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A Qualitative Study of Group Therapy Incorporating Rap Music with Inmates

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**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF GROUP THERAPY INCORPORATING
RAP MUSIC WITH INMATES**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements of the Degree
Master of Science, Counseling

By

Abigail V. Richards

December 2017

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF GROUP THERAPY INCORPORATING RAP MUSIC WITH INMATES

Education

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Abigail V. Richards

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of inmates who participate in group psychotherapy incorporating elements of rap music. Rap music includes elements such as emotional expression, songwriting, community building, freestyling, and beat, which can be beneficial for individuals experiencing typical symptoms of incarceration such as anxiety, self-discovery, and difficulties regulating emotion. Ten inmates of a Missouri county justice center (50% male) were recruited on a volunteer basis to participate in a five-week psychotherapy group. The study involves psychoeducation, group-drumming, self-expression, and improvisation. Qualitative data were collected through an interview process with participants, including inmates, facilitators and supervisors. Results were analyzed to find evidence of three main themes among the participants: 1) Affirmation and reflection of identity, including sub-themes of freedom of expression, sense of identity and humanness, and use of beat and rhythm in self-identity; 2) connection to others and building relationships which included sub-themes of sense of connection to others, use of beat and rhythm in communication, and use of writing in communication; and 3) Escape from the present, including sub-themes of mental relief, safe place, and new methods of coping.

KEYWORDS: therapy, rap, inmates, group, improvisation, drumming

This abstract is approved as to form and content

Jeffrey H. D. Cornelius-White, PsyD, LPC
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to Benjamin Jordan for enlightening me to the profound power of freestyle, and for reminding me to stay inspired, even in the simplest of moments.

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INTRODUCTION

Music and Language

Music and language are processed through many of the same mechanisms in the brain, however they each host very unique abilities when it comes to individual expression (Patel, 2015). As children, we are taught that the majority of emotional understanding is to be compartmentalized into overgeneralized words such as “anger” or “sadness.” As adults, we can increase our emotional dimension using words such as irritated or frustrated, and melancholy or gloomy. However, in reality the body’s vast experience of emotions cannot fit within a single label. There are a variety of emotions that span across multiple categories such as the feeling of “bitter-sweet,” which is used to encompass a feeling of both happiness and sadness within the same moment. In fact, every language has its own span of emotional words that encompass unique social constructs (Russell, 1991). For example, according to Holten (2011), the Dutch word, “Gezellig” depicts the comfort and coziness of being at home with friends, loved ones, or general togetherness, whereas in English, we must use many words to gather the idea of this single Dutch word. Even when combining all of the languages found in our vast world, there are still times when language fails and we must rely on the simple experience of “being with” in order to connect and communicate our subjective experiences to those around us. It is these experiences of unnamed emotions that musicians have been able to harness in order to help span the gap between language and the experience of emotions. Many artists who use rhythmic language such as rap and poetry utilize both musical beats *and* linguistics to help portray a richer emotional

experience than storytelling, or instruments alone. These compositions can tap into the intrinsic musical connections of beat and rhythm, while still using the more familiar and concrete language to describe and label internal feelings. The creation of rap music can bring together the most natural aspects of both our limbic system and physical experience of emotions, and the cognitive interpretations of these emotions, to create an emotionally rich expression that can be a very effective part of therapeutic interventions (Alvarez, 2012; Chen, Penhune, & Zatorre, 2008; Patel, 2015; Salimpoor, et. al., 2009; Tierney & Kraus, 2014).

Music as Emotional Expression

Emotions can be confusing experiences before one finds the labels that best fit the bodily sensations that accompany them. Van Der Kolk (2014) wrote, “all feelings of emotion are complex musical variations of primordial feelings” (p. 95). Much like complex classical pieces of music, emotions can be mixed and exaggerated as we grow through new experiences and face situations in different contexts. Intricate classical compositions host a number of instruments in varying timing and intensities, just as emotions can be felt in varying times and intensities. We may have felt the same “sadness” at separate times in our lives, yet by adding even one extra instrument (or one extra emotion) into a familiar song (or situation) our overall experience is changed. In this sense, music can help us to explore the emotions that don’t quite fit within linguistic constraints. By utilizing our innate connection with music, we can access and attune to emotions that go far beyond our linguistic abilities, we can combine sounds and rhythms and patterns to elicit an emotional experience that potentially aligns more closely with

our internal ebb and flow of feelings. Patel (2015) examines the similarities between the rising and falling tension of music, and of our emotions, “[music] unfolds in time, giving music a kind of emotional narrative that can reflect the way our own emotions unfold over the course of a day, although music can make this happen over just a few minutes” (p. 35). This can be utilized further within therapy to help clients to explore a wider variety of emotions within a single session or single group, and ideally be able to better relate to one another’s individual emotional experience.

