Social Identity and the Music Making Choices of Black/African American Youth from Limited Resource Communities

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SOCIAL IDENTITY AND MUSIC-MAKING CHOICES OF BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH FROM LIMITED RESOURCE COMMUNITIES

A DISSERTATION

submitted by

NATASHA THOMAS

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Lesley University
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Ph.D. in Expressive Therapies Program

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**Approvals**

*In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.*

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Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate’s submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

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For my grandmothers, who have shown me what it is to be wise. For my father, who has shown me what it is to go far. For my mother, who has shown me what it is to have grace. For my sisters, who have shown me what it is to speak truth.

I am eternally grateful.

For my spouse, who has shown me what it is to actively listen and walk in solidarity. For my child, who has shown - and is showing me - what it is to have patience and seek joy.

I am reminded, daily, of what a blessing life is.

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Thank you. I see you. May you always feel seen.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how Black/African American youth from limited resource communities described and demonstrated their social identities through their music-making choices in the therapeutic relationship with a board certified music therapist who was also a Black/African American person regarded as a participant in the study. A review of literature regarding social psychology and identity theory, as well as culturally relevant pedagogy and participatory action research (PAR), which form the foundation of this study’s methodology, is included. Findings include that participants placed a high degree of importance on their social status as authorities on their chosen identifying groups, and consistently reinforced their verbal assertions with behavior that promoted their identifying groups as ideal, and degraded others as being lesser. Their music making choices reflected their stated beliefs as well, through the purposes they ascribed to their songs’ elements (including lyrics), and the structural decisions made in collaboration with—or isolation from—their peers. The project facilitator described the process of facilitating these experiences as one that was strongly influenced by her cultural proximity to the participants, as well as her supervisory relationship with the primary researcher, who was also a Black/African American woman. These results are discussed in the context of the PAR framework, including insights gained by the primary researcher that clinicians may find useful in their own quest for promoting the most authentic and meaningful connections possible in the therapeutic relationship.

Keywords: Black/African American, Youth, Adolescents, Identity, Music Therapy, Participatory Action, Group Processes, Therapeutic Relationship, Supervision
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The process of identity construction is an ongoing one that is informed by a variety of life experiences, beliefs, and sensations, leading to a wide array of choices and actions (Seigworth, 2016). Social identity theorists posit that identity is a social construct that is as much about who or what one feels they are not as it is about who or what they are (Walker, 2000). In this way, the human identity exists in context with not only who an individual surrounds themselves with, but who they distance themselves from as well, and how they behave within the contexts of relating and/or distancing. These practices can result in internal attitudes that influence external behaviors in ways that may not always be directly visible or understandable to the outside observer. However, they may nonetheless be informing and contributing to the unique challenges of individuals within specific populations.

In the United States, the marginalization of Black/African American ¹ individuals has been heavily perpetuated, from the colonial practice of slavery through the Jim Crow era of oppressive legislation and beyond. Remnants of the Jim Crow era remain in the arenas of housing and the school to prison pipeline, with strong evidence that these are related issues (Burch, 2014; Mallett, 2017). Individuals who live in impoverished neighborhoods—like those created by Jim Crow era policies—are at greater risk of academic failure and low quality of life (Kaufman, Bradbury, & Owings, 1992). In fact, national statistics show that, on average, youth who identify as Black/African American

¹ The use of the combined term Black/African American (as opposed to the singular “African American”) is intentional, to include both natural born American citizens and those individuals who may identify as Black but have ancestry outside the United States.
score up to 26 points lower on standardized tests than their White counterparts (Darenbourg & Blake, 2013). However, little is actually known about the culturally complex experiences of Black/African American youth, making it a challenge to determine just what conditions or preconceptions are responsible for lowered academic achievement and quality of life. Poverty, exposure to violence, and the internalization of stereotypes themselves have all been raised as possible culprits, though there is limited consensus on any single source (Elsaesser, Hong, & Voisin, 2016), let alone what solutions may exist to combat these challenges.

Music has long been a means of communication and identity sharing within the Black/African American community. From the oral traditions of historical African peoples to the modern age of Rap and Hip-hop, the spoken word—particularly when amplified by the beat of a drum or grounded in a memorable melody—has been considered a form of magic and creation: the speaking of beliefs and ideas into existence (Hadley & Yancey, 2012). Black/African American culture on the whole is thus strongly tied to music (Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2009). Songs may be used as a means of coded communication and resistance against oppression (Pyatak, & Muccitelli, 2011; Towns, 2015). These song forms have evolved to popular consumption in various forms and ideations, most notably in hip-hop culture. Their codes have evolved in a parallel process, positioning the process of music making in Black/African communities as a unique foundation for discussion of complex issues like identity, culture, and struggle.
Youth who identify as Black/African American, and describe themselves as being avid consumers of rap and/or hip-hop music² and music videos, have collectively demonstrated a high sense of collective self-esteem, which may be based in seeing themselves and their struggles represented in media (Dixon et al., 2009). Some performers of rap music view their work as a ‘resistive occupation,’ striving to advance political or social justice causes through their music (Pyatak & Muccitelli, 2011). It would seem that these two elements are related: that because youth see themselves in the music of hip-hop as representative of their culture and values, they view it as a vehicle for their own self-expression as well. Thus, the medium—and its related theoretical tenants—can serve as an important means of developing and improving Black/African American collective view of self and identity. This study seeks to explore the relationship between social identity in Black/African American youth and their music making choices in the therapeutic relationship.

Much of the existing research on self and identity within the Black/African American population has been limited to that which can be measured by tools designed by Western social cognitive theorists working from a Eurocentric world view. According to Lykes (2013), such tools have the potential to be “individualist, ahistorical, and culturally disembodied” (p. 775). As a result, the term ‘at risk’ has generally become somewhat of a ‘catch-all’ term for Black/African American youth who are struggling in the school system. However, researchers do generally caution against speculations (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Steele, 2010) or oversimplifications of backgrounds or

² For the purposes of this paper, “hip-hop” is utilized as a blanket term which encompasses both the music genres and theoretical foundations of rap, neo-soul, reggaetón, krunk, and other predominantly Black genres which contribute to the greater “hip-hop culture” that builds upon the Civil Rights and Black Power movements (Rabaka, 2013).
behavioral traits that children might exhibit, particularly when those traits originate from
deepen systemic roots that have impacted their community resources. This would seem to
suggest that the strongest future research in this area will be research that prioritizes the
voices of these children who are “best positioned to analyze, engage, and sustain
systemic responses to the interlocking circulations of power” (Lykes, 2013, p. 776), at the
centers of their own stories.

Research supports the idea that Black/African American youth in particular who
are exposed to culturally relevant forms of instruction in school based settings tend to
prefer that instruction over more ‘traditional,’ Western Eurocentric approaches (Kim &
Pulido, 2015; Wade & Sampson, 2005). Additionally, research that is conducted on
individuals from a given culture by someone who either shares or is culturally proximal
to that culture has been reported to yield valuable insights into the process and institution
of research as a whole, both by the participants and consumers of said research
(Hodkinson, 2005; Kim & Pulido, 2015). With these concepts in mind, it could be argued
that studies of music and identity conducted with the population of Black/African
American youth are best undertaken by individuals who are either themselves
Black/African American or from a proximal culture that is similarly marginalized. Such
studies, conducted by researchers who share similar identities to their participants as
marginalized individuals, could stand to yield stronger results with more relevance for
professionals who work with said populations, versus studies that are not at least
carefully informed by history and an understanding of the community within which their
research is situated.
Music therapy is a profession that can be readily adapted to address individual needs. Community Music Therapy (CMT), in particular, has been defined by Ansdell (2002) as an approach recognizing social and cultural influences on individual health and relationships, encouraging work with and through these issues by bridging the gap between formal and informal music making and creation, or *musicing*. The role of the community music therapist is thus somewhat more musical than it is clinical, and the focus on clients runs across a continuum of the personal to the communal. CMT experiences, such as those that involve the creation or duplication of entire musical works that can be recorded or performed for an audience, have been found to increase participant attendance and academic engagement (Ierardi, 2007), and to strengthen participants’ sense of control and self-worth (Smith, 2012). Thus, it could follow that community-based music making experiences may serve as a valuable form of culturally relevant engagement with marginalized populations. It is precisely this type of relevant engagement that is sought by the present study, investigating the relationship between Black/African American adolescents’ sense of social identity and its connection to music. Such investigation could not only inform music therapists who seek to facilitate community-based music-making experiences, but—and perhaps more importantly—enrich the experiences of session participants on the whole, all of whom may benefit from more culturally cognizant and relevant tools.

This study seeks to explore the relationship between social identity in Black/African American youth and their music making choices in the therapeutic relationship, utilizing elements of Community Music Therapy (CMT) and Participatory

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3 This spelling of the term “musicing” is in keeping with Ansdell’s 2002 article defining community music therapy, as opposed to other articles, which use alternate spellings.
Action Research (PAR). PAR can be defined as a form of research in which participants are regarded as co-researchers and integrally involved on a continuum of participation that consistently seeks their input and feedback throughout the project (Brown & Strega, 2005). Specific research questions to be asked in this study include the following:

1. How do youth from limited resource communities describe and demonstrate their sense of social identity in a referential music-making context?

2. How does the Black/African American music therapist facilitating these experiences regard their
down relationship with referential music making and social identity? How do their past experiences intersect with the current experience of facilitation with this population?

This chapter provided a brief introduction to social identity theory and the unique challenges and opportunities found in the Black/African American population with regards to identity related concepts. Particular attention was given to the context of work with adolescents and the role music may play in engaging that population effectively. It is ultimately argued that culturally relevant engagement, fostered within the frameworks of PAR and CMT, may yield richer experiences for Black/African American youth participating in music therapy and provide valuable insights for the professionals who serve them.

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4 The use of the plural “their” is purposeful to create a gender-neutral statement.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of literature regarding social psychology and social identity theory, the evolution of terminology for low resource communities, and associated challenges within those communities as they relate to existing social theories. Discussion will additionally be focused on Black/African American and youth cultures, music therapy both generally and with Black/African American Youth in particular, and the opportunities for approaching group research in these areas.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory was developed in the field of social psychology, derived from the concept that individuals do not develop in isolation, but rather that they form their identities based on the sense of belonging they feel to social groups that are distinct from one another. Thus, individuals define themselves not only by the group(s) they belong to, but by the group(s) to which they do not claim membership (Jary & Jary, 2006; Schaffer, 2006). Initial explorations into social identity were made in the 1970s by social psychologists studying inter-group relations, particularly power and prejudice (Brown, 2000). Theorists sought to understand bias and inequality, and in doing so determined a variety of ‘givens’ regarding individual choices in group membership and behavior. Chief among these givens was that when objective resources were unequally distributed, antagonism between groups of people is the natural result (Tafjel & Turner, 1979). From this animosity, individuals within each group will seek to distinguish themselves from each other by consistently defining and re-defining what constitutes membership in their group, and then derogating members of the out-group. Turner took these givens a step
further with his theory of power, positing that the type of power that led the controlling of resources was derived from a combination of three elements: persuasion, authority, and coercion, all skills that could be utilized and abused from within a social context (Ye, Ollington, & de Salas, 2016). This would seem to imply that power, intergroup bias, and inequality were interrelated, and that it is the social mobility of individuals within or between groups that either maintains a status quo or promotes social change.

**Social Identity Development**

Clear and stable identification with social groups is a trait which appears to gradually present itself between middle childhood (7-8 years of age) and adolescence (Ruble et al., 2004). Prior to this point, children identify themselves largely by simplistic physical terminology (‘big,’ ‘little,’ ‘boy,’ ‘girl,’ etc.), and not out of any sort of recognition of—or desire to perpetuate—anything that would constitute membership to a given group based on a particular characteristic. However, once children are fed—and begin to attribute—deeper meaning to these characteristics (i.e., ‘boys don’t cry’ or ‘black kids don’t go to this school’), they begin to assign the values they’re perceiving about the various identities they hold onto themselves, seek out others who share their identity to reinforce their self-concept, and distance themselves from the ‘other,’ or those they deem unlike themselves.

**Unique Social Challenges in Adolescence**

School aged individuals are often assigned an unspoken *sociometric status* by their peers, who classify them as either rejected, neglected, or accepted (Harrist & Bradley, 2002). Upon their arrival in the school setting, children are ostracized, ignored, or included based upon their status. Much of the research in this area focused on the
adolescent years, providing perspectives on the kind of value adolescents place on these classifications, and how they behave within and between them.

In a study of 380 Australian adolescents (184 males and 196 females), Tanti, Stukas, Holleran, and Foddy (2011) sought to determine whether the influence of social identity factors such as self-stereotyping and in-group favoritism were strongest at the earlier, middle, or later stages of adolescence, and if certain types of identity conformed more strongly to stereotyping and favoritism factors than others. Participants were randomly assigned to either a peer identity or gender identity group, and then divided by age range (12-14 for early adolescence, 15-17 for mid adolescence, and 18-20 for late adolescence). Peer identity for this study was defined as ‘popular,’ ‘normal,’ or ‘nerd.’ Gender was defined as ‘male’ or ‘female.’ Each group was asked to choose which peer or gender group to which they thought they belonged, then list three things they thought their group did ‘well,’ ‘badly,’ ‘often’ or ‘rarely.’ Following that, participants were asked to mark on a 10 centimeter line to what degree they felt they were “very much a group member” or “very much an individual” (p. 558) based on the criteria they had created. Additional (and more standardized) measures were also applied to determine cognitive abstract reasoning, any social context changes participants had experienced recently (such as a physical move or group membership change), strength of identification with the group, and how concretely participants considered the defining boundaries of the group(s) to which they belonged, as well as a variety of descriptor and bias seeking measures.

Not surprisingly, late adolescents displayed higher abstract cognitive reasoning skills. Late and early adolescents expressed similar levels of social context change, more
so than their mid-adolescent peers, which would appear consistent with the onset of puberty in early adolescence occurring between elementary school and middle school most Western/Euro-centric countries, and the unique transition that occurs around high school graduation in late adolescence. Across all other categories, when social identity factors were present, early adolescents displayed them most strongly, indicating that younger adolescents seem most preoccupied with belonging to a group. Between the categories of peer and gender identity, peer identity seemed most pronounced across adolescence, though the authors acknowledged that the study was limited by addressing gender solely within the male-female binary, when current research suggests gender is more complex than binary-based measures are capable of accommodating.

In a descriptive study utilizing semi-structured interviews with 26 adolescent girls who had developed friendships across racial groups in a Los Angeles high school, Thomas (2009) explored a variety of social identity based behaviors (which she labels as ‘territorial’), designed to either dissuade the existing group member from the cross-group behavior, or ostracize them from the group entirely. These included physical behaviors such as intimidating stares and posturing, as well as verbal statements or accusations that the individual engaging in friendship across racial groups was a ‘race traitor.’ Participants in the study tended to emphasize the impact of those in-group behaviors just as strongly, if not more so, than any derogatory actions leveled against them by members of groups to which they felt they did not belong. The author made particular note of some Hispanic participants (who were the majority in the study), noting their discomfort with the pressure of feeling like they needed to match expectations of what it meant to be
Hispanic, and that mobility across other identity types (such as participation in athletics or the arts) seemed easier than moving between racial groups, which was more stressful.

Vaillancourt et al., (2013) assessed 695 American upper elementary/early middle school children over the course of four years (between third and seventh grade), utilizing a variety of developmental psychological and academic measures; their purpose was to determine the relationship between psychosocial issues and academic performance. Among students who self-reported a high amount of victimization or bullying from peers, academic performance on standardized tests and school absenteeism was noted to be significantly impacted by their fifth grade year. Thus, these kinds of societal issues are not just emotional problems, they are academic problems that can potentially develop into career problems, which impact quality of life across domains.

