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The research mentor-mentee relationship is often one of complication and struggle along with celebration and invigoration. Working together on a common project with mutually beneficial goals can bring many benefits and pitfalls to both the mentor and mentee. In particular, when there are marked differences between the mentor and mentee, such as social and historical position, students may feel especially vulnerable, have difficulty developing trust, thus adding to the challenges presented in the mentoring process. The majority of mentors in higher education are non-minorities; and traditional models of mentoring fail to recognize the tensions faced by marginalized students in higher education (Hinsdale, 2015).

This is the story of a mentoring relationship that took place as a part of a unique study on the impact of Hip-Hop as a therapeutic intervention for African-American youth. Although the mentoring relationship described here was a very positive one of mutual respect, it was still fraught with challenges and opportunities for insight and growth for both mentee and mentor. Because the research topic in this mentoring relationship was tied closely to racial and gender differences, the differences between mentor and mentee were often highlighted and impossible to ignore.

The story begins in a Human Service Studies Senior Seminar course on Alternative Therapies. Students in the course were assigned a research proposal on a therapeutic intervention alternative to traditional talk therapy. In class the group discussed art therapy, music therapy, horticulture therapy, pet and animal assisted therapy, wilderness therapy, and many more. During class discussions students were encouraged to pursue their own interests within the umbrella topic of alternative therapies. One student in particular, Miles, suggested Hip-Hop therapy as an idea, almost in jest. When I, as his professor, encouraged him to go and look into Hip-Hop as an alternative therapy, neither of us had any idea where it would take us. What followed was an exciting yet difficult, challenging yet inspirational, path of discovery for both the mentee and mentor. This article discusses the process of this mentoring relationship, from alternating perspectives of the mentor and mentee, throughout the development of an innovative children's program and the researchers' efforts to understand the program's impact on the children served by it.

### Mentee: Navigating Research with a Double Consciousness
As a young African-American male at a predominantly white institution, it is not uncommon to feel out of place, uncomfortable, or misunderstood. Most of my experience growing up Black[1] has been

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[1] Throughout the article I have capitalized the word Black because I believe that when we refer to a group of people (Chinese, Jewish, British, Spanish etc.) the first letter is capitalized to honor the group's history, tradition, and culture. In most writing, the word 'black' is

characterized by those three things, constantly fighting to be appreciated for being all of who I am. Being valued and respected for the part of me that enjoys reading outside of school and listening to Kenny Chesney, just as much as the part of me that loves any and everything about Black empowerment and Hip-Hop culture. Before beginning my research with Dr. Esposito (who I refer to as Dr. J), I rarely got an opportunity to voice my frustrations and discomfort of navigating through life as a high-achieving African-American male. Our work together gave me a platform to be heard in an authentic and powerful way, much like the Hip-Hop music that our research participants annotated, danced to, and composed.

Coming from a historically marginalized group, so frequently it feels like my experience is overlooked and devalued. Whether it is being the only Black student in the classroom or being the token Black friend, it is rare that people from the majority can empathize with my experience. Growing up, I remember wishing that my peers could trade places with me just so they could see how I felt. In this project that focused so heavily on race, Dr. Esposito was in this position throughout the study, which I am sure was an interesting experience from her perspective. During the study I felt at home and far more comfortable than I had in many classrooms, growing up or as an undergraduate. Often, though, I thought about how uncomfortable it must be for Dr. J to be in a predominantly Black environment, listening to music that she was not as familiar with and navigating that space as a white woman. At times, I remember subtly checking in to make sure she was comfortable; however, in the back of my mind, I also felt there were so many times nobody ever thought about doing that for me. If Dr. Esposito was not as conscious of her privilege and her role in the space, I probably would not have cared about her comfort; yet, because she was able to address areas of discomfort and participate in tough conversations about race, I was more empathetic.
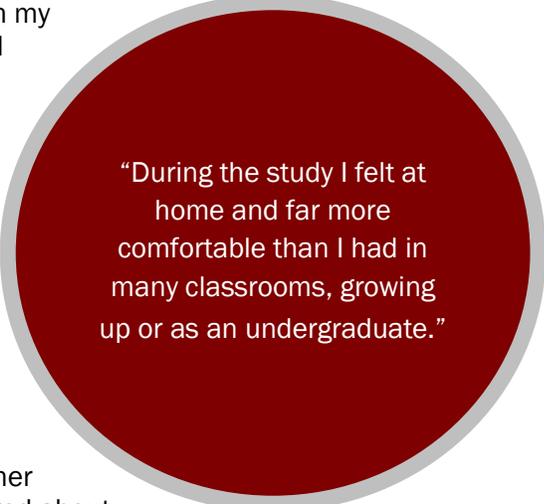
"During the study I felt at home and far more comfortable than I had in many classrooms, growing up or as an undergraduate."

