where do you get your inspiration? How does listening songs or poems by other artists impact you?
9. How does writing songs/poems impact you?
10. What is performing like?
11. How has your experience been in the program? What are the group dynamics?
12. What is unique about a program that incorporates rap, hip hop, and/or spoken word?
13. What are your future plans? Has your participation in this program impacted your future in any way?
14. Anything else you would like to share?