**Youth from Low Resource Communities**

Adolescents who live in predominantly Black or African American communities that are characterized as being ‘at risk’ are very familiar with this domino effect of emotional challenges influencing academic and career success. A 1988 longitudinal study published by the National Center on Educational Statistics, or NCES, in 1992 was among the first to use the term to refer to students who were at risk of educational failure. The study collected basic demographic data on a group of eighth grade students from a cohort of 25,000 adolescents across the country for two years, and found that Black, Hispanic, and Native American students from low socio-economic environments were more likely to fail or drop out of school than their White counterparts (Kaufman et al., 1992). Additional demographic information gathered by the study included family background (parental make-up and involvement, and so on), and academic history,
including characteristics of the student’s schools, teacher perceptions of the student, and any noted behavioral issues. Considerable assumptions were made based upon the loose correlations between individuals’ personal backgrounds, their behaviors, and subsequent success or failure in the school system, some of which has led to critique from more recent scholars for the potential harmfulness of its generalizing language.

**Concerns regarding the term “At Risk”**

In a 2006 speech, educator Gloria Ladson Billings described the term ‘at risk’ as one that has the potential to prescribe the very thing it claims to be identifying. This perspective is supported by research on the concept of ‘stereotype threat,’ or the stress brought on when an individual experiences concern that their behavior or ability in a given area will enforce (or weaken) stereotypes about a given identity that they may hold (Steele, 2010). For example, a student from a predominantly Black, low income neighborhood who grows up hearing they are at risk of academic failure because of their Blackness or socio-economic status may experience heightened stress during academic testing that may actually result in causing them to test lower than their academic capability and thus confirming the stereotype.

In a study on the impact of stereotype threat on small groups versus individuals (Aramovich, 2014), 171 black female undergraduate students were recruited for a series of problem solving exercises based on math and logical reasoning that they would be asked to either solve as individuals \( n = 81 \) or in groups \( n = 90 \). Each group contained 3 subjects, for a total of 30 groups. 43 of the individuals and 14 groups were presented with a stereotype threat alongside their problem. The threat involved a male researcher presenting the problems to subjects as a test of reasoning in which results would be
weighed against other subjects (meaning higher scores indicated an individual or group was more ‘logical’), followed by a fabricated statement that the researcher was particularly interested in the differences between male and female respondents. Subjects working on problems with the threat condition also were asked to identify their gender on their worksheets.

It was hypothesized that threatened individuals would underperform their non-threatened peers, but that threatened groups would outperform similarly threatened individuals (Aramovich, 2014). These hypotheses were based on theories of group problem solving, particularly that groups—even those aware of a stereotype threat—would be better able to minimize errors than any individual based on the very nature of there being more minds dedicated to the issue. Similarly, a group may not put the same sort of pressure on themselves to confirm or defeat a stereotype as an individual would, thus it might not weigh as heavily on the result.

Two raters who were blind to the respondent conditions assessed each individual and group worksheet for problem solving errors and the number of trials, or steps, used to solve the problem (Aramovich, 2014). Problem solving sessions were also audio recorded to assess the level of concern any subjects expressed regarding the stereotype threat (as well as to disqualify any individuals who failed the ‘manipulation test’ by guessing the true intention of the study). ANCOVA analysis of problem solving results revealed, not surprisingly, that groups in general solved the problem presented to them in fewer trials than any individual, $F(1, 98) = 37.52, p < .001$. More specifically, supporting the first hypothesis, individuals under stereotype threat utilized more trials than their non-threatened counterparts, $F(1, 98) = 6.52, p = .012$. The results between groups and
individuals also supported the second hypothesis that threatened groups would
outperform threatened individuals, \( F(1, 98) = 29.75, p < .001 \). This suggests that when
individuals are encouraged to work together, stereotype threats would appear to have
significantly less impact than they would on an individual who is tasked with facing a
stereotype threat on their own. However, limitations to the study included that all
subjects came from a single ethnic group (African American women), and it was difficult
to pinpoint every psychological factor at work within group interactions in order to truly
attribute their success to any one mechanism, other than the fact that they were working
collaboratively, suggesting that more research in this area is needed.

The Roots of the “Risk;” Low Resource Communities and their Impact on Youth

While national statistics show that, on average, youth who identify as Black or
African American score up to 26 points lower on standardized tests than their White
counterparts (Darensbourg & Blake, 2013), little is actually known about “the complexity
and culturally specific…experiences of African American children” (p. 1044), making it
a challenge to determine just what conditions or preconceptions are responsible for the
lowered academic achievement for which they are often considered “at risk.” Whether
from poverty or exposure to violence to the internalization of stereotypes themselves,
stereotype threat or the association of stereotypical characteristics (such as poor academic
performance) with the concept of what it means to ‘act’ one’s identity, there is limited
consensus on any single culprit (Elsaesser et al., 2016).

However, the results of lowered academic achievement in a child’s life are clearly
evident, as the psychosocial issues determined by Vaillancourt et al. (2013) to be related
to school truancy and other risk taking behaviors—such as substance abuse—can have a
tremendous impact on an individual’s general quality of life. And in a country that is increasingly arresting and prosecuting juvenile offenders at younger and younger ages for such offenses (Mallet, 2017), it is possible that a “chicken or the egg” scenario may be developing, as children labeled as “at risk” essentially become socialized to being disproportionately targeted and punished. They may begin to see being overly policed and/or incarcerated as an inevitable part of who they are and who they will become.

In communities that are healthier, however, with more resources and opportunities for children and their families that support them across developmental milestones—providing greater opportunities for them in the process—these risks factors can be greatly diminished (Mallett, 2017). For this reason, some researchers have taken to dropping the label of “at risk” youth to instead refer to these children and adolescents as individuals from low or limited resource communities, utilizing more strengths-based approaches towards addressing their unique environmental needs (Harrison-Hale, McLoyd, & Smedley, 2004; Hart, 1992) This substitution takes the onus for reducing these risk factors off of the individual, who is a product of their community, and instead places it on the systems that limit the ability of a community to provide its residents with the type of supports they need to thrive. In this paper, the terms “at risk” and “low or limited resource communities” will be used interchangeably, due to the former’s recognizability in the field of social psychology and group work, but with a stronger emphasis on the latter, which acknowledges the valuable role that community resources can play in reducing risk taking behavior by children and adolescents and increasing opportunities for them to see themselves—and their futures—in more healthy light.
Identity Expression in Low Resource Communities

Much of the existing research on self and identity within this population is currently limited to that which can be measured by tools designed by Western social cognitive theorists working from a Euro-centric world view. According to Lykes (2013), such tools have the potential to be “individualist, ahistorical, and culturally disembodied” (p.775). As a result, the term ‘at risk’ has generally become somewhat of a ‘catch-all’ term. However, researchers do generally caution against speculations (Elsaesser et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Steele, 2010) or oversimplifications of backgrounds or behavioral traits that children might exhibit, which are rooted in more systemic impacts on their communities. Thus, it is argued that future research should prioritize the voices of these children as “local protagonists” who are considered experts in their own lives, and capable of creatively crafting solutions to those systemic and interlocking issues that impact the communities with which they identify (Lykes, 2013).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The term Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, or CRP was originally defined by Gloria Ladson Billings (1995) as an empowerment-based form of instruction that utilizes cultural referents to help students build critical thinking skills. The core tenants of CRP include 1) allowing space for student success that is oriented towards critical thinking development, 2) imparting cultural knowledge that empowers student self-identity, and 3) encouraging the development of a “critical consciousness” (Kim & Pulido, 2015) in students, towards critiquing the status-quo. In recent years the concept of CRP has become increasingly popular, with ‘cultural relevance’ at the core of a growing amount of research (Kim & Pulido, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995, Samson, Garrison-Wade, 2005).
However, not every study naming its techniques as ‘culturally relevant’ includes all elements of CRP.

For example, in a six-week study taking place in an ethnically diverse Colorado high school, 30 African American students in two purposefully sampled American History classes were invited to share in focus groups and feedback forms based on two types of instruction they received: first, a standard classroom instruction which included experiential and movement based elements and group discussion, then secondly, instruction that included all of the previously mentioned elements in addition to being culturally tailored to the African American population (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2005). While what exactly makes up ‘culturally tailored’ instruction is not clearly defined beyond the fact that it was Afro-centric, African American students consistently stated preference for culturally tailored instruction over more ‘traditional,’ Western Euro-centric approaches. Emergent themes in the focus groups and feedback sheets included appreciation for challenging topics like those related to race and ethnicity, the desire for more ‘fun’ and ‘interesting’ lessons, and the value of teacher interaction and sense of humor. Thus, this study could be considered to include at least one core tenant of CRP (the empowerment of student self-identity), but to what extent it intentionally addressed critical thinking or the development of a broader critical consciousness is unclear.

Regardless, while this study did not have a control group, it would be interesting to see how the academic, career, and/or general quality of life outcomes of African American students receiving CRP would fare against their peers who did not receive any altered instruction, particularly since current research tells us that on average, African American
students are testing lower than their peers and generally at risk for a lower quality of life (Kaufman et al., 1992).

**The Value of Insider Research as Partner to CRP.**

Worth noting in the previous study was that the researcher in that classroom was an African American Female. Hodkinson (2005) posits that research into the impact of this practice, which seems common across recent research on marginalized populations, is notably scarce. This perspective is echoed by Kim and Pulido (2015), who explore the use of hip-hop as culturally relevant instruction. They express concern that youth in classrooms reportedly using hip-hop as CRP are most often regarded as consumers of the artform, rather than producers of it, with a white instructor at the helm administering hip-hop as a medium which is tailored to classroom instruction rather than serving as a foundation to it. Thus, the empowerment tenant of CRP is undermined, a problem that might not occur were the instructor a member of (or at least more connected to) hip-hop culture.

Thus, it can be argued that research that is conducted on individuals from a given culture by someone who either shares or is culturally proximal to that culture may yield valuable benefits for the process and institution of research as a whole, namely creating a more comfortable atmosphere for participants to engage and disclose.

**Music as CRP**

One of the primary ways in which adolescents in general seek to assert their agency is through music. Despite often opting out of school-based opportunities to engage in music making (Saunders, 2010), adolescents generally express enjoying the freedom to choose what they listen to and how they listen to it on their own time and
terms. The artists they choose to identify with can even begin to impact additional choices in dress and social engagement. Thus, it also stands to reason that it is important to investigate the role that music can play in the development of a healthy sense of identity, which is a core tenant of CRP.

McFerran, Garrido, O’Grady, Grocke, and Sawyer, (2015) surveyed 111 Australian students aged 15 to 18 years (62% male, 38% female), seeking to determine the ways in which students used music in their everyday lives. Researchers specified five emotional states (happiness, sadness, stress, anger, and boredom) to assist in the identification of motivating factors for music listening, and also included in the survey a psychological distress scale to determine a baseline understanding of participants’ mental health. Participants in the study reported spending an average of 17 hours per week listening to music, with 68.5% of students reporting that music enhanced pre-existing feelings of happiness. In fact, the majority of students reported music enhanced all other pre-determined emotional states (sadness, stress, and anger), with the exception of boredom, which 60.4% of students reported music listening diminished. Pearson correlation analyses additionally supported the idea that students who displayed higher psychological distress chose to listen to music more often, even if that music enhanced those feelings of stress ($r=.28$, $p=.003$). This would seem to suggest adolescents choose music to reinforce their states of mind, whether positive or negative. When this suggestion is paired with social identity research which suggests adolescents place a great deal of emphasis on their social standing with peers, and that teens will consistently seek to maintain the status quo of behaviors and beliefs within their defined social group by
whatever means necessary, there may very well be a valuable intersection between music engagement and the expression of identity in a social context.

**Music in Black/African American culture**

Black/African American identity on the whole is strongly tied to music, even beyond adolescence (Dixon et al., 2009; Donnetrice, 2012) Historically, songs have been used as a means of coded communication and resistance against slavery and oppression (Pyatak & Muccitelli, 2011; Towns, 2015). These codes have evolved and morphed across the spectrum from marginalization to popular consumption and back again in various forms and ideations, most notably in hip-hop culture. Youth who identify as Black or African American, and describe themselves as being avid consumers of rap/hip-hop music and music videos, have demonstrated high senses of collective self-esteem, which may be based in seeing themselves and their struggles represented in media (Dixon et al., 2009). Some performers of rap music view their work as a ‘resistive occupation,’ striving to advance political or social justice causes through their music (Pyatak & Muccitelli, 2011), which would be in keeping with the first and third tenants of CRP: developing individual critical thinking skills and encouraging a broader critical consciousness that challenges the status-quo.

With these supported concepts in mind, any study of music and identity within the population of African American youth that hopes to be relevant for practicing professionals who work with this marginalized population then might best be one that is carefully informed by history and an understanding of human development that is specifically connected to the community within which it is situated.
Music Therapy

The experiential nature of expressive therapies (ET) like music therapy, as suggested by Ho et al., (2012), appears to make them promising tools towards addressing various life challenges. Levine, Knill, and Levine (2004) refer to the unique experiences cultivated by ET as “rites of restoration” (p. 76), rooted in universal themes connected to major life cycle events, healing, and relationship building. Trauma or other restrictions to the human ability to relate to (or grow in) any of these areas may result in stunted development and a feeling of helplessness or being ‘stuck.’ Ritualistic practices, such as those cultivated by ETT, are thought to create space for experiencing the world through new ideas and connections that can be explored and tested in a safe environment (Levine et al., 2004).

A systematic review of 28 randomized controlled trials using music therapy with children found that a variety of diagnoses are regularly treated and studied by music therapists, from emotional and behavioral disorders to physical injuries and disabilities (Mrażova’, Celec, & Ing, 2010). Twenty-three out of the 28 studies reviewed displayed some kind of significantly positive effect. Concerns relating to sample size and the amount of detail provided in descriptions of therapeutic approaches, however, were noted, just as it is also worth noting the small number of extant randomized controlled trials utilizing music therapy with children.

Music Therapy with Racial and/or Economic Minorities

There is evidence to suggest that racial and ethnic minorities (youth in particular) are frequently marginalized in the arts in general. In a study surveying the composition of participant groups in gifted arts education programs across Canada (Gaztambide-
Fernandez, Saifer, & Desai, 2013), researchers discovered that white, upper-middle-class students were in the large majority, whereas students with disabilities or lower English proficiency, or students from more disadvantaged socio-economic communities were more likely to be excluded entirely. Lorah, Sanders, and Morrison (2015) similarly found that American English Language Learners (ELLs) did not appear to participate in school sponsored music ensembles at the same rate as their English speaking peers, but found that when socio-economic status was considered, the disparity between ELLs and non-ELLs all but disappeared, indicating the core issue at hand is more likely to be lack of opportunity and access than a lack of ability or interest.

Two hundred 12- to 13-year-olds in the greater Philadelphia area were recruited from existing community, school based, and correctional programs for a grant funded project titled ‘Safe Spaces,’ which provided one hour weekly creative arts therapies for students for the duration of two consecutive school years (Ierardi, 2007). The specific modality of therapy (art, drama, dance/movement, or music) was selected for each group based on availability of service providers. Participants in music therapy groups engaged in a variety of improvisational, performative, and receptive music-based experiences, from songwriting to music listening and lyric analysis. A self-report survey created by the researchers for measuring elements such as self-esteem and perception of the learning environment (whether students felt supported by their teachers and peers, etc.) did not prove to be reliable in collecting consistently truthful data from participants, but external skills assessments and therapist field notes did produce an overall view of participant growth that included improved behavior in school settings and increased attendance and engagement. Due to the unique combination of community stake-holders in the process
(such as parents, educators, and city government), the researchers noted some challenges in achieving consistent language use and leadership styles throughout the project, suggesting that it may be necessary to provide advanced training of creative arts therapists wishing to undertake culturally relevant community based work, in order to encourage the most supportive and consistent therapeutic environment.