Our Study

Our project grew out of Dr. J's senior seminar course for the Human Service studies major. The students were required to research an alternative form of therapy for the semester and find a special population that could benefit from that therapy. Before I knew what therapy I wanted to focus on, I knew what my population was going to be: Black males. As a group, it is documented that African-American males are underachieving in the classroom due to a plethora of simple and complex social, psychological, economic, political, and educational issues that make up the fabric of America's power structure (Ford and Moore, 2013; Jenkins, 2006). As a Black male I can identify with the challenges that many young Black men around the country face—which I thought would be an important emphasis for my project.

After many tedious hours of searching through our school's library and journal database, I did not find any topics that interested me. I met with Dr. J to get any type of guidance that she was willing to offer, and she encouraged me to look into something I was passionate about. At the culmination of our meeting we decided that I would search the literature to see if there was anything about Hip-Hop therapy. It turned out that it existed, and there was a significant amount of literature about how Hip-Hop has or could be used in the classroom, especially for at-risk African-American males. This intrigued me because I knew how impactful Hip-Hop had been in my growth and development; I wanted to see how it impacted the development of others. I ultimately ended up focusing my project

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written with a lowercase 'b', which to me, robs a group of people of the reverence they deserve. Also, 'black' simply represents a color and not the people of the African diaspora who have much more to them than the melanin in their skin.

on the influence Hip-Hop therapy could have on the self-efficacy and cultural identity of high-achieving elementary aged Black males. Dr. Esposito's excitement about the topic fueled my excitement. She emphasized how important it is to do research that one is passionate about and can identify with on a personal level. I achieved that with my topic choice.

Once my senior seminar presentation was over, Dr. Esposito encouraged me to apply for our university's Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE)—a highly competitive undergraduate research opportunity that pairs students with a faculty mentor in their discipline to conduct research in their areas of interest. Students receive a stipend for their participation, along with funds to support their project of choice. I felt encouraged by receiving so much support from the university, especially with my topic being about a socially conscious and culturally sensitive method of helping Black males. More than anything, the investment in me shown by Dr. Esposito motivated me to stick through this tough but worthwhile project. Dr. J saw potential in our project from the second I solidified my topic. Similar to how good parents see far more in their child than they see in themselves, Dr. Esposito challenged me because she knew I could achieve more than I thought possible. For me this process was frustrating, like all growth is. I expected my project to work just as planned; But, just like life, it did not happen that way at all. Our instrument was too complex for our population, our participants could not identify with my previous perceptions of cultural identity since their socioeconomic status kept them in an all-Black environment, and the qualitative data that we had hoped to receive was nowhere close to what we expected.

Mentor: Who's the Expert Here?
One particular aspect of this research that posed challenges for me, the mentor, was that the subject was something about which I had very little knowledge and expertise. While I am a music lover, and my kids love to listen to Hip-Hop, I was not versed in the contemporary Hip-Hop artists or the old school pioneers of Hip-Hop the way my student was. Although I have a musical background and some training related to music therapy, I had no real expertise in Hip-Hop as a genre, or research experience with African-American youth in particular. Because of my lack of training in the research topic area, I found myself frequently taking second chair to my mentee. Our roles were more typical while reviewing the literature and designing the research methods. However, once we found our participants at the local housing authority and the program began, I was often unsure how to proceed.