History of Rap Music

What we know as rap music today has its roots in jazz, R&B, soul, improvisational blues, and the first hip-hop scenes of the 1980s in the Bronx (Hara, 2012). Some say that modern rap perhaps originated from tribal chants of West African griots, or storytellers, who often used repetitive beats and rhythmic talking to better remember important events predating written language (Ierardi & Jenkins, 2012). Rap also has potential roots in the West African Yourba culture, where it used by women as a way of voicing gossip or abuse, “it was used when two women argued and they needed to vent to each other in public” (Hara, 2012. p.7). Hara also highlights how Miss Mary Mack, an African American song often sung by enslaved children, utilized hand and body percussion combined with chanting and singing (2012). These features can be mirrored with modern day rap’s beatboxing, rhythmic verses, and rhyming.

Blues music emerged in America through the combination of African cappella music brought by enslaved Africans, and the European folk music they heard from slave owners (Touré, 2016). The music was a way of expressing the struggles experienced by

enslaved, “players sang about oppression and marginalization, giving black people a space to deal with their pain. This was a core part of what the blues did for its listeners, too-it was meant to heal” (Touré , 2016. p.83). Music was used as a therapeutic medium in which to express the difficulties of their lives, and as a way to communicate to those in their community. Touré quotes a blues musician, “as the bluesman has experienced certain things, he must be able to display that to the next individual. And that individual should be able to feel what the bluesman is throwing back at him” (Touré, 2016. p.81). Musicians were sharing and receiving the lives of others as an attempt of validation amongst oppressive circumstances, and in our modern culture.

As rap music has slowly grown to find its place in American pop culture, in a more personal sense, this music has found a home in the therapeutic setting. The roots of rap have been attributed to life in impoverished areas, where artists emerged from a time of thick oppression and need for social outcry. As it gained popularity, artists such as Tupac and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five used the platform of Hip-Hop music to speak out about social injustices and the oppression of African Americans (Tyson et. al., 2012). rap and hip-hop, and music in general, has been a widely utilized form of self-expression and emotional release that spans a wide variety of struggles, emotions, and accomplishments. What makes rap and hip hop music particularly useful within therapy is that not only does it already host a therapeutic and culturally rich history, it appears to be a much more socially accepted form of emotional expression, particularly among males who are often taught to suppress feelings and provide stability for the family.

Historically, rap music has been criticized for promoting drugs and violence, however when considering the social oppression, educational inequality, and other unjust

circumstances through which rap has evolved, we must acknowledge that this is oftentimes what fuels the cathartic experience of performing rap (Scott, 2002). Just as with Griots and blues, rap music has helped individuals to connect with their community, and be heard and in ways that can strengthen and empower each other (Hadley & Yancy, 2012). In certain communities, individuals can stay away from violence by expending hostile energy into dance-offs or “rap battles,” which allow individuals the opportunity to release anger or aggression in a channeled, nonviolent manner. These battles feature improvised insults that keep to a beat and oftentimes rhyme, forcing the individuals on stage to be quick-witted, as they are often rewarded by creativity and self-control rather than drugs and violence. Hara (2012) postulated that practices such as this may have emerged from disabled slaves entitled “*the Dozens*” who took turns “insulting and disparaging each other, using clever put-downs to describe their adversary” (p. 8). Although these battles were certainly not respectful by any means, it is this general structure and dynamic that can be potentially harnessed and used within therapeutic setting to help facilitate a therapeutic experience. Individuals must take turns speaking, enhancing restraint and self-monitoring. And the attacks must be strictly verbal enhancing ability to communicate, and maintain physical control. The rich history of African music being used to express and to heal highlights the potential utility within modern day therapy.

Statement of the Problem

Music and group psychotherapy are two means that have helped humans explore, express, and connect through emotion (Maschi & Bradley, 2010; Patel, 2015; Schwarcz,

2016). By utilizing the power of both music and language together, we can help define, discover, and communicate our individual emotional experience to those around us (Hakvoort, 2015; Ierardi & Jenkins, 2012). This method can particularly appeal to incarcerated individuals who oftentimes have very little opportunity for self-exploration, and where verbal self-disclosure can be detrimental (Chen, Leith, Aarno, Manger, & Gold, 2014). Rap music provides a socially acceptable way for inmates to express themselves, while simultaneously featuring a more intrinsic connection of mind and body through steady beats and musical flexibility (Hookavoort, 2015). These features within the safe environment of a therapeutic group can potentially provide inmates with the tools and experiences they may need to cope within this environment without falling into the social pressures of continued criminality.