**Community Music Therapy.** Community Music Therapy was first defined by Ansdell (2002) as an approach recognizing social and cultural influences on individual health and relationships, encouraging work with and through these issues by bridging the gap between formal and informal music making and creation, or *music-ing.* The role of the community music therapist is thus somewhat more musical than it is clinical, and the focus on clients runs across a continuum of the personal to the communal. Hense (2015) conducted individual and focus-group interviews of 11 adolescents as part of a two-stage research project at a mental health treatment facility in Melbourne Australia, seeking to determine the influence of community-based music experiences on young people’s recovery process. Upon determining a variety of themes and needs raised during these interviews, including opportunities for playing in a group ‘jam’ and performing in public, a ‘Youth Music Action Group,’ or YMAG was formed, including a board made up of a variety of local community stakeholders, including the ‘service users,’ or participants from the interview stage of the study.

In the second, organizational stage of Hense’s 2015 study, the board convened for a series of meetings to determine priorities for the YMAG, other community partners with which the board could collaborate, and other related logistical issues such as locations and funding sources. From those meetings, six service priorities were created:
instrumental lessons, access to instruments, jam groups, songwriting groups, social music scenes, and hip-hop. While funding for the project proved to be a major hurdle for the board, at the time of the article’s publication, a website had been created for the YMAG, and four of the six priorities were either in process or had been fully realized and were being consistently offered (instrumental lessons and the songwriting groups seemed to suffer from separate, but related funding issues). Hense (2015) acknowledged the inherent limitations to measurement of participant progress that her chosen qualitative approach presented, but argued that more research like it was needed in order to stimulate clinicians’ creativity towards utilizing approaches that elevated and encouraged participation by adolescents in making meaning of their own lives.

In another example, Smith (2012) sought to use elements of participatory action research and community music therapy with ‘at risk’ youth living in an urban environment. Seven girls between the ages of 10 and 13 years were recruited from a Philadelphia Boys and Girls Club, three of whom identified as Hispanic American and four of whom identified as African American. Due to the age and developmental level of participants, the researcher entered the project with a degree of preliminary structure, introducing students to the songwriting process and inviting them to collaborate on a music video project. Collaborators met for a total of 9 sessions, beginning each session by reviewing any decisions made in the previous session as a group. Participants were also given time to individually brainstorm or free write intermittently within sessions. The final session culminated in a premiere party for the rest of the Boys and Girls Club to see the final product the group created: a fully costumed and choreographed music video about their group, which they named ‘The Sparkle Divas.’ Themes emergent in video
transcripts and the researcher’s field notes from sessions throughout the process included that of each group member’s sense of control and value of their contributions to what the group was creating, as well as the empowerment of being able to self-express in a tangible, sharable way with each other and the broader community, suggesting that research which prioritizes the voices of youth as experts in their own experiences may have particular value in engaging and empowering marginalized communities in a culturally relevant way.

The Value of Group Work

The primary foundation for this current study is a pilot study on self-efficacy (unpublished), which was conducted with a group of nine Black/African American individuals in their early adolescence (aged 11 to 14; Thomas, 2017). That study was based on the values of PAR and conducted over an 8 week period, with participants asked to complete a generalized measure of self-efficacy as a pre and post-test, and a group devised music video created between those tests, focused on priorities derived from the self-efficacy measure. While the quantitative data from the project was ultimately unusable due to issues with reading comprehension in the group, several resulting behavioral themes emerged. These themes included physical aggression (which decreased over the course of the study), verbal interaction (which increased), confusion (primarily associated with any reading material that was provided), self-segregation of the group, artistic decision-making, and pride. The self-segregation of the group (which for these participants happened across gender lines) was noted as a motivator for exploring more group process dynamics in future study.
Group process is a term typically applied to dynamics in therapeutic group settings that tend to emerge non-verbally, but impact the direction and success of the group’s goals. These dynamics include group norms and cohesion, the emergence of trust, resistance, and/or conflict (and how those elements are addressed), inter-member engagement, and forces that promote healing throughout various stages of the group’s development (Corey et al., 2010). Given that the foundation of social identity theory is that humans learn and grow in relationship to one another – including how the groups to which they ascribe define and govern themselves – these terms and dynamics may well serve as useful references in the present study, which will be described in the following chapter on methodology.

**Conclusion**

Community-based group music making experiences may serve as a valuable means of further investigating the relationship between African American adolescents’ sense of social identity and music, as well as that of the Black music therapists who facilitate community-based music-making experiences, towards the development of more culturally cognizant and sensitive tools for working with this marginalized population. This review provided an overview of the literature regarding social psychology and social identity theory (including the phenomena of ingrouping and outgrouping behavior), the evolution of terminology for low resource communities, and associated challenges within those communities as they relate to existing social theories. Black/African American and youth cultures, music therapy both generally and with Black/African American Youth in particular, and challenges/opportunities presented by approaching group research in these areas were also discussed. The following chapter on methodology will describe in detail
the tools and frameworks uncovered by the previous review of literature that will be utilized in the present study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The current study seeks to investigate the nature of the relationship between social identity in Black/African American Adolescents and their musical choices in the therapeutic relationship. This chapter will describe in detail the methodology utilized in the present study, as influenced by the tools and frameworks uncovered by the previous review of literature.

Research Questions

The specific questions this study seeks to answer are as follows:

- How do youth from limited-resource communities describe and demonstrate their sense of social identity through the musical choices they make?
- How does the Black music therapist facilitating these experiences regard their own relationship with music making and social identity in this process?

Research Design

This project is an exploratory qualitative study influenced by the values of participatory action research (PAR). PAR can be defined as research which involves planning, acting, observing, and evaluating in a consistent repetitive cycle (McTaggert, 1997) in order for participants to collaboratively address mutual areas of concern in ways that can immediately benefit them and be shared with others.

While PAR in its purest form involves participants being in total control of a project’s every aspect from its conception to completion (Boyd, 2014), the ‘participatory’ values of PAR have been applied in context of the present study across a continuum of engagement and control, due to naturally existing restrictions from the project facility.
regarding scheduling and behavior (including the use of profanity). As a result, some elements of the project, such as research questions and basic parameters for the timing of the study, had to be designed outside of sessions by the primary researcher. Those pre-determined elements were then presented to youth participants by the project facilitator for their input; however, whenever possible, participants were granted complete control over the general direction and stylistic details of their individual projects, with occasional check-ins (shared decision making) from the project facilitator to elicit verbalization of the planning and evaluative aspects of each group’s work as the project unfolded, for the ultimate purposes of data collection and member checking for accuracy of themes being observed. At the close of the project, participants were also encouraged to provide input on how they wished their resulting work to be preserved and/or shared, in keeping with PAR’s emphasis on participants having ownership of their work.

**Data Collection Instruments**

Research tools used in this study included one video recording device (Windows Surface tablet with camera) which was shared between the researcher and project facilitator, an audio recorder which was placed closer to youth participants during sessions to capture any audio the video recording device could not capture clearly, and a Macbook laptop with Garageband and iMovie (audio and video editing software) installed, which was used by the facilitator with youth participants throughout the study.

**Data Analysis**

Data consisted of video recordings of semi-structured interviews (between the facilitator and youth participants), as well as the researcher and facilitator, facilitator and participant field notes, and video or audio-recorded music-making sessions between the
facilitator and youth participants, including the musical elements themselves that were derived from the project. These data were analyzed and then triangulated on a weekly basis via exploratory substantive and theoretic coding (Stebbins, 2008), which is described below:

Once recordings for the initial interviews and each session for both groups were transcribed, facilitator and participant field notes were consolidated into a single document per session and stored alongside the transcripts for each session, with indicators connecting them to the individual who constructed them (facilitator or participant initial/pseudonym). From that point, exploratory and substantive theoretic coding could begin, using the following steps:

1. Video was viewed alongside the transcript by the primary researcher,
   a. Substantive color-coded memos were handwritten directly onto the transcript. These memos highlighted thematic material (behavior, verbal or musical engagement) that appeared significant or recurred multiple times in the session.

2. Separate memos (also handwritten) were made onto larger, color coded sheets that matched the initial color-coded memos for each session, to consolidate thematic material noted during video viewing, as well as any field notes shared or musical products created for that session.

3. The larger, color coded sheets were further consolidated into master folders organized by theme (rather than by session), so that they could be compared across sessions and sub-themes allowed to emerge. Emerging subthemes were notated or highlighted directly on these color coded sheets.
The choice to code in this manual manner was influenced by theorists like Glaser (1992) who proposed that exploratory data analysis was best conducted when the researcher could spread themselves out across a table or floor and physically maneuver through and around the data. The resulting thematic color coded sheets from this study were then additionally stored alongside the transcripts and fieldnotes for each session, from which they were derived. A photo sampling of this process can be found in the following figures (Figure 1.A. and 1.B)

Figure 1.A: an image of data binder open to a transcript from group one, session one, featuring color-coded highlights directly on the transcript, as well as separate handwritten notes on full-page memo sheets color-coded by theme.

Figure 1.B: an image of the data binder, closed, alongside the full-page color coded memos, organized by theme for each group instead of by session (group one across the top row, group two across the bottom row).
Following that initial viewing and memo taking, in keeping with the reflective nature of PAR (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), memos were expanded on, apart from the transcripts/field notes, by returning to the literature and making note of any connections to the thematic material observed. Additionally, any connections to past sessions were noted, as well as ideas for future sessions towards engaging with that material, or possible theoretic ideas for the future of research in this area. Any information derived from this return to the literature was shared in the weekly meetings between the researcher and the project facilitator in time to discuss and integrate into any necessary planning before the next youth sessions.

Setting

The setting for this study was an after-school community program provided by an organization based in a prominent historically Black/African American neighborhood in New Orleans, Louisiana, which will be referred to in this paper as the ‘Creative Community Project,’ or CCP. A variety of community educational programming is
offered through CCP as a whole year round for local students from age five to 14 years old, with everything from academic tutoring by local Sylvan Learning professionals to individual music lessons provided by volunteers from the a local orchestra. The program also promotes a variety of cultural and health based offerings for the community at large, including a food pantry, screenings for diabetes, a djembe orchestra group, and an African dance class. Programming occurs during after school hours, with dinner served to attendees, and on Saturdays as well, with lunch also made available. Groups are typically mixed gender and led by a variety of paid and volunteer staff, typically drawn from local university social work and education programs, though the general population is also welcome to volunteer. The facilitator for this present study was a Board Certified Music Therapist (MT-BC).

**Participants**

There were five youth participants in the study, four identifying as male and one as female. All participants were between the ages of 11 and 14 years of age, identifying as Black or African American, and were purposefully recruited for the project by administrators at the research facility via convenience sampling (Hoskins & Mariano, 2004). Staff were given parameters for age and asked to include only those students who had not been involved in any previous research with the primary researcher. All participants in the groups were familiar with each other and had experienced group music therapy at the facility before, but never within a participatory action structure, and never with the project facilitator chosen for this project. One participant was discovered to have met the project facilitator before, though she (the facilitator) was serving as a substitute
teacher at that time, and not a music therapist. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

**Tamir**

Tamir was an 11-year-old, Black, male. He was the second of five siblings (all sisters, one older and three younger) and lived primarily with his grandmother, though his mother lived in a nearby town.

**Devonte**

Devonte was also an 11-year-old, Black, male. The middle child of a number of siblings he did not quantify, Devonte lived with one adult sister who served as his primary guardian. The rest of his siblings lived with his father. Devonte additionally identified as bisexual and a “furry,” a term used for individuals who enjoy donning haute-couture fur suits as a means of escapism, sometimes as a fetish.

**Michael**

Michael was a 13-year-old, Black, male, the middle child of four brothers. He did not disclose any additional demographic information.

**Chris**

Chris was a 13-year-old, Black, male and a cellist, having studied and played with various instructors and ensembles for approximately three years. Due to scheduling issues, he and Sloane (the female participant to be discussed in the next paragraph) were initially interviewed together, a fact which limited some of the demographic information that could be collected about them.
Sloane

Sloane was a 12-year-old, Black, female. As stated previously, she and Chris were interviewed at the same time, and thus limited demographic information was collected on her beyond her age, race, gender identity, and that she was also a cellist, who played with Chris in at least one ensemble currently, and several in the past.

Melanie

An MT-BC who also identified as Black and was purposefully recruited by the primary researcher was also a project participant, and regarded as a co-researcher. She engaged in regular member checking through weekly meetings with the primary researcher in between the music-making sessions. During these meetings, project progress was discussed, and collaborative problem-solving to address any behavioral or logistical issues from youth participants was also conducted. The project facilitator additionally participated in two semi-structured interviews of her own with the researcher, one at the start of the study and another at the close, both of which were included in data analysis. She was also assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality.

Melanie was a board certified music therapist in her twenties who had been practicing for just under a year at the start of this study. She had interned in the Geriatric Psychology department of a local hospital, and was-practicing primarily as an Older Adult/Hospice music therapist. She had an expressed interest in working with youth from limited resource communities, particularly Black/African American Youth, and was beginning a master’s thesis with that population. She identified as Black/Haitian American, having been born in Haiti, but spent the last decade in the United States. She
grew up as trilingual, speaking Haitian Kreyol⁵, French, and English. Additionally, Melanie was a classically trained violinist.

**Grouping for participants**

Youth participants were separated into one dyad and one group of three. The group of three students contained the one female youth participant. Each grouping of participants, under the guidance of the study facilitator, via the research procedure, conducted their own music making project over the course of eight weeks, with each group participating in opening and closing semi-structured interviews surrounding the group sessions, all of which were included in data analysis. Between their initial and final interviews, the first group (the dyad) received six weekly group sessions, and the second received five, due to some scheduling and attendance issues. Each group’s process was largely participant led, and thus distinct from the next, which produced multiple unique examples of the ways in which social identity might be made manifest through the youth participants’ music-making choices.

**Ethics**

The institutional review boards of both Lesley University and Loyola University New Orleans, where the primary researcher was employed at the time of data collection, approved the study. Study information sheets, general permission forms, and photo/recording release forms were submitted to and signed by the legal guardians of participants. After an initial informational meeting which preceded the formal start of the project, participants also signed assent forms, and were consistently asked at intermittent

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⁵ This spelling of what is traditionally referred to in the English language as “Creole” is intentional, in order to distinguish Haitian Kreyol (a spelling created and recognized by Haitians themselves) from other Creolizations of English and French that exist elsewhere in the world (Valdman, 2002).
points throughout subsequent sessions to affirm verbally that they were continuing to consent to their participation as the study progressed.

Youth participants were not offered any compensation for their participation in the project, though some did elect to receive CDs or digital copies of their projects upon their completion. The project facilitator was paid an hourly wage for her facilitation of the youth projects, half before the start of the project, and half upon its completion.