This was different for me. Most of the research I have mentored has some link to play therapy, or some other area I'm trained in and have a network associated with. This topic was different. I am a Caucasian-American woman, mentoring an African-American male, working with primarily African-American children, focusing on Hip-Hop. I stood out like a sore thumb. The differences between us were too obvious to ignore, especially in a study that highlights the participants' African-American identities. I tried not to let this bother me, telling myself that there is no reason why me, a white female, shouldn't be able to mentor my student effectively in his study of Hip-Hop with African-American youth. Still, the roadblocks emerged. Miles was working with two groups of youth: One co-ed group grades 3-5 and one male group grades 6-8. The second group was called "Training for Manhood," and the program coordinator was delighted to have my mentee coming in to work with the children in this group. When we met to discuss the program specifics, he very politely said to me, "We like you, but you are not invited to this group." Because this was an all-male group experience, I was not allowed to attend.

"Okay," I told myself, "I can roll with it." So Miles and I decided to move ahead, working together to plan the lessons and activities for both groups, with the understanding that I would just attend the co-ed group sessions. These sessions consisted of a variety of Hip-Hop related and inspired activities, including graffiti murals, dance moves and dance contests, creative writing, musical

chairs, and both written and freestyle rap battles. I loved it---especially the dance moves----I felt like I mastered the *Whip and Nae Nae* by the end of the program, much to my own kids' horror. The children at the housing authority accepted me without hesitation and we laughed and played happily. Still, I couldn't help but be hyperaware of my "whiteness" in this setting, and I hated that. Why couldn't I just relax and enjoy being there? Why did my race have to be a factor at all? I couldn't put my finger on it, but something about the experience kept nagging at me, as if I didn't have the right to be there. And, I think my self-consciousness about this made me even more awkward, and therefore impeded my ability to fully connect with the children at the housing authority.

Meanwhile, Miles shone like a shooting star. The kids loved him, he had incredible control of the classroom, the students did whatever he asked, and he made them smile, laugh, dance and sing with each visit. The teachers loved him as well. They called him "Mr. Hip-Hop." I was not going to make this about me. This was Miles' study. This was his legacy. So I forged on and didn't mention anything to him about how I sometimes felt uncomfortable at the housing authority.

After six weeks, the program came to an end and Miles wrapped up the activities by giving each child a CD with carefully selected Hip-Hop music and an artfully designed album cover. He also gave each student a journal to continue writing their creative Hip-Hop lyrics and expressing themselves in positive ways. We were both excited about the work he had done, and eager to see what the students gained from participation in the program. We used an open-ended cultural identity scale to assess their gains.

Upon reviewing the data from the Cultural Identity Scale, we realized we had very little data that we could use. We had hoped that the open-ended questions of the scale would give the children the opportunity to write openly about their experiences of being African-American and how Hip-Hop impacted their self-perceptions. Instead, many of the children's responses were unclear and ambiguous, and some were even illegible. Few actually addressed the idea of cultural identity. What we were asking them was too abstract for where they were developmentally. After all the hard work and dedication, the responses from the children were hardly usable. We were left with no material from the children that actually assessed the effectiveness of Miles' program. This was disappointing for both of us, but it was a major setback for Miles. He was crushed.

Mentee: Growing Pains

The challenges we faced were very discouraging for me but Dr. J allowed for me to go through those frustrations and voice them to her. In retrospect, it was like teaching a kid to ride a bike. Early in the process, Dr. J was the protective parent that I could feel there as I began to pedal. I knew if I needed anything, she was right behind me. As the research picked up and I felt more comfortable, she drifted away. I fell a couple of times and it felt like I was alone. All I wanted was for her to run, pick me and the bike up and tell me it was going to be okay, but she did not. Dr. J was observing and seeing if I would get back on the bike on my own. When it looked like I wanted to throw the bike down and step away from it, she was always there to help me and remind me how important it was for me to ride that bike as far as it could take me because there was so much power and freedom in it.