Purpose Statement

This study is intended to provide exploratory information for the utilization of elements of rap music in therapeutic endeavors.

Research Questions

1. How is a therapeutic group incorporating elements of rap music perceived by a group of incarcerated adults and its facilitators?
2. What elements do participants and facilitators identify as noteworthy to the experience of the group?

Definitions of Key Terms

Rap: According to Dunbar, Kubrin and Scurich, “Rap music is rhymed storytelling that represents the political and social experiences common to inner-city communities throughout the United States” (2016, p. 280).

Hip Hop: “a specific cultural group or youth arts movement...originally created by young, urban, African Americans” (Elligan, 2012 p. 41).

Therapeutic Drumming: “A method of utilizing the natural power of rhythm and sound and applying it to an individual or group for the purpose of healing” (Schwarcz, 2016, p. 1).

Freestyling: “Improvising or freestyling in rap and hip hop involves extemporaneously creating rhythmically complex lyrics, beats, or dance moves” (Hadley & Yancy, 2012, p.xxxv).

Significance of the Study

Rap music has slowly been implemented into the therapeutic scene through interventions with youth and incarcerated youth (Hadley & Yancy, 2012). However, there is much power within this realm that has yet to be discovered. This study aims to open the door into utilizing the elements of rap music within adult psychotherapy groups, and inspire future studies in developing yet another tool for therapists of all kinds.

Delimitations

This group is a closed group, meaning new members were not be added once the group has started the first session. Especially in an environment where both mental and physical restrictions are very prevalent, it can be very difficult for inmates to find a safe place for their emotions and personal growth. This group in particular is different than other therapy groups that have been offered in this county previously, and therefore may host an extra layer of hesitancy related to partaking in drumming and music rather than simple words. By providing the structure and expectations of a closed group, inmates can better grasp what to expect and better trust their fellow group members allowing them to take risks related to their vulnerabilities and growth.

A main intervention of this study is through drumming and beat-making, however there were no external instruments brought into this group. Not only are there restrictions within the facility, this has also been a deliberate choice in order to highlight the intrinsic connection between one's internal feelings and the external environment. As discussed in the review of literature section, humans have a natural attunement to rhythm and beat (Nozaradan Perretz, Missal & Mouraux, 2011; Grahn & Rowe, 2009; Chen, Penhune & Zatorre, 2008). Studies have also shown that by bettering one's ability to stay on beat through physical movement, one can improve in areas such as attention, planning, and many other areas (Tierny & Kraus, 2014; McGrew, 2013). Perhaps by utilizing one's own body to create this beat, group members will strengthen the mind-body connection, as well as highlight the ability to use nothing but their physical self to work through past experiences and present emotions, especially with such the limited resources and activities available during incarceration to release and channel emotions.

This study has also been designed to host one female group, and one male group. This is in efforts to discover the effects of this type of intervention related to female and male differences. Males are often taught in society to only express certain emotions, however it has been much more acceptable for men to express themselves through music, particularly rap. Thus, non-verbal interventions as well as musical and rap-related interventions can potentially provide males with an opportunity to explore their emotions in a socially acceptable manner, despite the added pressures of the social environment within a detention facility. As females are often more in tune with their emotions due to elevated social pressures, musical interventions are utilized in hopes of exploring deeper emotions and new ways to express inner feelings.

Due to restrictions within the facility, the data will be based on summarization and recollection of responses to interviews as well as within the reflective journal. The lack of audio and video recording will not allow for direct transcription.

Summary

Emotions are often difficult to describe within the confines of one, or even two languages, however, we can access a much more flexible representation of our emotions through music (Holten, 2011; Patel, 2015). Language can help us communicate our inner experience with others, while music can help express our emotions by using particular sounds or pitches to reflect the natural tension and release of our moods and feelings (Patel, 2015). Genres such as rap host elements that reflect the most basic musical rhythm of our physical bodies, and the verbal interpretations of visceral emotions, to create an emotionally rich expression. (Alvarez, 2012; Chen, Penhune, & Zatorre, 2008; Patel, 2015; Salimpoor, et. al., 2009; Tierney & Kraus, 2014). This can be utilized within therapy to help clients to explore a wider variety of emotions within a single session or single group, and ideally be able to better relate to one another's individual emotional experience.