Procedure

Youth participants met formally for a total of eight weeks, with six 30 minute group sessions between the initial and final interviews for the first group; the second group was restricted to only five sessions between their interviews due to scheduling and attendance issues. All sessions were video and/or audio recorded unless otherwise noted. A brief overview of the format for each session follows:

**Initial meetings and interviews.**

This initial phase of the project spanned over the course of two weeks, with an informal opportunity for participants to meet the project facilitator one week prior to the official start of the project. In that same week, the primary researcher and project facilitator, who are both music therapists identifying as Black, met one on one for the first of two semi-structured interviews, which were included in data analysis. Interview questions for this and the first semi-structured participant interviews are included in Appendix A. In keeping with Creswell’s (2017) guidelines for qualitative researchers, questions were few and kept relatively open ended in order to elicit the most in depth responses and most authentically represent the voice of the participant being interviewed. Interviews were included in data analysis.
The choice to utilize a Black-identifying music therapist in this project was also a conscious one. Hodkinson (2005) refers to individuals who conduct research on particular cultural groups while themselves belonging or being in relatively close proximity to said groups as ‘insider researchers.’ In this study, both the researcher and the project facilitator were Black Women, though neither were born and raised in the New Orleans area, so in a broad sense they were ‘insiders’ belonging to the same racial group as their participants, but in a more specific sense they were more proximal to the community in which the youth participants were situated. The presence of insider researchers is posited by Hodkinson to yield greater access to participants from within the groups to which they belong or closely identify, and lead to more immediate, comfortable, and authentic engagement from participants, which can ultimately improve the quality and effectiveness of data. While access to participants was readily available through an existing partnership between the researcher’s teaching institution and the project facility, it was hoped that having a project facilitator who looked like the participants (and their researcher) would yield the most authentic relationship between all participants, the facilitator, and the researcher as possible.

Following that first meeting between the researcher and facilitator, the youth participants and their families were invited in the same week to meet with the project facilitator informally, in order to establish comfort and trust, discuss the details of the project and sign consent/assent forms. This meeting was not video recorded as part of the effort to establish comfort and trust, but starting the following week with the official start of the project, subsequent sessions, including initial interviews with each of the youth participants, were video recorded on a Windows Surface tablet that was provided for the
facilitator and retrieved for analysis by the primary researcher between the weekly session dates. Each youth participant met with the facilitator one on one for their initial interviews, with the exception of 2 participants, S and L, who—due to scheduling constraints—were brought into their initial interviews with the facilitator together and interviewed initially at the same time.

**Music-making sessions.**

The following table (Table 3.1) details the music making sessions for this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1</th>
<th>Music-making sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session one</strong></td>
<td>Both groups provided with open prompt and parameters for the project. Groups discussed and negotiated general structure of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session two</strong></td>
<td>Negotiations continued, facilitator worked to shift focus from general ideas to more specific details regarding roles, timing, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session three</strong></td>
<td>Participants began to make more tangible music choices, utilizing sample music and loops from Garage Band, some participants began to express desire to create more individualized projects as opposed to one cohesive group project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session four</strong></td>
<td>Individual project work began, with input from peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session five</strong></td>
<td>Individual project work continued. Groups additionally discussed how their projects were to be recorded and shared. Since Group two began one week behind Group one, this was their final session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session six</strong></td>
<td>Individual project work concluded for Group one. Final interviews for all groups followed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Final Interviews.**

After their weeks of group work, each participant met with the facilitator for a final interview to discuss their feelings about the project, which was included in the data
analysis. All participants were presented with a printed list of identity related statements that either they had made themselves or someone had made about them throughout the course of the project. Each participant was asked to review their own printout, cross out any statement they did not agree with, and write in any identity related statements they felt were missing from the printout. Following that action, participants were invited to discuss whether they felt like the music they created reflected those identity statements they had said they agreed with, and if/how they thought they might share their projects or identities with their community.

Finally, two weeks after the formal close of the youth projects, the researcher and facilitator met for one last semi-structured interview, in which the facilitator was asked to reflect on their feelings regarding the project and their role in it which was included in the data analysis. Interview questions are included in Appendix A of this document.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this study that may have potentially impacted the quality of findings and ability to fully answer the research questions proposed. Attendance and scheduling issues presented the most pressing limitations to the project, including the lack of consistency in the initial interviews (having to conduct the one interview with two participants from group two at the same time in order to keep the project on schedule), and the back-to-back absences of one male participant in group one. These absences and scheduling problems, which were out of the project facilitator or researcher control, meant that some participants may have felt more rushed to complete their respective contributions to their group projects than others, which may have impacted the quality of their work. The project facilitator, in collaboration with the
primary researcher, attempted to accommodate these scheduling issues by rescheduling sessions where possible, and letting participants know that the project at hand was more about how they worked together, rather than whether their finished product at the end of the study was “perfect” (or even completely “finished”).

Behavioral issues in both groups also presented challenges for youth participants to create cohesive group projects. These included the use of profanity and aggressive posturing that, according to facility rules, bore harsh consequences for participants, including being removed from the session setting after being redirected more than three times. While no participants had to be removed from the session setting during this research, behavioral issues did impact some participants’ relationships with their peers, which may have compromised the quantity and quality of any self-disclosure they may have provided, which would impact the researcher’s ability to fully answer the research questions proposed for this project.

An additional limitation of note was the disproportionate grouping of one dyad and one group of three, and the fact that only one group (the trio) contained a female youth participant. Group dynamics can vary with the number and genders of participants, and the fact that the project facilitator was female may also have had an impact on participant engagement.

In noting these limitations, it is equally important to note that, in keeping with PAR values, every opportunity reasonably available was sought to allow participants as much ownership over their projects as possible, with as minimal facilitator or researcher disruption as possible. This meant that some behaviors were intentionally allowed to run their course (usually profanity, as physical safety was more carefully guarded), and
scheduling issues were always accommodated and adjusted to with the best of the project facilitator’s ability. In doing this, it is this researcher’s belief that the present study still managed to yield rich and valuable results even with the aforementioned limitations at play. These results will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of this research. A brief review of the research questions and data sources for this project is followed by the results from the data analysis, including summaries of themes.

The Research Questions

Research questions for this study were as follows:

• How do youth from limited-resource communities describe and demonstrate their sense of social identity through the musical choices they make?

• How does a Black music therapist facilitating these experiences regard their own relationship with music making and social identity in this process?

The Data

There were approximately 12 hours of recordings and 15-20 pages of field notes for analysis between the project facilitator and primary researcher. The group sessions were the primary focus of question #1 for this project (How do youth from limited-resource communities describe and demonstrate their sense of social identity through the musical choices they make?). Data included pre and post-project semi-structured interviews, video recordings and transcripts of all sessions, plus each youth participant’s ultimate contributions to their own individual pieces of music within the group sessions, resulting (for group 1) in two individual pieces, and (for group 2) one mash-up/medley style piece of individual contributions from each of the 3 participants.

The project facilitator was also part of an initial and post-project semi-structured interview and weekly meetings with the primary researcher between group sessions, in
keeping with the reflective nature of PAR. Insights gleaned from these meetings that related directly to youth participants’ actions and needs were considered results and are also included in the following sections of themes regarding research question #1. Melanie occasionally reflected on her own experience of facilitating during meetings with the primary researcher. These insights were also considered results and their themes became the primary focus of research question #2 (how does the Black music therapist facilitating these experiences regard their own relationship with music making and social identity in this process?).

Results

There were 5 core themes across groups resulting for this project in response to research question #1:

1. Identity. Defining ones’—and others—identity and preferences regarding music

2. The Continuum of Collaboration

3. Decision making processes in the group context

4. Challenges to group focus

5. Possible roles of music and music making

Within each of these core themes were 2-5 subthemes, which will be described in detail within each theme’s section. Themes in answer to research question #2 were found from field notes and interviews with the project facilitator, Melanie:

1. Defining one’s role as a facilitator (within a therapeutic, participatory action context)

2. The unique realities of serving in this role as a Black professional
3. The value of processing/peer supervision throughout the project

4. Challenges and lessons learned

All themes and sub-themes are discussed in the sections below.

**Defining ones’—and others’—identity and preferences.**

Assertions of one’s identity were made through both actions and words. The act of defining one’s own identity, as well as others,’ was drawn from documentation of personally defining statements—i.e., statements that began with the words “I am” or “you are”—and any actions that occurred frequently enough to be considered prominent “states of being” that either reinforced or contradicted such statements. Youth participants were noted to make identity specific statements and actions relating to identity that both referred to themselves and others. During sessions, when an identity related statement or action was made, the project facilitator would draw the participant’s attention to their words/behavior and seek clarification by asking if it was intentional or important to them, which often produced more clarifying identity-specific statements.

As an example of identity-asserting statements being clarified in session, Chris and Sloane described themselves in their opening interview as being able to relate more to villains in comic books than the superheroes, statements which Melanie interjected to clarify in the following interaction:

Sloane: I don’t like any superheroes. I like all the supervillians. I love Harley Quinn…

Melanie: You love the supervillans? Why? Tell me why

Chris: What about deadpool? Deadpool, though? you like deadpool

Sloane: Oh yeah deadpool is a nice guy, too
Melanie: Wait nice?

Sloane: Well not, nice, that’s not what I meant. Not like that

Melanie: What is more interesting about the villains?

Sloane: The bad stuff that they do. I loved it. I actually liked suicide squad

Chris: I liked suicide squad

Melanie: Do you think it’s because they’re more interesting or…

Sloane: Yeah they’re more interesting, like superheroes just do good stuff, I don’t like good stuff

Chris: I like that they do good stuff, but the story is all the same. They’re either orphans, they’re out of their world, or like some weird accident occurred to them, but super villains are more actual…it’s destiny. It’s manifest destiny

Sloane: I look up to them because I know that I’m not perfect and they know that they’re not perfect. They’re not perfect people. I don’t know if I’m making any sense.

Melanie: No, it makes sense, it makes sense. No, you’re not perfect and it’s hard to live up to ‘I’m the perfect superhero that does all these perfect superhoery things.’

Sloane: Yeah I know that I’m not perfect.

Identity related statements in general fell into the following subthemes: describing one’s attributes and/or special abilities, assigning value judgements to these descriptions (such as derogatory or complimentary statements), contradictions, an emphasis on being (or not being) “cool,” and history/rivalry/hierarchy. Detailed tables of identity specific statements made by all participants, separated out by group and member checked by them to be only those statements with which they agreed to be true, are provided below (Tables 4.1 and 4.2).
Table 4.1
Identity-specific statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devonte</td>
<td>Tamir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I define myself as me</td>
<td>I’m French and African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one can chain me</td>
<td>I’m mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m only myself</td>
<td>I’m nice. Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can be who I wanna be</td>
<td>I’m helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m smart</td>
<td>I’m a star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m truthfully good</td>
<td>I’m thankful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love my family, my cousins (and) my friends</td>
<td>I’m a DJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m the person who is good at everything</td>
<td>My music is the best. Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I describe myself as a person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My furry voices are part of my identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m the one who I am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m bisexual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not stealing other people’s stuff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t scare easily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We (T &amp; I) are team members. That’s what we are</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t care about my sexuality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like being in school. Not all the time…but if</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not angry, fine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2
Identity-specific statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m athletic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m slow to (care for other people because most people are deceitful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I act more mature when I need to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I feel like I’m in a very old body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people call me Mr. Pep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My last name come from a slave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t quiet down, this is who I am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m the goodest student in this group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m so for real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m like the only good musician up in here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m the only one that’s gonna work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t get scared of nothin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m a nice giving person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gotta do solos (in the music industry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m just cool.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I’m full of energy
I can’t be in the music industry
I’m a nice giving person

**Describing one’s attributes and/or special abilities**

Descriptions of one’s attributes and/or special abilities were noted as statements describing something specific that the participant seemed to find important or distinguishing about themselves. These statements could be related to basic demographics, such as Tamir defined himself in the following interaction:

Melanie: Ok. So how do you identify yourself? Like what, what are your (inaudible), what’s your race, are you –

Tamir: I’m not white!

Melanie: Ok, I’m just,

Tamir: I’m French and African American.

Melanie: French and African American?

Tamir: Yeah.

Identity specific statements could also be personality centered, as Sloane demonstrated:

Sloane: I describe myself as a Cheshire cat.

Melanie: As a Cheshire cat, ok.
Chris: Oh, like from –

Sloane and Chris (overlapping): Alice in Wonderland

Melanie: Ok, the Cheshire cat, what does that mean? I think –

Chris: I saw that movie once

Sloane: A random person

Melanie: Random, ok

Sloane: That does happen. I talk to myself, I talk randomly. I see myself as a random person.

Sloane’s behavior reinforced these statements, as she was noted occasionally to verbally respond to issues in the group in a quiet tone that did not always seem to be expecting a response, or in fact addressed to anyone other than herself.

**Value Judgements (derogatory, complimentary, etc.)**

Identity-specific statements rarely existed without being assigned some sort of personal value that framed them in a derogatory or complimentary light. For example, Devonte made the following value judgements on his own character:

Devonte: I define myself as me.

Melanie: Ok, but what does that mean…who are you?

Devonte: I am (Devonte). I am smart. Truthfully good. I love my sisters. Well, I never seen some of them before – I actually don’t know one of my sisters. So I love my family, my cousins, my friends, and most of all I’m just the person who I
think I am. I’m the person who is – do I wanna say it? – the person who is good in everything. Next question!

Statements relating to others were most often derogatory, noted as comments which denigrated another individual in the group by calling them names or otherwise seeming to reduce the value of an assertion or action that participant had made. An example of this would be Tamir claiming Devonte was the one who “always got them lame old songs,” something he was noted to do frequently throughout the project. Conversely, complimentary statements were noted as those which assigned a positive value, or highlighted something either the individual themselves or another participant had done or said, such as Devonte defining himself as “good.” Michael also did this, frequently asserting that he was “cool.”

At the close of the project, all participants were presented with a written list of identity related statements that either they had made or that had been made about them, and invited to cross out any statements they regarded to be untrue of their identities. Most often, those statements which found themselves crossed off an individual’s list were derogatory. For example, the statement Tamir made regarding Devonte’s taste in music, “he the one that always got them lame songs,” was crossed off by Devonte when he saw the statement on his list.

Sometimes, statements were expressed with a seeming intent to be complimentary, but not received by their intended recipient as such. For example, when asked by Melanie what he thought their role was in their group project, Devonte stated “Tamir and I are team members,” seemingly intending to be complimentary of he and
Tamir’s relationship, but Tamir did not seem to hear it that way or share that sentiment when it was presented to him in writing on his sheet of identity related comments at the end of the project. He indicated his disagreement by crossing the statement out with his pen.

Identity statements were sometimes made paired, with a self-asserting comment preceding—or in response to—statements denigrating whoever did not possess the quality they ascribed to themselves. As an example of this, Michael frequently paired his assertion that he was “cool” by telling Chris and Sloane that they were not.

**Contradictions of verbal descriptions**

Contradictions were noted as statements made in proximity to each other by a single individual that were clear opposites, or a participant’s actions which appeared in opposition to statements that said individual had made. While all participants made contradictions, this appeared more so in the first group. An example of clear opposite statements occurred when Melanie asked Tamir to describe himself in four words or less; he responded “I’m mean,” followed by “I’m nice.” Both of these statements were made in the same session, in the same sentence. Michael made comments like calling himself “lazy” in session one, then stating in later sessions “I’m the only one that’s gonna work.” Meanwhile his behavior seemed to demonstrate a different statement as he frequently moved about the room and made his preferences and desires loudly known, but didn’t manage to create his project until the final weeks of the study.

**Emphasis on being “cool” (assimilation, non-conformity, etc.)**

Statements regarding “coolness” were noted as they occurred explicitly in value judgements participants made throughout the project, whether referring to themselves or
others, that used that specific word “cool,” or words/phrases which indicated its opposite, such as “not cool,” or “lame.” Statements in which participants elaborated on the nature of “coolness,” what made a person or thing “cool,” were also noted.

This unique sub-theme to identity could be noted to emerge primarily for group 2 in terms of the value they placed on “being cool,” as exemplified in the following interaction between Michael and Chris:

Chris: (hits play on piece of music)
Michael: Feeling like Dragonball Z and (thinking) he cool. You’re not cool.
Chris: It’s not Dragonball Z. But ok. I don’t have to be.