In this process, I learned about the power of having a mentor who believed in me and my work. This process was not about generating results; it was about making an impact. Being my toughest critic, I struggled to see the impact that our project made until we met with the teachers of the summer enrichment program at the culmination of our study. The reactions from the teachers confirmed that our work was meaningful and had purpose. The teachers spoke to how it allowed individual campers to develop a greater interest in writing and self-expression. For other campers, it gave them an activity they could participate in even when they were reluctant to participate in other activities

throughout the week. They confirmed that all of our hard work was not in vain and, though we did not get the results we hoped for, that we were able to touch the lives of children who needed and deserved the love and attention we were able to provide. That is something that I will always cherish.

Mentor: Watching my Mentee Struggle

Crutcher (2007) emphasizes the need for mentees to find their own way and noted the unique dynamics inherent in mentoring relationships. The dynamics are different from that of a peer relationship, which is horizontal, and of a parent-child relationship where the child totally relies on the parent for resources. Balance is important. Letting Miles make his own mistakes, and not rushing in to save things for him was really difficult for me. Miles is such a nice person and he worked so hard putting the Hip-Hop program together. When we didn't get the results we wanted from the children, Miles' disappointment was almost too much for me to bear.

Realizing my own inner conflict, I found myself seeking out some mentoring for the mentor, or perhaps my own pseudo-clinical supervision. I told a trusted colleague about our research setback, as well as Miles' disappointment, and asked for ideas. She encouraged me to talk with Miles' more about our mentoring relationship and process. She also suggested that we both write about our own experiences in the mentoring process. It was from this writing and in open discussions with Miles that some valuable lessons materialized.

"It is from our struggles that we learn the most and emerge with a greater sense of accomplishment."

In the counseling profession we have a term called parallel process, which often takes place in counselor/client relationships. This process has its origin from psychoanalytic concept of transference, when a client transfers emotions from his or her personal life onto the therapist (McNeill & Worthen, 1989). An example would be a client responding to the therapist as if she is his mother and therefore reacting with strong emotions to something the therapist says. In clinical supervision, parallel process is noted when the counselor is experiencing the same kinds of emotions or conflicts that the client is. Or, as I have experienced many times, the supervisor experiences similar challenges to those of her supervisee. This was the case in my work with Miles. As I processed our mentoring relationship, I realized there were many experiences of parallel process throughout our work together. Miles' had such high hopes for the children he was working with at the housing authority. He wanted them to achieve success and express themselves positively and creatively through Hip-Hop. Meanwhile, I desperately wanted Miles to be successful in his work with the children and in his research experience. When Miles saw that the children were composing rap lyrics about cars, women, and money----the opposite of what he wanted the children to get from his program-----he quickly adapted his lesson plans to include respect for women and being a good citizen. Likewise when I saw that our research was not revealing the results we had hoped for, I quickly responded by amending our IRB application so we could use other data sources that would show us the true impact of Miles' work. Just as Miles knew Hip-Hop had a lot of positive influences to offer the children, I knew that evidence of the true impact of Miles' program was there. Together we decided that the teachers at the housing authority might have some valuable observations related to the Hip-Hop program.