Rap music has rich roots that has helped people remember historical events, express social and personal struggles in ways that could not have been as powerful through simple speech (Hara, 2012; Irardi & Jenkins, 2012; Touré, 2016). Therapeutically, rap can provide a socially acceptable way for individuals to express themselves, while simultaneously featuring a more intrinsic connection of mind and body through steady beats and musical flexibility (Hookavoort, 2015). By utilizing the power

of both music and language together, we can create a therapeutic environment that can provide individuals with a new way to explore themselves and their internal emotions.

This study aims to harness the power of both language and music through elements of rap music to create a therapeutic group that can help individuals explore their internal experience as well as better communicate with others around them. This study featured a closed group in order to ensure the most therapeutic environment for vulnerability and self-discovery. This group also featured the human body as the instrument in order to better connect mind and body, and to bring light to inner resources. There were two groups conducted, one female and one male in order to explore differences in interest or participation in the intervention.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Music Therapy

Music and its powers are not new to the therapeutic setting, as it has even emerged as its own branch within psychotherapy, including many types of interventions, and many focuses regarding clientele.

Chang and colleagues (2015) performed a meta-analysis of music therapy, particularly on patients with dementia and found that it has significant effects in reducing anxiety ($n = 5$, $ES = -.51$), depressive moods ($n=5$, $ES = -.39$), and a less than significant effect on improving cognitive functioning ($n=5$, $ES = .19$). The authors analyzed fifteen studies that measured the effects of music therapy on disruptive behaviors, anxiety, depressive moods, and cognitive functioning.

In another meta-analysis by Silverman (2003), it was found that musical interventions can decrease symptoms of psychosis ($n=19$, $ES = .71$, $p = .00$). Silverman presented how both passive listening ($n=9$, $ES = .61$, $p = .01$) and music therapy techniques ($n=10$, $ES = .80$, $p = .00$) as well as both short- ($n=5$, $ES = .80$, $p = .00$) and long-term ($n=9$, $ES = .71$, $p = .00$) musical interventions are successful, and both music used as a structured activity ($n=9$, $ES = .79$, $p = .00$) and used for behavioral change ($n=8$, $ES = .57$, $p = .00$) are successful in reducing psychosis symptoms..

Pelletier (2004) performed a meta-analysis on the effects of music on stress arousal. They analyzed 22 articles and found significant evidence ($n=22$, $ES = .67$, $p = .00$) for the powerful effect of music on decreasing arousal due to stressful situations. The results also showed that music was more beneficial for adolescents, females, and for

those who practice and create music on a regular basis. The authors showed that learning to play or read music is beneficial, increasing cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal areas. The authors further found that although music-assisted relaxation had a more prominent effect in individual therapy, there was still a large effect on group-relaxation.

In a 2016 study, Chen, Leith, Aaro, Manger, and Gold argued that prisoners in particular could benefit from music therapy because the music experience provided the participants an opportunity to explore their emotions and learn to express them in a positive way. Group members were encouraged to explore their personal struggles and life stories through musical experiences. The authors found that music therapy is effective in improving offender's mental health regarding their issues such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and social functioning. The aesthetic qualities of music allowed each group member to initiate interpersonal connection in a nonverbal and nonthreatening way, and these communications permitted diverse interpretations from every individual because of the abstract and metaphorical nature of music.

Attunement to Rhythm and Beat

Nozaradan, Peretz, Missal, and Mouraux (2011) analyzed electroencephalogram scans to show that neurons automatically entrain to a beat. The authors used EEG responses of eight individuals and measured ability to perceive a periodic beat while either imagining or physically tapping, to sound pattern. They found that even when a sound pattern does not host a periodic beat, by having any musical experience (including simple listening), musical beats can be generated by mental representations. They

conclude that the periodic structure of the beat synchronizes or entrains the listener's attention, leading to expectancy at the neuronal level.

In a study on rhythm and beat perception, Grahn and Rowe (2009) used functional magnetic resonance imaging to find that beat perception occurs at a neuronal level regardless of previous musical training. They further found that listening to rhythms activates multiple areas of the brain including the putamen, frontal cortex, cerebellum, and of course, the auditory cortex. They concluded that beat perception led to increased bilateral communication, particularly in the putamen areas. The authors found that the putamen in particular (a part of the brain located in the basal ganglia) most strongly responds to the presence of a beat, which they suggest to play a role in the precise control of movement timing required for clapping or tapping one's foot in time with a beat.