This example highlighted Chris’s belief that he didn’t need to be considered “cool,” or listen to the same music as someone else considered “cool.” By contrast, Michael expressed not being “cool” as having serious consequences:

Melanie: What does that mean?
Michael: (He) don’t know NBA Youngboy (rap artist)
Chris: Ok…
Michael: Hold up, do you know Cardi B? (Chris shrugs)
Melanie: (typing on computer) I don’t know –
Michael: Oh my God.
Melanie: - how to cut it. It’s alright! (Chris stands up, walks towards the exit).

Michael: Don’t come back. You don’t belong here.

This interaction would indicate that for Michael, if one wasn’t familiar with the genre and artists he considered “cool,” then they weren’t worthy of staying in the room with him. He responded similarly to Sloane, who was noted to choose artists and styles that neither Michael nor Chris had heard of. By contrast to Michael, however, Chris would typically respond to Sloane’s suggestions by asking questions about what drew her to that artist, and sharing music of his own.

History, rivalry, & hierarchy: The impact of social/racial/gender roles.

The terms history, rivalry, and hierarchy were defined and combined collectively into a single sub-theme as statements made when a participant referenced local or cultural history in relation to a current situation in a session, particularly history which involved of rivalry or conflict between individuals or groups, the likes of which the participant making the statement perceived as enforcing some sort of unspoken and unfair hierarchy in the present moment. These hierarchies were typically associated with societal, racial, or gender roles and norms, such as richer individuals being prioritized over poor individuals, lighter skinned individuals over the darker skinned ones (even if both parties identified as Black), and males prioritized over females.

This sub-theme was most prominent between—and particularly unique to—participants Chris and Michael, as evidenced through interactions like the following:
Michael: (to Chris) you are gonna stop hitting me with that thing up your sleeve.
I’m not scared of you, Master.
Melanie: (Chris)! Give that to me. Thank you.
Chris: (to Michael) just because I’m hitting you doesn’t mean that. Besides I’m Black too.
Michael: I never said you wasn’t.
Chris: Then why did you say that?
Michael: You hitting me like I’m a slave or something.
Chris: No.

While the above statements were initially raised as a complaint, Michael was also noted later on to ascribe pride to the assertion that his last name “came from a slave,” and how he knew his history as people who were dark skinned, worked hard, and made something of themselves. This would seem to imply that he thought Chris, who had lighter skin and mixed-race ancestry, was more privileged and therefore possibly thought he was better than him. Chris was frequently noted to dispute this belief.

Michael also seemed to hold strong opinions about the importance of his music representing his masculinity, and resisting any music created or performed by women, as evidenced in the following interaction:

Michael: We need some boy music!
Melanie: Ok wait.
Chris: (Michael) that’s sexist.
Michael: How? You think I’m a boy trying to listen to girl music?

Melanie: There’s no such thing as girl music, boy music.

Michael: Well my parents didn’t raise me like that.

Chris: Well this is what they call 2018.

Michael’s statements would seem to imply that gender of the artist who made the music he listened to somehow contributed to or lessened its worth, a belief that both Melanie and Chris openly disputed. Sloane was often quiet during these interactions themselves, but would later assert under her breath—in an unrelated moment of suggesting a female artist for the group to listen to—that she thought women were “powerful, thank you very much.” How these types of gender and racial assertions relate to the average adolescent social identity will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

**The Continuum of Collaboration**

Collaboration in group projects was defined as those actions or statements made by participants that indicated a desire to have their musical product be something that represented the whole of the group. Examples of this included explicitly stating this desire, or demonstrating it through appropriate turn taking behavior such as waiting for one’s turn to use the laptop, or asking for peer input when one was in control of the keyboard or other tool or instrument. By contrast, non-collaboration was noted as actions or statements made by participants that indicated the opposite. Such statements would assert an alternate desire to have one’s own individual musical product be separate from other group members, whether explicitly stated or demonstrated by behaviors like talking
over peers who were supposed to be taking their turns at the laptop, or refusing to give up their time at a piece of equipment when asked to allow space for another peer to take their turn.

Collaboration was observed early on between Sloane and Chris in group two, when statements were made that they desired to find a way to work together by creating a “mash-up” of their favorite music, something that merged together pieces that they all enjoyed.

Chris: Let’s mash-up the music.
Melanie: Like a medley?
Sloane: Mash-up
Chris: Let’s mash-up the music.
Melanie: Mash-up?
Chris: (smiling) Let’s mash-up my beautiful music with her mediocre (Sloane smiles in response).
Melanie: Ok. So you wanna do a mash-up and you wanna –
Sloane: Make up our own lyrics.
Melanie: - come up with your own lyrics, is that correct?
Chris: Yes

Their behavior throughout the project reflected these explicit statements, in that they frequently demonstrated appropriate turn taking behavior and offered productive suggestions when their peers were at the laptop working, with minimal reminders to
allow space for said peers to try out their own ideas. Chris described this as making something that was “respectful” of each of their musical preferences, a sentiment Sloane shared.

Non-collaboration was most notable in the resulting musical product for group one, which was technically two separate pieces which appeared in the same track back to back, but were ultimately completely separate from each other. This began when Tamir and Devonte expressed having different tastes musically, with Devonte asserting himself as more “electric” whereas Tamir preferred rap; additionally, the two could not agree on whether they wanted to create something wholly original, or a cover of a pre-existing song. Tamir called the latter “going copyright:”

Tamir: I just want to copyright it.

Melanie: Ok, Ok.

Devonte: Let me try (reaches for computer)

Tamir: (reaching across Devonte) Let me copyright. Copyright, copyright, copyright, copyright, copyright, copyright.

This behavior of intercepting Devonte’s attempts to utilize the computer for anything other than playing Tamir’s favorite music was a persistent occurrence. Once in command of the laptop, Tamir would cycle between finding and listening to clips of songs by his favorite artists, seemingly in an attempt to determine which was the one he would want to use for his “copyright” piece. It wasn’t until the final session that he made the decision to abandon this effort entirely and recorded something completely original,
and not at all “copyright.” Any attempt by Devonte to either create something original or even suggest a song of his own to contribute to the “copyright” effort would be met with vocal disagreement by Tamir, often in the form of distracting sounds that degraded Devonte’s musical choices:

Devonte: I have a song…
Tamir: (groans, then laughs, walks offscreen).
Melanie: (Devonte), what were you saying? What song were you saying?
Tamir (off camera, groans)
Devonte: It’s actually a Japanese song
Tamir (groans more loudly)
Melanie: a Japanese song
Tamir (groans)
Devonte: STOP!...Be quiet.
Melanie: He asked you nicely…
Devonte: I did not do this when you were playing your song.

This inability by Tamir to accept Devonte’s suggestions, and Devonte’s unwillingness to yield to Tamir’s desire to control the process of choosing an artist to emulate resulted in the two participants ultimately creating their own separate pieces, with no overlap or collaboration between them.
Decision making processes in the group context.

This theme—while related to that of collaboration—is to be distinguished from it, as it had more to do with the strategies used by participants to make group related choices within their music making sessions. This is, as opposed to how/whether they expressed or displayed a willingness or ability to do so. As mentioned in the section on collaboration above, conflict and disagreement were frequent between participants across groups. Each participant seemed to hold a preference for a particular way to process and address these conflicts and disagreements as they occurred. This could be done by more passive or avoidant means, more aggressive means of pressuring or persuading the opposing party, or attempts at assertive and collaborative negotiation. Each of those means (passive, aggressive, and assertive) is detailed in the following sections, in addition to a sub-theme on the use of humor, which follows those sections.

Passive or avoidant behavior.

This behavior was defined as that which involved a participant physically or verbally withdrawing from the group, not initiating engagement or offering limited response to requests for their direct input. For Tamir in group one, his passivity would manifest in occasionally withdrawing physically from the group, head lowered onto the table or propped up on his hands, and refusing to engage until all parties involved could either agree with his position, or at least follow him in whatever new direction he wanted the conversation or experience at hand to take. The following interaction, when the group was in the early phases of sharing music to listen to as possible inspirations for their piece, is an example of this:
Tamir: My song is the song
Melanie: What is your song?
Devonte: No, actually (here’s) a song he might like, it’s called “We’re animals.”
Tamir: No
Devonte: Ok, just try it out ok, “we’re animals”
Tamir: (burying his head in his hands) No.
Melanie: Wait, before I play your (Devonte’s) songs (to Tamir), we can play your second song at the end…(Tamir still hunched over, then he lifts his head to look at the computer)...ok, let’s do it, alright, let’s start the music.

This type of passive behavior even occurred in solo decisions Tamir was tasked with, such as whether to build beats himself or find instrumental versions of existing songs, a decision that spanned two sessions before he could assert that he wanted to do the latter. He would only resume engaging productively in the session if the opposing party acquiesced or promised to do what he wanted, as described above, or if the subject was changed to something of more interest to him.

Sloane was similarly passive, often burying her head in a book or notebook whenever the other two participants were in a heated disagreement. She would become active again when there was more space for her voice, either in a moment of silence between Michael and Chris talking, or when Michael was absent. These were not behaviors Michael or Chris were noted to employ in their group, but Devonte occasionally did in his, most notably after being distracted by one of Tamir’s verbal outbursts, in the following interaction:
Devonte: How do you…
Tamir: Press record
Melanie: Hang on… (Devonte presses record. As his previously recorded music begins to play back, Tamir makes distracting noises. Devonte pauses the music without recording anything new, buries his head in his hands).
Tamir: What did I do to him?
Melanie: You’re distracting.
Tamir: But I’m just singing.
Devonte: (lifting his head, looking at Tamir) You’re distracting me so much even the world is distracted because of you.

Following this interaction, while Tamir did not apologize to Devonte, he did agree to try and be quieter while he was recording.

**Aggressive pressuring or persuading behavior.**

The term “aggressive” in this subtheme specifically refers to behaviors that are intense in nature and exhibited by a participant while attempting to pressure or persuade a fellow participant to see and adopt the other participants point of view. This is to be distinguished from behavior which was physically aggressive, or aggressive simply for aggressions’ sake, which was prominent in the second group.

Members attempted to recruit members to support their vision, while the members who disagreed with their position were marginalized. Michael made it clear he was not willing to work with Sloane because she was not “relevant” to his vision and then
attempted to recruit Chris to work within his frame of ideas. This recruitment included behaviors like verbally berating Chris for not being ‘cool,’ while reminding him that acquiescing to his view would make him ‘cool.’ Michael’s verbal berating would often occur, as evidenced below, in a flurry of volume and speed that would make it impossible for any alternative perspective to be heard, such as in the following interaction:

Chris: I don’t like the song…you know I don’t listen to songs (like this)
Michael: You don’t have to listen to it all you got to do is say yes. That’s all you got to say is “yes—”
Chris: —But what if I don’t like the song—
Michael: —If you don’t like the song don’t listen to it…
Melanie: This is a group project.
Michael: But excuse, listen. He’s saying he don’t like the song, but on Saturday afternoon he was like, ‘Michael look at me—’
Chris: —Quit lying (drums crash as Chris stands up abruptly, lunging towards Michael)
Melanie: Ok…cut it out Chris.

After Chris’s physical posturing towards Michael, Melanie ended up facilitating a group vote on whether or not group members were enjoying the song Michael had suggested or if they wanted to move on.
**Assertive negotiation.**

Moments of assertive negotiation could be defined by one participant offering a suggestion, the other(s) offering alternatives (either spontaneously or with a prompt to try and find a compromise), then a respectful back-and-forth of ideas until an agreement could be reached. There were moments of assertive negotiation in both groups. As an example, in group one when Devonte first suggested the idea of splitting his group’s song in two, so that part of it could be original to accommodate his preferences, and part of it “copyright” to suite Tamir’s tastes, the following interaction ensued:

Tamir: Ok. We could do (inaudible) two minutes and then we could do NBA Young Boy (rapper).
Melanie: So two minutes long. We’re all in agreement two minutes long.
Tamir: No. Ten.
Melanie: Ten minutes long? (turning to Devonte) What do you say?
Devonte: Well, videos are usually under or exactly 10 minutes.
Melanie: Ten minutes. Everybody’s in agreement 10 minutes? In the intro –
Tamir: It’s going to be electric and then five minutes is going to be electric. Then five minutes, then the rest five minutes is going to be NBA Young Boy…
Devonte: Oh, yeah. That’s cool. Like five and five so it’s both fair.

With this compromise, each participant could have complete control over what happened in their section.
Participants did occasionally attempt to negotiate with the project facilitator, as evidenced in the following interaction between Tamir, Devonte, and Melanie:

Tamir: If I say-
Melanie: Is it appropriate? It has to be appropriate.
Devonte: They say hell in the Bible so ...
Tamir: So I can do it.
Melanie: They say hell in the Bible?
Devonte: Yeah.
Tamir: I would say the "F" word.
Melanie: Is that appropriate?
Tamir: Yeah it would and so ... How can they (other rappers) say it though?
Devonte: Say what?
Melanie: What can who say?
Tamir: NBA Youngboy how can they say that?
Devonte: Because he's a rapper.
Melanie: And he's not at (name of facility).

Ultimately, Melanie did acquiesce to the use of the word “hell,” though she did have to reiterate on several later occasions that other words, like “the F word” were not appropriate given the rules at the facility.
Use of humor.

Humor was defined for this project as the use of statements or actions, whether claimed as purposeful or appearing unintentional, productive or disruptive, that drew smiles or laughter from participants during sessions, such that it directly impacted the task at hand in music making sessions. This sub-theme emerged uniquely in group two, and frequently applied to a variety of situations throughout the project, most often to dissipate tension and transition towards negotiation between peers.

Michael typically used humor as an afterthought, a justification for behavior, such as in the following interaction, after telling Chris he wasn’t “cool”:

Michael: Feeling like Dragonball Z and (thinking) he cool. You’re not cool.

Chris: This is not Dragonball Z, ok. And I don’t have to be.

Michael: Don’t get angry over it, I’m just playing, chill.

“I’m just playing” would become a frequently used phrase by Michael, used to follow up to statements about threats to punch Chris, or when called out by a peer or Melanie for being “rude.”

Youth did not always seem to like when their project facilitator used humor. An example of this occurred while Melanie was engaging in some strategic ignoring of distracting verbal behavior from Michael, while attempting to keep the music that Chris and Sloane were working on going in the background:

Michael: Can you pause the stuff for one second?

Melanie (smiling): Can you pause your mouth for two seconds?
Michael: You tryna be funny? See I’m tryna be respectful.

This phenomenon of youth responses to adult use of humor will be explored more thoroughly in the discussion chapter.

**Challenges to group focus**

Challenges to group focus were defined as any behavior—whether intentional or unintentional, initiated by participants or outside factors—which drew participant attention away from the expressed goals and rules of the project, which were to create a group project which could be shared with the community. Challenging behaviors that made reaching these goals difficult were incredibly prominent across both groups, taking one of two forms/subthemes: first, general distractions (such as phones going off, or outside interruptions), which were seemingly harmless but nonetheless prolonged, and secondly, physical posturing and escalation, whether occurring in isolation by one group member in response to their own feelings of frustration, or in attempt to influence others.

**General distractions.**

In keeping with the definition of challenges to group focus, general distractions in the project were those incidences—or responses to such incidences—which were seemingly harmless but nonetheless prolonged, drawing participant focus away from the goals and rules at hand in music making sessions. As an example, the project facilitator had to regularly confiscate participants’ phones throughout sessions, after some issues with Tamir pulling his out to answer calls and texts during the first two sessions, and this action often took several minutes at a time, with Tamir attempting to persuade Melanie to let him have his phone “just in case,” or to let him answer it if it went off during group:
(phone rings from backpack across the room)

Melanie: Hang on, hang on, you need to turn that down

Tamir (going to phone, ringing stops, he attempts to put the phone back in his pocket): Alright, whatever

Melanie: Can you turn the volume off?

Tamir: I think my friend gonna call me.

Melanie: I’m gonna need you to turn it all the way off.

Tamir: But my friend’s gotta call me.