As mental health professionals we are cautioned not to work harder than our clients are----a common indicator of parallel process. I had to remind myself of this with Miles as I rushed to try and rescue our study. In my mind this was a minor setback, but when I saw how upsetting it was for Miles, I wanted to fix it quickly so Miles could get the results he had hoped for. I wanted to keep him from struggling. This was counterintuitive for a counselor and educator who knows that struggle is
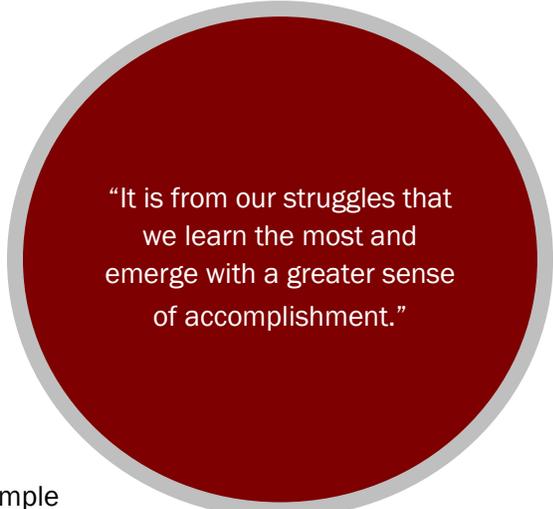
important. It is from our struggles that we learn the most and emerge with a greater sense of accomplishment. In this situation it was important that I not deny Miles the importance of learning from this experience through struggling and figuring it out for himself. As we moved forward to our focus group interview with the housing authority teachers, I found myself walking a thin line between letting Miles take the lead with the interview process (amending the IRB application, preparing the interview questions, setting up the meeting, bringing refreshments, and leading the discussion), and doing it for him. Even with my awareness, I probably did more than I should have to prepare for the interviews.

Another example of parallel process emerged during the focus group, when the teachers gave glowing reports of Miles' program and listed several benefits that we had not anticipated. Miles was relieved and thrilled to find that his program had helped the children by breaking down racial barriers, inspiring creativity and providing alternative methods of self-expression. Like a proud parent, I, too, was relieved and thrilled as I heard these comments. I think I even let out an audible sigh of relief as they listed the personal, social, and educational benefits they had observed related to Miles' work. "Whew! He *was* successful. He *did* achieve what he set out to. It *wasn't* a waste of time and effort. Whew indeed!" This response revealed to me just how happy I was to avoid an experience in which Miles' had to face failure. His struggle was over. We had been validated; and now I could feel good about the overall experience.

But, why could I not feel good about the experience even if things had not turned out so well? I know as a researcher, that success in research can come in many forms, whether or not one gets the desired results. Why couldn't I be pleased knowing that Miles' had learned a lot from his experience, rather than feeling the need for him to feel successful? Once again, writing, talking this through with my colleague, and processing with Miles, helped me make clearer sense of the process. I had to admit to myself that the differences between Miles and myself might have something to do with why his success was so important to me.

I also felt the potential magnitude of this project. Miles' program had the capability to change lives, to broaden perspectives and to impact the children's sense of self. This was HUGE.

Still, I had to ask myself: Would I be so emotionally invested if the same kind of research setback had happened with a white female student (the demographic of the majority of my student mentees)? Would I struggle with the same temptation to do more work than my mentee if Miles had been a white female? The truth is, I've had lots of student mentees for whom the research did not turn out as we had hoped. And, while I have been invested in all of my student mentees' projects, I don't remember being impacted quite so personally and profoundly as I have in my work with Miles. Both his topic, and his background appeared to have had an impact on my responses to him and his work.

Hinsdale (2015) describes marginalized students as:
> ...frequently made to feel that they are outsiders who are "guests in someone else's house": their bodies and their ideas are not welcome in the academy. When they share their experiences with me through written or verbal testimony, they call me to bear witness to their pain. The ethical pedagogical response must acknowledge our relational wounds and seek to mend them. (Hinsdale, 2015 p.82).

One could argue that parallel process emerged as I found myself feeling like the outsider during our work with the children at the housing authority. I felt like I didn't deserve to be there. Still, as the above quote from Hinsdale's (2015) book on mutuality in mentoring suggests, Miles had dealt with this feeling for most, if not all, of his academic career. The fact that Miles was concerned at all about

my feelings is a further testament to what a caring person he is. My experience during six weeks of a summer term was nothing compared to what he had endured in his lifetime. I only hope that he felt supported by others the way he supported me as he worked through these feelings.

