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Hip hop's impact on the development of the sense of self and identity

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A mixed qualitative research design was utilized to retroactively examine hip hop's impact on the development of hip hop listeners' sense of self and identity throughout adolescence and the present-day. The literature suggests hip-hop can be effective in regulating mood, empowering its listeners, and increasing treatment outcomes in mental health settings. A gap in the literature exists, however, in identifying, in-depth various contributing factors to individuals identifying with hip-hop, factors which sustain interest in hip-hop, and the developmental impact it has on their lives. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect participant data and facilitate the co-evaluation of participant results by hip-hop artists. Twelve adult male hip-hop listeners and three hip-hop artists were interviewed. Three categories with 22 total themes were yielded from the interviews: (1) Social Contribution to Hip Hop Listening, (2) General Contributions to Personal Identity Development, and (3) Cathartic Utilization of Hip Hop. In a modified application of the Delphi method, hip-hop artists further validated the results. Results were consistent with Eriksonian (1950, 1968) stages of adolescent development. These findings also support the notion that hip-hop plays a significant role in listeners identifying with others outside of their primary system who have similarly forming identities and contributing in various ways to the crystallization of their personal identity. It was abundantly clear that hip-hop provided both social and personal benefits to participants. Socially, for example, participants reported a sense of belonging and acceptance within hip-hop. Individually, hip-hop played an important role in personal identity development (e.g., self-empowerment). By suggesting that hip-hop possesses various developmental benefits which help listeners figure out who they are and their place in the world, implications of this study include developing more culturally-sensitive treatments and improving hip hop's incorporation in mental health.

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