Melanie: Why does he always need to call you?

Tamir (jumping up and down in frustration as Melanie takes his phone): Because I got to go to practice!

Melanie: You do that after (this).

Behaviors from Tamir like jumping up and down in frustration, getting up from his seat and crossing the room, or making distracting sounds, were common responses to being told to do something he didn’t want to do, and would often require verbal redirection by the project facilitator in the first few sessions, but then less so after that.

There were the occasional distractions that occurred which were not the fault of anyone in any group, such as outside noise from other classes, or interruptions by staff who needed to enter the room for equipment or scheduling reasons. Tamir sometimes had to leave sessions a few minutes early for a sports practice, and staff would come in to tell him how many minutes he had to prepare to depart, which was helpful for Tamir in one
sense, but incredibly distracting for his group as a whole. Typically, due to the flurry of activity in transitions between groups, it was not uncommon for several minutes to pass before all participants were present in the room and focused enough for sessions to truly begin, and any interruptions that occurred in the final minutes of group time usually meant that remaining time could not be productively utilized.

Ultimately, in the time during sessions between these transitional bookends, participants were able to remain on task for about six minutes at a time, with mid-session distractions usually lasting less than a minute between. The consistency of this behavior with existing research in the area of adolescent attention is discussed in the following chapter.

**Physical posturing and escalation.**

Physically escalating behavior was defined as that which involved a physically abrupt reaction towards an object or other person in the session space that was notable enough to disrupt a peer’s process or the general flow of the session. This could occur in isolation, as in a participant having a physically aggressive reaction that—while distracting for the group—was primarily focused on themselves, or more externally, initiated by some sort of posturing gesture (brandishing a fist or an object overhead, puffing out one’s chest, etc.) with focused intention towards impacting another member of the group.

**Physical escalation in isolation**

As an example of a physical response that occurred in isolation, Devonte was noted primarily to utilize physically aggressive action as a response to something—or someone—that had frustrated him, such as pounding a fist on the desk in front of him,
whether because something on the computer was not working the way he’d liked, or Tamir had distracted him somehow. These behaviors always occurred in one single action, and were typically followed by silence, in which Devonte collected himself and then verbalized his frustration. Similarly, for Tamir, physical aggression typically occurred in the form of him rising from his chair to run to the opposite side of the room and slap the wall, or crumple to the floor in frustration. These instances—while still focused inward, like Devonte’s—tended to be more prolonged, and often required the project facilitator talking him through his feelings with a prompt like “What’s going on Tamir?” to get him to return to the group.

**Physical posturing and escalation in attempt to impact others.**

As examples of more externalized physical aggression, participants Michael and Chris were frequently noted to escalate verbal disagreements between the two of them by progression to physically aggressive posturing, which was defined as any physical gesture with focused intention towards impacting another member of the group, such as an abrupt change from sitting to standing, a raised fist or brandishing an object over one’s head (which Chris was noted to do on several occasions), or puffing of one’s chest to appear taller and moving one’s body closer to the opposing party (a practice most commonly utilized by Michael). There were multiple contributing factors which could contribute to a physical escalation, from Michael’s perceptions of Chris treating him as lesser due to race or class, to Chris responding to what he perceived as Michael pressuring him to accept his ideas. How to address the issue of physical posturing and resulting distractions was a prominent theme in weekly meetings between the project facilitator and primary researcher.
Music making choices in the therapeutic relationship.

The participant driven nature of this project yielded a variety of music making choices from and between individuals. Those choices included what type of music and lyrical content was utilized, how individual sections of each piece were organized, and the function each individual section served as part of the finished group project. The content, form, and function of each piece was analyzed from the final audio files themselves, as well as video recordings of their creation in sessions, including statements participants made about their process throughout the project regarding the purposes of music making and general role of music in life.

Content, form and function as identity statements

Each group utilized the Apple computer program Garage Band on a Macbook Pro to complete their project. The program included options for not only live recording of digital or acoustic instruments, but loop based elements as well, with hundreds of preset melodic motifs for individuals to choose from. It was also possible for participants to insert clips from pre-existing pieces of music and arrange these clips—or any loops or recordings—any way they saw fit.

Participants made distinct choices in these areas that related to the identity statements referenced in previous sections and Tables (4.1 and 4.2, p.50). For example, Tamir’s stated belief that Devonte “always got them lame old songs,” was illustrated in his inability to work with Devonte to come to an agreement about how to merge any of their musical choices together, thus the two peers made the collective choice, with some negotiation, to create a single 10-minute piece, with five minutes each of Tamir and Devonte’s own unique music.
Within his individual section, Tamir created a rap in stream-of-consciousness form which he initially free-styled, improvised in a single recording, over the beat of the song “On my Mama,” which he asserted was by NBA Youngboy⁶, a popular rapper. This choice of Tamir’s to freestyle over a pre-existing beat was a microcosm of his process on the whole in creating his section: each session for him was an exercise in improvisation and exploration of ideas that did not result in anything concrete until the moment of recording, all of which occurred in the final session. Additionally, the choice to utilize a beat he believed to be by an artist that was known to his peers functioned to support statements Tamir made regarding “coolness,” and his belief that he was a “cool” person. Lyrical content also supported this, in passages such as the following, which was repeated twice throughout the song as a “hook,” or chorus:

“I’m a boss you can’t never stop me.
And my squad is gonna let you know.
My squad name, I ain’t gotta say it,
Because you already know about us.”

By contrast, Devonte chose to create a piece with instrumentation that was partially original, in form at least, utilizing the loop library of Garageband to put together a series of clips leading into the full version of the pre-recorded song “Five Nights at Freddies,” the theme to a videogame of the same name. The videogame—which could

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⁶ Readers should note that Tamir’s musical selection could not be verified as an NBA Youngboy song, as the audio he provided for it was downloaded from a Youtube video created by a fan who did not credit Youngboy in the video’s title or description. Additionally, a cursory Google search of the title and Youngboy’s name did not yield any results beyond that video.
possibly be considered well-known to the gaming community, but not as widely in
general—is considered a horror game and features an animatronic teddy bear named
Freddie who terrorizes the player as they try to survive working the night shift at a
children’s entertainment restaurant that looks and functions similarly to Chuck E. Cheese.
It is interesting to note Devonte’s interest in a game featuring an animatronic teddy bear
given his assertion of his identity as a “furry,” though he did not specifically state this
was an intentional choice. Devonte’s structural choices regarding form in the initial loop-
based passages, however, were given more attention on his part, meticulously crafted
over the project’s duration with electronic, grungy sounding loops and beats appearing in
motifs which return only loosely to one another, such that there is occasional repetition,
but never any sort of predictable pattern. This seems to function in keeping with
Devonte’s general statements about his identity (Table 4.1 p.49), particularly those
statements regarding being unchained and whoever he wanted to be. His music is
definable in parts, but on the whole, not entirely predictable, just as he professes himself
to be. The lyrical content of Five Nights at Freddy’s seems to be incidental, but is
included in Appendix B.

The three members of the second group created a mashup of contributions from
all 3 group members, though the bulk of the work in putting the pieces together largely
came from Sloane and Chris, with limited input from Michael. He focused his attention
more on selecting his own music and crafting a vision for it that was different from his
peers, expressing a desire to exclude Sloane in particular:
Melanie: We can do some remixes. There are gonna be 3 of you, so you guys are going to have to work together.

Michael: There's only gonna be 2 of us. Sloane don't come.

Melanie: She usually is here.

Michael: No. Not when I'm here. Okay…

Melanie: (crosstalk)…what we said we were gonna do is you get three songs, you get 3 songs and Sloane gets 3 songs.

Michael: She's not even relevant!

Melanie: She's not irrelevant.

Sloane and Michael’s lyrical content, however, indicated they had more in common than they seemed to perceive of each other. Michael’s contribution to the group piece—a selection of pre-recorded clips from the song “Paramedic” by SOB X RBE—spoke of the singer being “stuck in these streets” while his rival was “in the stands,” implying that they—the protagonist in the song—were the “real” ones on the ground, while their rivals, who may have gotten accolades for their work, were “fake,” removed from the actual lives of people like him. This description of the self as “real” and others as “fake” could be considered to function as a reflection of some of Michael’s expressed frustrations about his identity-related conflicts in what he perceived to be a heirarchical relationship with Chris—or people like him, at least. These people “in the stands” he seemed to deem as a different, more privileged kind of Black, less “real” than his own Blackness.
Similarly, in Sloane’s selection of “Piggyback” by Melanie Martinez—which she chose to sing herself over a recording of the original song—lyrics described a protagonist living in close, impoverished quarters with parents who worked hard to move out of the projects; but then once they did succeed in moving out (and by many accounts, up), the singer felt herself torn away from the only friends who had ever truly understood her, relegated instead to deal with “fake people” she couldn’t trust in her new environment, lest they “come for blood.” The song ultimately concludes that the protagonist has no intention of trusting any of these people in her new surroundings, and that she intends to be who she is, no matter what. Full lyrics to the sections contributed by Michael and Sloane can be found in Appendix B. While Sloane never did explicitly state that she felt these lyrics were autobiographical to her own lived experience, she was noted to express distaste throughout the project for anyone she deemed “fake,” a list which included artists like Beyonce, Taylor Swift, and most rappers, who she considered “stupid.” In this way, her choice of lyrical content seemed to mirrored Michael’s by functioning as a reflection of a state of being that was intolerant of those who would seek to look down on her.

**Possible roles of music**

In their initial interviews, participants made comments about the role music played in their lives, and elements of their behavior and musical choices in their group projects reflected this. The following sections detail the individual roles group members ascribed to music in their lives, whether as more passive background reinforcement/reflection of their existing feelings, or a prescriber or interactive catalyst for transforming existing emotions or states of being into more desired ones, with examples of how each role was reflected in their musical processes.
Music as background: A reinforcement or reflection of existing feelings/states of being

The presence of music in one’s life as a background for reflecting one’s identity and feelings in the moment, rather than something more or transformative in nature, was described by several participants in their introductory interviews. Devonte and Michael, in particular, described their music use in day to day life as involving listening to music in the background of other activities, such as “when I do the (video) games or when I’m hanging out in my room” (Michael).

In keeping with his perspective of music as a background-type experience, Michael’s selection of pre-recorded clips for his group’s mash-up piece were originally intended by him to serve as background to a video, which was never officially completed, but was carefully mapped out and described by Michael to present him in the “coolest” light possible. This was complete with images of himself being surrounded by money and expensive items like cars and cell phones. In this way, Michael was expressing an intent to project an image of “coolness” that was reflective of that aspect of his identity.

Devonte generally expressed that music served to help him “calm down” and “see better” during times of conflict, implying it served similarly to Michael as a means of reflecting his feelings in a given moment, but in a somewhat more targeted way, in that it could possibly be utilized to help clarify—or even change—those feelings. This would seem to be evident in his musical process as well, as Devonte was noted to be very particular about his musical choices, often spending entire sessions on selecting and editing loops for a single ten-second passage, such that the final product was the result of frequent and consistent revisiting and revision. Thus, in many ways Devonte’s musical
choices echoed Michael’s expressed intent for his music to serve as reflective of who he said he was, though it could also be argued that Devonte’s perspective on music’s role in his life may also be more active and transformative than Michael, who seemed to view it solely as a reflective background to his existing identity.

**Music as a prescriber or interactive catalyst for more desired emotions or states of being**

A majority of participants used specific terms to detail a more active and prescriptive—rather than reflective—purpose for their music engagement in those moments. For example, Sloane stated early on in the project that music “calms me down (and) keeps me on the steady side,” a sentiment echoed by Chris, who stated that music “stop(s) me from going insane,” adding “it’s how I deal with junk.” These statements would seem to imply that for them, music was not just a background for reflecting their existing emotions, it was a disruptor of negative ones and a prescriber (or even a catalyst) for more desired feelings and/or states of being. These beliefs were emergent in musical choices throughout the project.

Tamir’s assertion of his “coolness” was stated in his freestyled rap as both an existing state (as discussed in the previous section) and a prescriber of future goals. His lyrics described a desired role as part of a crew “in the streets,” with previously mentioned passages asserting that said crew was notorious enough to require no introduction, and additional lyrics including promises (or threats) of future actions said crew might take, such as “if you come for us, we gon’ come for you,” and “we respect people, but at the end of the day…if you come up in our face, we gonna shoot you any day.” These phrases not only reflect Tamir’s assertion of his “coolness” as an existing
state, but took it further as a profession of forward-facing commitment to ensuring he would back up his crew if called upon. The choice to put these goals in his own words, rather than using someone else’s, further supports the idea that Tamir viewed the role of his piece—and his music use in general—as an active process, rather than a passive one. The entirety of Tamir’s freestyle lyrics can be found in Appendix B.

Sloane and Chris similarly demonstrated an active perspective of music as a prescriber of their goals, albeit with a more interactive process than Tamir applied. Where Tamir seemed to feel he needed to stand alone and posture in his lyrics for the sake of his “crew,” Sloane and Chris expressed a dedication to crafting their vision together through their actions, in the creation of a mash-up style piece that included individual contributions from each member of their group that alternately stood alone and overlapped each other. This reflected their interactive process and previously discussed assertions of their intent to create something that reflected all of them, all the way down to including contributions from Michael even after he expressed a desire to craft his work in a more solo-focused direction.

Chris’s contributions were particularly notable in this regard, as each recurrence of his selection of clips—chosen from the video game “Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask”—seemed carefully selected to compliment whichever clip followed or layered on top of it, whether it was Sloane or Michael’s contributions. In fact, Chris’s selections seemed to serve as buffers between the two. There was never a moment where Sloane’s piece faded directly into Michael’s. These types of structural choices, while never explicitly stated as intention, could be seen as indicators of how the general nature of the relationship between participants in group 2, specifically between Michael and Sloane,
but also Chris’s relationship to both Michael and Sloane was impacting the music-making process. Ultimately, the interactive nature of Sloane and Chris’s musical choices in the project, particularly those choices to position their music as adjacent to or simultaneously occurring over each other, projected a desire to be collaborative and creative in working with peers to craft something that could transform each of their perspectives into something wholly original, and perhaps even better than they ever were alone.

**Themes in Answer to Research Question #2**

The following are the resulting core themes specific to Melanie, the project facilitator, and her own relationship with music making and social identity in this process. Those themes include:

1. Defining one’s role as a facilitator (within a therapeutic, participatory action context)
2. The unique realities of serving in this role as a Black professional
3. The value of processing/peer supervision throughout the project
4. Challenges and lessons learned

**Defining one’s role as a facilitator (within a therapeutic, participatory action context)**

Prior to the official start of the project, in her initial interview, Melanie described herself as “open” to the tenants of participatory action as a general element of her own therapeutic philosophy, at one point stating “I’m happy to meet you where you are.” More specifically, she described herself as someone who was open to “a lot of different kinds of music,” and welcomed participant suggestions in that particular area of the
project. A complete list of identity related statements made either by or about M, narrowed only to those with which she agreed, can be found in Table 4.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3</th>
<th>Identity-specific statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Facilitator (Melanie)</td>
<td>I feel like I’m very vast (musically)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If it was a soundtrack of music…of my life, it wouldn’t fit into any one category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Rap and hiphop) doesn’t resonate with me as much as some Cuban music (but) I’m open to a lot of different kinds of music and…different moods…states of being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m clearly black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I identify as Haitian American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My voice is really calming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People say I’m always smiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m not 34 (in response to a youth participant trying to guess how old she was)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m happy to meet you where you are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would describe (my role) as the track of the streetcar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Melanie demonstrated this openness to input from youth participants with open ended questioning (i.e., “what do you think about this?”) and strategic use of silence, allowing them space to explore the tools brought into the session and articulate their vision to the best of their ability. When asked in the final interview how she would define this way she had of prompting while still allowing space for participants, Melanie offered two metaphors. In the first, she stated feeling as though her role was to be “the track of the streetcar,”

So you’re there, not to be the only thing, but as a guide. And to facilitate movement forward as much as possible, but also to provide structure. I think also
presence is important. Being present and emotionally aware of what’s happening with kids...when they’re play fighting and when they’re not play fighting (for example).