In a study by Chen, Penhune and Zatorre (2008), it was found that motor areas of the brain respond to musical rhythms. The authors analyzed functional magnetic resonance images of twelve individuals as they listened to musical rhythms. Participants either (1) listened to rhythms without anticipation of tapping task, (2) listened to rhythms anticipating tapping along without moving, or, (3) listened to rhythms and tapped the index finger in synchrony with the rhythms. The authors found that motor areas of the brain activated both when listeners expected to tap along with a song, and when they simply listened to the rhythm with no instruction to tap along. However, different motor areas were activated depending on which task the listeners were assigned, for example, sound-movement mappings, movements in response to an auditory cue, and areas that solely responded to auditory stimuli rather than motor movement. In conclusion, the

authors suggested that there is an inherent link between auditory and motor systems in the context of rhythm, and perhaps a reason for the urge to move along with music.

Not only do we naturally connect motor and auditory areas when perceiving rhythm and beat, strengthening this connection has been shown to have an effect in other areas as well. In a study by Tierny and Kraus (2014), it was found that there is a connection between ability to tap on beat with both reading and attention. Authors explored the connections between auditory, motor, and prefrontal areas in the ability to tap in synchronization with a beat. Further, results also indicated that synchronized tapping helps to improve sustained attention as the performer must constantly revise his actions to minimize the discrepancy between motor output and auditory input. The authors found that “variability in tapping to a beat correlated with performance on tests of reading, attention, and auditory temporal precision” (para. 9).

This attunement to beat can help improve cognitive processes such as focus and motor abilities in restorative therapy efforts as well. Tools such as the Interactive Metronome (IM) have been developed and implemented in efforts to improve function in working memory, controlled attention, and executive function. According to McGrew (2013), Interactive Metronome technology “combines a musical metronome with a computer-based program that accurately measures and facilitates the improvements of an individual’s rhythm and timing” (p.12). Active training in synchronizing auditory perceptions and motor behaviors can increase communication between the frontal and parietal brain networks. In a paper discussing the science behind the Interactive Metronome, McGrew (2013), highlights studies that support the effectiveness of practicing this IM technology and that it has positive effects for ADHD behavior, speech

and language disorders, improvement of gait, reading achievement and focus and attention. Through practice of this type of interactive technology, individuals can have better focus, and slowly learn to ease their racing thoughts, a symptom that is quite prevalent within among incarcerated individuals.

These studies explain that neural entrainment to a beat intrinsically occurs, suggesting that humans are biologically programmed for beat perception, and further that beat perception is a process that involves multiple areas of the brain and the physical body as well (Chen, Penhune, & Zatorre, 2008; Grahn & Rowe, 2009; Nozaradan, Peretz, Missal, & Mourax, 2011). By practicing auditory and movement synchronization such as clapping to a beat, one can hope to improve attention, enhance bilateral communication, and harness creative abilities through strengthening the mind-body connection (McGrew, 2013; Tierny & Kraus, 2014;).

Group Drumming

Through embracing the natural ameliorating effects of tapping to a beat, many therapeutic endeavors have been explored through group drumming. In a study focusing on creative arts interventions, Maschi and Bradley (2010) found that group drumming can help improve stress levels of participants, as well as increase their energy, and sense of empowerment and connectedness. The study conducted was a single-session, 2-hour, recreational drumming group provided at a university, and was measured by a self-report, pre- and post-test assessment. Although the authors did not provide specific details on the intervention, they base their study on previous theories, including the Ecological Systems theory which proposes that the interactions among students facilitates positive classroom

learning outcomes, and the Empowerment Perspective which emphasizes the importance of social roles and evidence-based self-care strategies (e.g. group drumming). The authors follow the I-We Rhythm intervention, which is a single-session 2-hour intervention that emphasizes the importance of environment on learning. The program consists of four steps; introduction to recreational music-making, basics of rhythm, introduction to techniques, and participation in group drumming. The study concluded that the intervention decreased stress levels, and increased energy, empowerment and connectedness among university students. This study can be seen as an enjoyable, evidence-based relaxation and stress-reducing tactic. One of the most empowering aspects of utilizing group drumming, as highlighted in Maschi and Bradley's 2010 study, is that "it places intervention in the hands of the players, as opposed to the use of music as therapy in which a trained expert is often required to administer the intervention" (Maschi & Bradley, 2010, p.54).