Mentee: The Power of a Voice

This experience gave me a platform. It allowed me to freely voice my opinions about the challenges of being a young Black man in a predominantly white environment and navigating that space. As we shared our work, we were able to educate and open the eyes of my peers and professors who may have never thought about what that experience may be like for students of color. This project allowed me and my friends to have an open dialogue about our experiences growing up and how so many of us have shared similar thoughts and feelings about our identity. Additionally, through grant money and donations, this project yielded over 250 books to start a youth library at the local subsidized housing community. The library focuses on Hip-Hop and other literature that was an integral part of my development as an African-American man.

Mentor and Mentee: Reflecting and Moving Forward

Because the research topic in this mentoring relationship was tied closely to racial and gender differences, the differences between mentor and mentee were often highlighted and impossible to ignore. The nature of Hip-Hop and its culture served as a bridge between differences, opening up a safe and comfortable environment for dialogue. Additionally, the quality of our mentor-mentee relationship enhanced our communication. The fact that we felt comfortable enough with each other to have these difficult conversations was an enormous asset to our mentoring relationship. Furthermore, the unwavering support, both spoken and unspoken, for each other throughout this process made these potentially difficult topics much more approachable. We were not strangers working on a research project. We took the time to get to know each other. We met each other's families. At each meeting we began by checking in with each other about the latest news in our personal lives. We talked about music (especially Hip-Hop, of course), books and films, asked about each other's vacations and compared workout routines. It was clear that our mentor-mentee relationship was becoming more collegial and leveling itself out from the traditional and more hierarchical professor-student relationship. It was also evident that we valued each other's strengths. Each of us figured out when to lead and when to get out of the way. There was clear mutual respect for each other as researchers, as people from different backgrounds and at different developmental stages, and, most importantly, as human beings.

Although this kind of relationship between mentor and mentee may not always be possible, it was evident that our relationship made for a smoother shift from safe topics to less comfortable ones. It facilitated our process. In fact, this process has continued and deepened through the writing of this piece. The writing process provided allowed for more thoughtful reflection and produced tremendous insights for both of us.

Conclusion

As a mentor, I (Judy) will rely on this experience to inform my work with future students---especially students who are culturally different from me. I learned that having the difficult conversations is worth the discomfort and brings so much more depth and richness to the mentoring relationship and experience.

For me (Miles), this work has major implications personally, but can also serve other cross-cultural mentee-mentor relationships. One of the most important elements that played into our relationship working as well as it did was the fact that Dr. J and I were fully aware of the elephant in the room. Neither of us wanted it to be in our room. It was integral that we acknowledged the historic inequity of our social positions head on and not shy away from it at all. In my opinion, ignoring that aspect of

our identities, especially in the context we were working, would only hinder our progress. Even if the children we worked with did not identify with their cultural identities the way we had hoped, we identified more with *our* cultural identities as a result of this work. Additionally, Dr. J's willingness to learn, listen and adapt to my experiences as a Black man made this experience a truly special and unique one for me.

As I am learning how to navigate the world in this Black body, I cannot emphasize how important this work has been in my academic and personal development. In processing how I will use this experience going forward, I realize working alongside white colleagues to advocate for Black males will be a critical component of my life's work. Though I will not always have Hip-Hop as a crutch, or a friend and mentor as understanding as Dr. J, this process of having a goal in mind and refusing for race to be a hindrance to my progress is going to be applicable in many settings in the future. My desire is to affect the greatest amount of Black students possible. Whether through policy or creating a school myself, at some point I will need the help of someone whose background and life experience is much different than mine. This research gave me a great opportunity to cultivate and practice tangible skills in communication and advocating for children who I believe deserve all of the love and care we can give. I strongly urge mentors and mentees, especially those with different cultural backgrounds, to take the time during and after working together to write about their experience. Without writing about the process and our feelings about the process, we would have missed out on a great opportunity to grow and learn from one another.

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