In positioning herself in this metaphor as a sort of roadmap, presenting participants with a variety of paths and options for them to explore, “facilitat(ing) as much forward movement as possible,” but with awareness of when to let something play out and when to bring the train to a halt, Melanie asserted that ultimately she couldn’t choose for her participants where they got off the track, she could only provide them with the means to either get where they needed to go, or draw their attention to issues that might benefit from a pause in the action. Ultimately, participants in charge of their own choice to follow the track(s) made available to them, or get off the train.

Here entered Melanie’s second metaphor, where she described herself having to “be like cartilage instead of bones,” in response to participant choices and behavior, to be flexible to following the lead of the youth participants once they got off the track. She described one particular example demonstrating the importance of this as follows:

There (was) a moment where I tried to do something for (Devonte), and I was pretty sure I had the right exact sound clip (that he wanted)...he knew exactly which one and it was not the right one, and I was like, it’s the same, but he was like no, very strongly.
“There ideas are not necessarily your ideas,” she would go on to say later, “It doesn’t have to be the destination you were thinking.” She referenced other compromises, such as allowing Tamir to use the word “hell” in his rap as an example, stating “the flexibility is something that I think they appreciate.”

Melanie did acknowledge, however, that one couldn’t just “let everything fall out” either. Sometimes it was alright to “stand in your own authority” with regard to facility rules (she used taking away phones as an example) in order to keep the group on task.

**Unique realities of serving in this role as a young Black professional**

While she was open to working in this project within a participatory framework (particularly as it represented values she held in general), Melanie did initially express some trepidation about being taken seriously as a young Black professional, but not for the reasons that one might think. The staff and participants at the project facility were predominantly Black, but specifically African American, whereas Melanie herself identified as Haitian American and had only spent about half of her life in the United States. As a result, she expressed concern that “because of my color, (they) might expect me to know all of the rap and hiphop (and)…be able to do more of the dances (than) I’m familiar with.” She was concerned, in essence, that she would not be “Black enough,” in her words—though she later clarified that she meant to express that she might not be the right kind of “Black,” meaning a Black American born and raised in the United States—to work with these participants.

But, while her lack of familiarity with some of their favorite artists did raise some eyebrows from youth participants during sessions. Melanie did later acknowledge that it
felt as though her Blackness in general was “helpful.” She noted observing that the way her Black/African American participants engaged with individuals of other races was “not the same” as how they interacted with her, at one point referring to a group she observed while waiting for her groups’ session room to become available one day, where older white facilitators were discussing a recent school shooting with the participants. To her in that moment, the students seemed “different,” and it appeared to her as though the white professionals were “preaching at (them).” Melanie was careful to note that she had “nothing against white therapists,” but that to her “the rules are different” when engaging with them, and that her participants seemed to be “willing to give me more.”

I think the way that they interact with other races is not the same. I guess, maybe they felt a little bit more safe (with me), maybe because I knew where they were coming from. Or maybe because I’m Black, a little bit more aware of where they come from or have more respect…they were willing to share with me.

While unsure of what exactly it was that made participants appear more comfortable and willing to engage with her, beyond her Blackness, Melanie did acknowledge the possibility that age may have been a factor, as she was also among the youngest staff at the facility. “I felt insecure about my adulthood (and) authority in some moments,” she said at one point, “but…they were so excited to see me all the time…they were always ready to try stuff (where) with others it was more they demanded like, listen to everything I have to say…their rules were probably different.”
In referring to the mentoring relationship with the primary researcher throughout the project, Melanie described the process of working with another Black professional as “refreshing,” elaborating, “I think when you’re with someone of your kind you feel more comfortable… Things are just understood (that) for other races are not.” It would seem that for Melanie, having to take extra time to explain perspectives that may have been race or culture based in a mentoring relationship with someone who didn’t come from a similar background was labor, and potentially obstructive to the process of mentorship, such that not having to break such things down in this particular relationship with a fellow Black professional made that experience of mentorship more comfortable—perhaps even more productive—by removing that “baggage.”

**Value of processing/peer supervision throughout the project**

In general, Melanie seemed to have strongly valued the opportunities to process between sessions with the primary researcher. She expressed leaving several music making sessions feeling “stressed out,” where “processing by myself I was like, I’m a horrible therapist,” but that in reflecting with the primary researcher that she was able to “put things back into perspective after I (had) psyched myself out.” With that in mind, she did suggest that perhaps processing could occur immediately after the music-making sessions, rather than the few days that were allowed to pass between. In general, the processing sessions were described by Melanie as helping her “cling back on the track,” to realize “actually it wasn’t that horrible,” and “here are some other things that we can try” to address challenges as they arose.

The primary researcher additionally noted that as the project progressed, where Melanie initially seemed to come to their processing sessions with basic reports of the
prior sessions and seeking input on how to address any issues that had arisen, in later sessions she seemed to come prepared with more ideas of her own for addressing problematic behaviors and needs within the groups, seeming more confident in general. At the close of her final interview, Melanie described her work in the project as “an achievement,” and a learning experience that she could bring into the oncoming data collection process for her own masters theses, which would be occurring at the same facility, albeit with a different group of participants. “I think I know better how to communicate with them (now),” she said, “where to fight, and where to kind of be cool.”

**Challenges and limitations of the project**

Melanie acknowledged several lessons learned from challengers that limited the project, some of which the primary researcher was also aware of as the project progressed. Chief among these was time. “It was too short” said Melanie, referring specifically to the 30 minute time frame in which sessions occurred on a weekly basis, proposing instead that sessions be 45 minutes to an hour long; but, it is also possible that the general eight week timeframe for the project may not have been a long enough time for participants to establish a trusting, therapeutic relationship, such that the majority of their musical products did not start to fully come together until the final two weeks of the project. However, it is also entirely possible that it was the fact that there was limited time in the project that served as a motivator for participants to complete their projects by the end of the available timeline, and that no adjustment of this would have made a difference to this ability, regardless of the relationship with the therapist.

Another element Melanie mentioned that was also observed by the primary researcher as a limitation to the project was what she described as the “learning curve”
for technological elements like Garage Band. Melanie noted specifically that “practicing by myself how to work the thing is not the same as doing the same thing in a session with kids there going crazy and pushing buttons.” Essentially, none of her solo practice had prepared her for when her youth participants would take over the keyboard from her and not follow the carefully rehearsed sequence of buttons and commands she had memorized for producing a piece using that software. Melanie was unsure of how to solve this issue, other than to propose that professionals wishing to work with this type of technology “be prepared…know how to do a whole project on your own…and have backup” for when/if that particular technology might fail.

Some of the backup elements Melanie was noted to use throughout the project were the use of Youtube or other programs where participants could search for beats via search bars they were more familiar with. She would then make note of what participants found, and between music making sessions find ways to download those elements, either from more legitimate sources or directly from Youtube (if they couldn’t be found anywhere else), to plug into Garage Band and try to start with using that program at the next session. This usually worked, but additional backups included the addition of a midi-keyboard connected directly to the computer, for participants to play any elements they were trying to create as a springboard for beat ideas, or – if that also failed – the use of the acoustic instruments in the room to record manually, though Melanie did note that the arrangement of said instruments in the room where music making sessions happened seemed primarily to just be “very distracting,” making the physical space for this project an additional limitation as well.
Lastly, Melanie expressed concerns about the project needing to adhere to facility rules about profanity, stating “having to edit out their words doesn’t portray their identity,” going on to elaborate:

The language, you know, that at home, in their cars, their parents are always cussing at them and they’re always using curse words, and they don’t even realize that they’re curse words because they’re just regular words…(so) there’s that line. It is important for kids to learn how to speak appropriately and there is a space and a time (for that), but I think maybe in the context of a project about identity, a little more freedom (is needed).

Melanie did note she felt to be able to find some compromise with participants on words and concepts they could bend the rules for because of her innate (or at least, proximal) understanding of the Black/African American vernacular in music, but she also wondered if (particularly for Tamir and Michael) more couldn’t have been gleaned from them if she hadn’t had to spend as much time negotiating language. With that in mind, though, she also acknowledged that “if you’re not from that background or aware of that, you wouldn’t really understand,” implying that it’s possible even less of participants’ identity could have been expressed if they had not been working with a culturally cognizant professional (either from their same background or with an understanding of it) at all. This issue of censorship, and suggestions for professionals, will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.
Summary and closing wishes of youth participants

This study sought to explore the nature of the relationship between the social identity of youth from limited resource communities and their music making choices in the therapeutic relationship, in addition to the Black professional’s own experiences with their personal identity in said relationship. Youth participants in both groups struggled with the principles initially set for this project, including fitting their project into the available timeline of the facility and creating content that was collaborative and in accordance with the facility’s rules regarding profanity and appropriate behavior. However, all participants did successfully manage to contribute at least some individual elements to their group’s musical products as a whole, and were asked at the close of the project how they desired for their resulting musical product to be shared with the community. Tamir, Michael, and Chris stated initially that they only wanted to keep their pieces for themselves for the time being, accepting the project facilitator’s follow-up offer to make them CDs with their tracks on it. When asked why they weren’t comfortable sharing their material more broadly, Michael was the only participant to articulate the reason for his preferences, stating he felt he could essentially only stand behind his work, and no one else’s in the group, therefore he didn’t want anyone else to hear it. Chris’s answer to why he didn’t want to share the piece more widely was to concede that he might be willing to share the project with the program director of the project facility if he would agree not to share it with anyone else. Sloane also accepted a CD of her group’s track, but seemed more ambivalent about sharing it, simply shrugging in response to being asked about whether or not the piece should ever be shared with anyone. Devonte was the only participant who not only accepted a CD, but had somewhat
broader plans for sharing the material, though the circle he initially intended to share his piece with was also relatively small, including a handful of friends and his mother. He ultimately expressed a desire to upload more original content to his Youtube account, stating that songs like the one he had created in this project might be the start of that work.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the results of this study on the relationship between social identity and the music making choices of Black/African American youth from limited resource communities, resulting in several core themes that spanned across the two groups of youth who participated in the project, including: defining ones’—and others’—identity and preferences, collaboration, decision making processes in the group context, challenges to group focus, and the role of music. The project facilitator Melanie additionally was considered a participant in this project and through semi-structured interviews and regular member checking with the primary researcher, yielded data which produced four core themes of her own, including defining one’s role as a facilitator (within a therapeutic, participatory action context), the unique realities of serving in this role as a Black professional, the value of processing/peer supervision throughout the project, and challenges and lessons learned. These themes illustrated the ways in which participants uniquely described and demonstrated their identities in the social context of creating group music projects within the therapeutic relationship. These findings also present thought provoking perspectives and possibilities for the future of music therapy with the population of Black/African American youth who have been labeled as “At Risk.”
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a discussion of this study’s results within the context of the existing literature regarding social identity, cultural relevance, and music-based experiences. Particular attention is paid to the associated challenges within low resource communities as they relate to said existing research, specifically with Black/African American youth utilizing music-based techniques. Finally, potential implications for the future of research and practice in these areas are discussed.

Research Questions and Resulting Themes

The questions this study sought to answer were as follows:

1. How do youth from limited resource communities describe and demonstrate their sense of social identity in a referential music-making context?

2. How does the Black/African American music therapist facilitating these experiences regard their own relationship with referential music making and social identity? How do their past experiences intersect with the current experience of facilitation with this population?

For these participants, there were several takeaways of value for this researcher. The following sections detail how the results of this study relate to the existing literature. The reader would be encouraged to explore whether the following were also of value to them.
Defining Ones’—and Others—Identity and Preferences

Ruble et al., (2004) asserted that children within the age range of this study’s participants (ages 11-14) should largely be expected to be able to define elements of their identity and begin to present value judgements about them. This assertion was affirmed by the ability of participants in this study to define and demonstrate their sense of social identity, as they made statements about their identities that were frequently categorized by value judgements. These judgements occurred along gender lines, perceptions of “coolness,” and color-based hierarchy, frequently resulting in asserting the value of the self while denigrating anyone who they believed to not fit into their preferred group. These findings also supported the work of Harrist and Bradley (2002), who noted individuals’ tendencies to derogate those peers belonging to groups they considered to be outside of the ones to which they ascribed membership. This could most notably be observed in the distinctions made by participants regarding who was cool or not. Those deemed uncool were subject to either being neglected, or they were rejected outright by actions such as by declaring another individual’s work and perspectives as irrelevant.

While neglecting behaviors and rejection-based language seemed harsh, participants to whom denigrating comments were made by peers outside of their desired in-group did not seem to be bothered by them. Rather, participants concerned themselves more with feeling affirmed by those to whom they considered themselves equals. This is in keeping with the findings of Thomas (2009) whose participants reported that feelings of rejection from within the membership of their in-group were often more painful than being derogated by members of outside groups. Participants did not address rejection directly, but responses were notably more intense whenever it was perceived by a
participant that they were being treated as ‘lesser’ by a peer who ascribed membership to their desired in-group, as opposed to any perceived rejection by someone deemed to be outside the desired group. This is in line with the findings of Tanti, Stukas, Holleran, and Foddy (2011), in a study of 380 Australian adolescents (184 males and 196 females), determined that the influence of social identity factors such as self-stereotyping and in-group favoritism were strongest at the earlier stages of adolescence, and that individuals in early adolescence place a high emphasis on the importance of their place in a hierarchy.

The Continuum of Collaboration and Decision-Making in the Group Process

Actions and decisions such as who one wanted to work with, the artists, songs and related imagery and language that they identified with, as well as how (or whether) to integrate those musical elements to which they were drawn, served as demonstrations that reinforced spoken statements about participant identities and needs. These types of participant collaboration and decision-making behaviors shared several correlations to research regarding group work. In their early work on social identity, Tajfel and Turner (1979) posited in foundational theories that wherever one group of people was perceived as receiving more attention or resources over another, the natural result would be that every engagement between those groups would be turned into a battle of ‘us’ vs. ‘them.’ Thus, the heated disagreements that occurred between participants in this study could be considered to have been as reasonably expected from any group where one was perceiving their preferences in the project to be so closely connected to their identities, particularly if they perceived their identities—particularly identities rooted in race or gender—to be hierarchical in nature (Tanti et. al., 2011). To some participants, this
project may quite literally have been a battle between their preferred groups (‘us’) and those perceived as outsiders (‘them’).

In terms of the process of decision-making, here elements of Turner’s theory of power, as demonstrated through acts of persuasion, authority, or coercion (Ye et al., 2016), could be seen at play through some participants’ focus on intra group influence and inter group discrimination. One or two participants would assert themselves as authority figures on coolness, and demand assimilation to their ideas. Where that could not be met—which was to be expected, given their derogations of those they considered themselves to be in authority over—they would pivot towards attempts to verbally persuade their peers, which could often become aggressive. If those attempts at persuasion failed, participants would move on to attempts at coercion, such as the time Michael offered to pay Chris to appear in his music video. This coercive behavior seemed to particularly serve for Michael as a means of offering Chris the mobility to migrate into the cool group.