In a 2016 study by Dickerson, Robichaud, Teruya, Nagaran and Hser, it was found that group drumming improved mental health in American Indians and Alaskan Natives. This population was chosen because drumming is often used in cultural traditions and healing practices within the community, as well as in similarities found between drumming and cognitive behavioral therapy. The authors ran a series of focus groups consisting of volunteers who had participated in the Drum-Assisted Recovery Therapy for Native Americans (DARTNA). DARTNA is a 12-step program that is designed to assist American Indians and Alaska Natives with substance abuse disorders. The twelve steps are similar to most 12-step rehabilitation programs while integrating the traditional native ideas of the medicine wheel; steps 1-3 include breaking denial and an

emphasis on the spiritual dimension; steps 4-6 include embracing wellness and recovery while focusing on the emotional dimension; steps 7-9 include practicing new behaviors while emphasizing the physical dimension; and steps 10-12 include integrating the changes while emphasizing on the mental dimension. The results showed that drumming helped promote healing and self-expression, as well as a cultural connection. Through analysis of the self-report responses to DARTNA, the authors concluded that most participants felt that the program provided an opportunity to develop a sense of cultural identity in relation to their addiction.

Another study on group drumming conducted by Fancourt and colleagues (2016) provided evidence for decreased symptoms of anxiety, depression, social resilience, and mental well-being. Forty-five ($n=45$) individuals participated in the study and were divided into a control group ($n=15$), which were taking regular therapy, and working groups ($n=30$), which were participating in the group drumming sessions alongside regular therapy. There were 10 weekly sessions conducted by a professional drummer who taught them drumming techniques that gradually increased in complexity. The instructor had no previous training in therapeutic interventions, and was blind to the purpose of the study. Participants completed a self-report questionnaire both pre- and post- treatment which showed a significant decrease in depressive symptoms and an increase in social resiliency, however only a moderate improvement of symptoms of anxiety (Fancourt et. al., 2016). This study helps to emphasize that group drumming even outside a therapeutic environment can help improve mental health and well-being.

Music and Group Synchrony

The natural perception, of musical beats, as well as the power of following or creating beats together as a group, plays a large role in interpersonal connection and communication (Patel, 2015). Most people have felt the synchronizing power of music through singing national anthems, or when clapping together at a concert. As explained earlier, this tendency is a lot more intrinsic than these social behaviors that we have come to love. Some theorists believe that this natural beat-perception was evolutionarily developed in order to help tribal survival because many people can synchronize quite easily with the aid of a beat such as within Native American tribal ceremonies, or soldiers marching to war by the beat of a drum. By being more in tune with your fellow tribe members, survival rate and communication can be greatly increased. The connection of music and emotions has been theorized to have origins in reading the nonverbal cues from other human beings as a mechanism to create more attuned communication among tribe members (Patel 2015).

In a study on group synchronization, Codrons, Bernardi, Vandoni, and Bernardi (2014) found that group members naturally synchronized with each other, both in movement and in other physiological qualities such as breathing and heart rate. The authors conducted multiple groups in which they measured the synchronizing tendencies of individuals and groups as they provided different variables such as silence, music, and a metronome beat in the background. They found that in all conditions, the group members tended to synchronize their movements with one another despite blindness to the purpose of the study. The authors also found that individuals tended to synchronize their respiratory rhythms both during movement tasks as well as at rest. The authors

concluded that “the importance of emotions and reciprocal bonding in the emergence of synchronization, these results reveal the underlying physiological mechanisms that are potentially responsible for the feeling of group bonding and coordinated human interaction” (p. 8).

In an article written by Overy (2012), the effects of music on learning were explored. Overy highlighted a number of studies that show the natural human musicality and its potential usefulness in therapy, and the classroom. The author follows the Shared Affective Motion Experience model, which posits that shared neural experiences such as singing and moving together in synchronization can increase empathy and social bonding. Overy further suggested that when learning music or attempting to achieve group cohesion and cooperation, that moving together is a neurologically-based behavior that can help build synchronization and communication. Overy further highlighted studies that show the natural motor behavior that underlies musical behavior such as vibrating vocal chords and clapping hands.

Music and Emotion

Not only do we have a physical connection to beat and rhythm, it also elicits an intrinsic emotional connection within ourselves as well. This wonderful ability of music to elicit emotions is clearly utilized within film and entertainment such as in horror films that use fast-paced, high-pitched violins to portray fear, or cartoons such as Tom and Jerry where the music seems to match the mood and emotions of the characters.

Salimpoor, Benovoy, Longo, Cooperstock, and Zatorre (2009) investigated the relationship between emotional arousal and pleasure during different music selections.

The authors monitored the physiological symptoms such as heart rate and respiration rate as well as self-report to account for emotional arousal due to the direct connection to the autonomic nervous system. Musical “chills” were measured by a dermal response to a musical piece, and used to measure the occurrence of pleasure. The authors were able to differentiate between emotional arousal due to enjoyment (pleasure) related to the musical piece, and the presence of emotional arousal in lack of pleasure to the song. Results of the study showed evidence for a direct link between emotions and the rewarding aspect of music. This study not only highlights the ability of music to induce involuntary physical responses, but also that certain pieces of music have the ability to elicit positive emotions (Salimpoor, et. al., 2009). Most importantly, this study shows a natural physical response to music, regardless of the pleasure experienced from it.

Patel (2015) suggests that music resembles emotions through both speech prosody and through resemblances to human nonverbal behavior. He highlighted a study that analyzed brain scans of individuals listening to music and voices that expressed the emotion of fear. They found that the same areas of the brain, including the amygdala which houses our emotion center, respond while listening to both vocals and music. In another study, Patel noted that children who had studied drama or piano were more accurate in perceiving emotions than those who were not trained in these disciplines. Patel also explores the Contour Theory of Musical Expressiveness, which suggests that the emotional expressiveness induced by music is based on the similarities of how music moves and nonverbal human expressive behavior.

In a study on brain responses to music, Arafat, Perkins, Peretz, Concha and Armony (2015) found that the same areas of the brain, particularly the amygdala, respond

to emotions, specifically fear, in the same way, regardless of the medium through which the fear was communicated. The authors studied 47 subjects with varying musical experience and reviewed fMRI scans of four emotions, fear, sadness, happiness and peaceful (neutral), as they were portrayed through facial expressions, vocalizations, and music. They found that the amygdala processes emotions, most significantly fear and happiness, through the same neural pathway regardless of the domain through which they are communicated. The authors concluded that music can be a useful tool in communicating emotions due to its close ties to vocal and facial communications.

This resemblance of music to our emotional and physical experience can be therapeutically utilized as a means to express oneself and begin to explore the realm of one's personal emotions. The non-verbal aspect of music allows for individuals to *feel* without the pressure and confinement of verbal descriptions. The act of playing music can actually help to discover a way to help regulate our emotions much like how film and theater utilize the power of music to influence the audience's emotional attachment to the characters and situations. Building this connection between mind and body by expressing feeling through exaggerated body movements such as drumming can be used within a therapeutic setting.

Songwriting in Therapy

Expressive writing has been used as a therapeutic endeavor in many contexts and has been found to decrease anxiety in many situations (Niles, Byrne, Mulyvenna, Lieberman, & Stanton, 2014). Barclay and Saldanha (2016) studied the effects of expressive writing in organizational settings, particularly focusing on forgiveness. They

found that expressive writing can help individuals to address and express their personal feelings in relation to a specific issue on their own, without specific guided interventions. They also found that this perceived effort also helps to empower individuals to step towards their own recovery. In a second study, the authors found that by incorporating forgiveness within expressive writing, individuals reported significant positive results as indicated by perceived resolution. The authors highlight how forgiveness provides a constructive way to work through injustices rather than the typical negative responses such as anger and revenge. The authors also highlight the continuing effect through the experience of expressive writing in that “forgiveness can also de-escalate conflict and enable individuals to continue to interact in the wake of offenses to achieve organizational goals” (p.709).

When investigating the therapeutic uses of music, quantifiable evidence can be difficult to ascertain due to the interpretive and personal experience that comes along with the creation of music. In a 2011 meta-analysis of songwriting in therapy by McFerran, Baker and Krout, it was found that common goals emerged across studies, such as externalizing thoughts and emotions, enhancing self-esteem and reducing anxiety, anger and tension. The goals that the authors noted are common themes across many different types of psychotherapy, and perhaps music can add a little pleasurable aspect that might make all the difference to a client.

In a 2016 study, Chen, Leith, Aaro, Manger, and Gold found that songwriting helped incarcerated individuals to “embody their feelings and thoughts in lyrics and melody” even within a highly restricted environment (p. 32). Songwriting has also been shown to help improve symptoms of schizophrenia such as auditory hallucinations,

cognitive task performance (Tseng et al., 2016) and with general mood and psychosis symptoms (Silverman, 2003), which can be very difficult to treat with conventional therapy.