These types of negotiations seemed to only be valid between peers, however, as suggestions for group decisions that were initiated by Melanie as the project facilitator rarely came to fruition. This could be expected though, given that the nature of the therapeutic relationship imposes a natural power imbalance, which—based on Turner’s theories—would default to an antagonistic relationship, particularly if the person perceived in the position of authority was perceived to be unfairly distributing resources (Turner, 2005; Ye et. al., 2016). Melanie was a member of an outgroup all the participants could agree on: she was “old.” This distinction between peer-to-peer interaction and peer-to-Melanie engagement could also be observed in the way the group
utilized humor, and how it was appreciated—or at least tolerated—between peers, but less so when offered up by Melanie, particularly if it was deemed derogatory. Research regarding culturally relevant pedagogy with this population, however, would suggest that—given time and careful attention—the natural imbalance of the traditional teacher-pupil balance could be more neutralized (Kim & Tulido, 2015). It would be interesting for future research to explore the specific ways in which the therapist-participant relationship might change over time, particularly when race and gender are considered as factors. For while Melanie was culturally proximal to participants as a Black American, she was female in a majority male group of participants.

Challenges to Group Focus

While not initially considered for addressing in the previous literature review, the attention spans presented by participants in this study were consistent with existing research on attention within their age range, such as Bunce, Fiens and Niels (2010), who determined that focus was largely strongest at the start of an experience, then more susceptible to distraction as time progressed. Physical posturing and escalation were about as expected, as they were observed by Thomas (2017) in the pilot study that preceded this dissertation, both in isolation, and in peer attempts to impact others.

Research on youth from low resources communities supports the idea that attention and aggression related challenges are disproportionately prominent in these communities and can impact quality of life if more—and better quality—resources are not provided (Vaillancourt, et al., 2013; Mallet, 2017). This study would suggest that the prominence of these issues can then lead to a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy in line with Steele’s (2010) work on stereotype threat: Black/African American youth concerned with
being negatively perceived are subject to greater attention and aggression related issues as they respond to the stress of trying to prove that they do not deserve to be negatively perceived. This, when coupled with the already limited resources they are receiving to address these issues, only yields further problems in those areas. Now, these socially related challenges might lead some to think that identity related work might then be best suited to one on one sessions with a therapist in order to maximize what could be done within those shorter attention frames and individual focus without the stereotype threat that groups can possibly induce. But historical theorists—and this author—would still argue that the unique nature of adolescence and the social challenges that so strongly impact this age group in general—and Black/African American Youth in particular—indicate that stronger results can be achieved through group work (Barrat & Kerman, 2001; Cory, Cory & Cory, 2010), particularly work that is culturally relevant to the population at hand, such as the music-making experiences undertaken by this study.

**Music Making Choices in the Therapeutic Relationship**

Existing research supports the idea that music plays a strong role in enhancing or altering existing emotional states in adolescents, which relates to music making choices in the therapeutic relationship. McFerran et. al., (2015) reported in a study of 111 Australian students aged 15 to 18 years (62% male, 38% female), that music which was perceived as enhancing existing emotional states or promoting desired states served as a motivating factor for music listening. In this study, participants echoed that their preferred ways to engage with music included playing it as background to their existing states or as a prescriber or catalyst for change to more preferred states of being.
Specific connections to music as a prescriber or interactive catalyst for more desired emotions or states of being may be found in related research on culturally relevant instruction and community music therapy approaches, which use music to promote the cultivation of a collective critical consciousness with their participants (Kim & Pulido, 2015; Smith, 2012; Stige & Aaro, 2011). However, there is little research that is specific to elements of content, form and function of music as identity statements, which this study found to be potentially valuable ground for possibly further exploring participant motivations for engaging with their peers, whether in music-making experiences or in general.

The Black Facilitator’s Role and Needs in the Participatory Action Context

Melanie described her role as project facilitator for this study as one that supported participant ideas and goals along a “track” of available options, rather than dictating their priorities or decisions. This is in keeping with the suggestion for more strengths-based approaches in working with youth from limited-resource communities (Harrison-Hale, McLoyd, & Smedley, 2004; Hart, 1992), particularly the ‘youth led, adult supported’ level of Hart’s ‘ladder’ model for youth participation which served as part of the participatory design for this study. Youth were encouraged to initiate their own ideas for their group’s musical project, with support from Melanie as the adult facilitator.

Melanie also reported that her supervision from the primary researcher, which involved frequent reflection between sessions as suggested by Brown & Strega (2005) was something that she believed added to the value of the experience and aided in her feelings of competence and success as a facilitator. Additionally, as argued by researchers
like Hogden (2005), and Kim & Pulido (2015), Melanie expressed feeling that her own identity as someone who shared a racial group with her participants was such that it added value to the experience of study participants, as well as herself. The value for these participants of having such a professional was that they seemed to find themselves more comfortable with engaging more authentically with Melanie as the facilitator—and by extension—the process itself, possibly yielding greater insights and growth for them than had the sessions been conducted by someone outside—or not proximal to—their racial group.

Melanie was careful to acknowledge the fact, however, that Blackness is not a monolith, and that even the subtle distinction between herself as an immigrant to the US, and not someone who was born and raised here, did mean that there might still be elements to her participants’ cultures and lives which she may never understand, even with their shared skin color.

**Limitations**

There were some limitations to this study that may have potentially impacted the quality of findings and ability to fully answer the research questions proposed. While the number and gender of available participants, as well as absences and scheduling problems were out of the project facilitator or researcher control, it is possible that these issues may have impacted the quality of some participants’ work, and their stress levels while working in the time available. There were multiple instances throughout the study that may have been impacted by the dynamic of a dyad versus that of a trio, or the presence of a female participant or facilitator versus all male grouping. Additionally, issues of censorship with regard to profanity may also have compromised the quantity
and quality of any self-disclosure participants may have provided, which would impact the researcher’s ability to fully answer the research questions proposed for this project.

The issue of censorship is one which has particular relevance to the field of music therapy, as a recent study (Joplin & Dvorak, 2017) reported that a number of music therapists disproportionately censor rap and hip-hop music compared to other genres. While that study did not cite the racial demographics of its participants, the racial makeup of rap and hip-hop genres is predominantly Black, so it would follow that clients who identify as Black/African-American stand a disproportionate chance of having their preferred music—and subsequent music-making choices—censored in the therapeutic relationship, which may yield further issues of trust and authenticity in that relationship.

In noting these limitations then, it is important to note that, in keeping with PAR values, every opportunity reasonably available was sought in this study to allow participants as much ownership over their projects as possible, with as minimal facilitator or researcher disruption as possible. This meant that some profanity was negotiated and accommodated with the best of the project facilitator’s ability. In doing this, it is this researcher’s belief that the present study still managed to yield rich and valuable results even with the aforementioned limitations at play, yielding valuable insights for clinicians and future researchers alike to consider.

Possible Directions for Future Research

Additional research could expand on the findings of this study and serve as contributions to the areas of both culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and community music therapy (CMT). For instance, further investigation into the specific musical forms and functions that can be utilized as representatives of identity-related statements could
prove valuable to proponents of CRP and expressive therapists alike who may be wondering how to better interpret the information their clients are giving them through their music making choices. Future research could also further explore what potential impact race and/or gender have on group dynamics in the therapeutic relationship, which would be of particular value to the field of music therapy, where research addressing such impact is scarce. Finally, future research could also expand on the potential impact that studies like this one might have on how individuals share aspects of their identities in general within the social context of their peers, or the collective consciousness of the broader communities to which they belong, over time.

Conclusion

This study explored how the social identities of Black/African American youth from limited resource communities were described and demonstrate through their music-making choices in the therapeutic relationship. Findings included that participants placed a high degree of importance on their social status as authorities on their chosen identifying groups, and consistently reinforced their verbal assertions with behavior that promoted their identifying groups as ideal, and degraded others as being lesser. Their music making choices reflected their stated beliefs as well, through the purposes they ascribed to their songs’ elements (including lyrics), and the structural decisions made in collaboration with—or isolation from—their peers.

The project facilitator, herself a Black/African-American person, described the process of facilitating these experiences as one that was strongly influenced by her cultural proximity to the participants, as well as her supervisory relationship with the primary researcher, who was also a Black/African American woman. The results for
these participants seemed to have been strengthened by several choices made by the primary researcher and project facilitator as influenced by the PAR framework, including making space for these participants to explore their identities within the realm of current technology, and flexibility regarding issues like language and normative views of behavior that may be culturally unique, towards the ultimate end of promoting the most authentic and meaningful engagements possible.
APPENDICES

Appendix A

Semi-structured and Focus Group Interview Questions

Semi-structured Interview #1 (for Project Facilitator)

1. Tell me a little about your personal background. How do you identify yourself ethnically? How do you describe yourself to other New Orleanians? To Americans in general?
2. Tell me about your musical background. What type of music do you identify with? How does this manifest in your own music making for personal enjoyment? How do you describe your musical self to colleagues where you work now? To other MT-BCs? To people in general?
3. How did you come to the field of music therapy? How did you choose the school you attended? The city you’ve chosen to live and work in?
4. How would you describe the experience of being a Black Music Therapist? Or a Black Professional in general? Are there elements of that experience that seem unique to your ethnic or musical background or other elements of your identity? If so, what are those elements? How do they manifest and impact your life?
5. When you consider the process of research, what connotations of the word have you had in the past, prior to beginning this project? What does/has the word ‘research’ mean(t) to you? What does it mean now?
6. How do you see yourself in this process? Are there any elements of being a researcher in this area that seem connected to your ethnic background or other elements of your identity? If so, what are those elements? How have they manifested and impacted your experience in this process?

Semi-structured Interview #1 (for Youth Participants)

1. Tell me a little about your personal background. How do you identify yourself (racially or otherwise)? How do you describe yourself to other people?
2. Tell me about your musical background. What type of music do you identify with? How do you use music in your day-to-day life? How do you describe your musical tastes to other people?
3. What do you think of the term ‘at risk’? What does/has the word mean(t) to you? What does it mean now?
4. How do you see yourself in this process? Do you think your musical tastes and practices are connected to your race or other parts of your identity? If so, how?

*italicized questions formed the basis of the 2nd, less structured interview/focus group.
Appendix B

Song Lyrics

Michael’s Selected Lyrics: Paramedic (by SOB x RBE)

I am Killmonger

No one's perfect
But no one's worthless
We ain't deserving of everything Heaven and Earth is
But word is, good
(This is my home)

Said, no one's perfect
But no one's worthless
We ain't deserving of everything Heaven and Earth is
But word is, good
(Northern California)

Ay, they better call a paramedic in the street
I got leverage in the street
I'm a California n**** and I'm heavy in the streets

.22 or .23, I'm heavy with the heat
Hit you with this chop, paramedics can't save you (can't save you)
Really in field c'mon boy, know that ain't you (no, it ain't you)
2018 hell nah, I ain't gon fade you, gon' paint you
TDE and SOB we can't lose
N**** b**** made
That's just something I can't relate to (can't relate to)
Turn on the gang
That's just something that I can't do (no, I can't do)
Fall out over a b****
That's just something that I can't do (no, I can't do)
Rip every beat I get on, I was made to (I was made to)
Glock get to growling, something like a black panther
Tryna touch a mil, f*** saying, "Get yo bands up"
Fucking with the gang, yeah I had to man up
One fist in the air, I ain't finna put my hands up

I wish a n*** would, I wish a n**** would, I wish a n**** would
I wish a n*** would, I wish a n**** would, I wish a n**** would
I wish a b**** would, I wish a b**** would, I wish a b**** would
I wish a n*** would, I wish a n**** would, I wish a n**** would
Sloane’s Selected Lyrics: Piggyback (by Melanie Martinez)

I was three years old
All I wanted was the music and
My parents were doing everything they could
To move away from our place working overtime always
While I sat up in my grandma's project building coloring, oh

Moved to a small town and started to, started to grow
Poetry written, I'm singing and dancing, oh
Photographs, painting, cartoons, that's all I know
That's all I know, oh

I have one best friend to this very f***ing day
Since we were five years old and I f***ing moved away
I wish I never did cause she's the only one who sees me
For who I really am instead of how many I reach, oh

Trusted too many fake people while I was still young
Gave them the benefit of the doubt, I was so wrong
I cut them off and they came for blood cause they know
They ain't getting no more

I'm so done with playing piggy back, oh
Swear to God I wished y'all all the best, oh
You're lying your way to and gain a piece of me
When you could never come close cause I know my destiny
I worked hard for my sh**
Put my love in this sh**
Now you're trying to kill my name for some fame
What is this?
Tried to help you do your sh**
Encouraged you to work on it
Was a good friend and you used that to your advantage
Devonte’s Selected Lyrics (Five Nights at Freddies):

We're waiting every night to finally roam and invite.  
Newcomers to play with us.  
For many years we've been all alone.  
We're forced to be still and play the same songs we've known since that day, An imposter took our life away  
Now we're stuck here to decay.  
Please let us get in!  
Don't lock us away!

We're not like what you're thinking.  
We're poor little souls, who have lost all control and we're forced here to take that role.  
We've been all alone stuck in our little zon since 1987.  
Join us, be our friend or just be stuck and defend, after all you only got.

Five Nights at Freddy's.  
Is this where you want to be?  
I just don't get it. Why do you want to stay?  
Five Nights at Freddy's.  
Is this where you want to be?  
I just don't get it. Why do you want to stay?  
Five Nights at Freddy's.  

We're really quite surprised, we get to see you another night. You should have looked for another job, you should have said to this place good-bye.  
It's like there's so much more. Maybe you've been in this place before.  
We remember a face like yours. You seem acquainted with those doors.  
Please let us get in!  
Don't lock us away!

We're not like what you're thinking.  
We're poor little souls, who have lost all control and we're forced here to take that role.  
We've been all alone stuck in our little zon since 1987.  
Join us, be our friend or just be stuck and defend, after all you only got.

Five Nights at Freddy's.  
Is this where you want to be?  
I just don't get it. Why do you want to stay?  
Five Nights at Freddy's.  
Is this where you want to be?  
I just don't get it. Why do you want to stay?  
Five Nights at Freddy's.
Tamir’s Full Original Freestyle Lyrics:

Yup. Eh. Yup. Eh. Eh.
I'm a boss, you can't ever stop me.
And my squad gonna let you know.
My squad name is, why am I gonna say it
because you already know about us.

We savages and all we on our plane.
We respect people but at the end of the day,
we gonna respect you, if you come up in our face
we gonna shoot you any day.

It will be the end of your life.
But when you come in the gang, it's gonna be okay
because we're gonna respect you next.
If yo squad come for us, because we gonna come for you today.

So we're all little boys, who are coming for us.
But you gonna have to find us.
When we get you don't dare.
Because you know we were recording.
We were that face though.
We were with that good man. Man.
I'm gonna come around my block.
They might not like it because I'm fresh.

But when they see me dancing, they gonna be like oo. He got a good tone voice.
All I know, he just can't dance. Oh you sure about that.
Because you a little boy.
But when I come for you, you should know, about to hit, some new moves.
But somebody already did it to me. So they should. I already know,
what's about to happen today.
Because we bout to come around your block and get you.
So get tight. So we can come, get you from a move today.
We gonna spend like a hundred bands on your girl because you the girl.
I'm gonna run my bands. You my world. You my girl.
I'm gonna come for you and never gonna come again.
That's all I got to say.

So when you see me dancing, you gonna be like oo no,
he can dance but he can't really do it. He can't do it like me,
all you haters already ugly.
So y'all can think all that if you want.
When I see you on the streets, I'm gonna shoot you.
When I come for you, it's gonna be there and yo momma gonna see you until you die.
So I'm just playing. What you talking about. 
I would never do nobody like that. 
All I'm saying, them little boys, all their daddies coming for us. 
But you should, already know, because I'm like big bill on the block.

You should already know because my dude be making mill like a king. 
That's my dude. NBA Young Boy. 
I don't really know if y'all cool so I'm tripping. 
But they hit some little dance moves today.

I'm a boss you can't never stop me. 
And my squad is gonna let you know. 
My squad name I ain't gonna say it, because you already know.

When they all come. Shake us. They gonna run up in your blood.
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