Expressive writing is used within many therapeutic interventions, and by combining this practice with music, one can experience a new way of self-expression and communication. Most individuals experience some level of pleasure derived from music, and to incorporate this into therapy, which can be very demanding and difficult, might even increase the motivation and hopefulness to continue to make the steps towards positive change.

Rap Therapy

It is a common theme when discussing rap and hip-hop to sway toward the violence and sexism that many artists advocate for, however there are many studies that highlight the therapeutic aspects of rap and its cultural strength and empowerment. In a paper by Hara (2012) explains how rap naturally possesses many parallels to therapy, specifically the simultaneous structure and freedom of expression that comes along with creating this music. She further explains that when using rap in therapy with adolescents, “as the teen is able to create, take risks, create some more, he is manipulating symbols-musical elements—and repeatedly strengthening his ego” (p. 17). Hara highlights that the skills necessary to participate in rap are not above that of the average individual, as there are many different layers of rap music that can be focused on, such as the lyrics or acoustics of the song. She also notes that in creating a piece of music as a part of therapy, we can gratify both the process and the product of transformation. Hara further explains

how “Rap music’s form is about as close to perfection as one can get to a therapeutic medium. Its structure provides stricter, Simultaneously, it allows freedom of expression and myriad ways to improvise” (p.15-16).

Authors Hadley and Yancy (2012), highlight the different techniques within rap that can hold great therapeutic power. “One Mic” is a concept that signifies an open space to be listened to, which gives the individual holding the “mic” an opportunity to be heard, recognized and validated. This simple concept “valorizes the importance of simply being able to speak and the sheer power and transformative possibilities inherent in lyrically or rhythmically expressed speech” (p. xxvi). The authors further explain how using “one mic” implies the power of a single voice, and further encourages individuals to find and express their own voice, and recognize their own narrative. Through performing a rap, whether it be an original piece, or a pre-composed piece slightly augmented to fit the client’s personal life, provides an individual with the opportunity to engage in ta “co-creative act of listening, creating and meaning making” (p.xxxiv). Through creating a rap, individuals can be empowered through building trust and potentially providing a platform for future risk-taking. The authors also highlight improvising, or freestyling as a therapeutic technique, “improvisation helps to develop spontaneity, creativity, freedom of expression playfulness, a sense of identity, or interpersonal skills...it provides a safe means of experimenting with new behaviors, roles, or interactional patterns, while also developing the ability to make choices and decisions within established limits” (p. xxxv). Improvising can host a number of skills that can be harnessed and utilized outside a therapeutic experience, for instance an individual must be able to cope without following a set structure or script, learn to actively and openly receive what is at hand, learn risk-

taking which includes “making choices on the spot and living with those choices” (p.xxxvi).

Clinicians such as Elligan (2004) have found many parallels between the process of creating and listening to rap and the widely used therapeutic process. For example, Elligan lists the phases in his rap therapy model; assess and plan, build an alliance, reframe thoughts and behavior, reinforce through writing, and maintain the change (Elligan, 2004). As in most psychotherapies, treatment plans and building rapport are two initial and necessary steps in the therapeutic process. Reframing thoughts and behaviors can be paralleled with many Cognitive Behavioral Therapy efforts such as thought stopping.

In fact, in an analysis of current rap songs by Tyson and colleagues (2012), it was found that although many violent and profanity-filled rap songs are among the hit-lists, there are also quite a few themes across hip-hop that mirror positive therapeutic themes. The author’s analyzed the lyrics of a total of 358 songs and categorized them into general themes. They found four overarching themes that included many subcategories; Social criticism (economic and racial oppression, and personal suffering), Social Empowerment (personal and familial empowerment), Humanistic Values (spirituality, love, perseverance), and Negative behavior criticism (anti-materialism, anti-thug-life, and anti-violence). The authors intentions were to aid music therapists, who do not have much knowledge in the genre, in choosing appropriate rap and hip-hop songs to use within their interventions. Their list also shows many songs that emphasize constructive messages and positive growth rather than the largely annunciated violent and profanity-ridden rap songs.

Hakvoort (2015) ran a study utilizing rap in therapy and highlighted the benefits of focusing specifically on the musical aspects of rap. The study featured offenders with psychiatric or psychological disorders working towards reducing anxiety, improving emotion regulation and impulsivity. Hakvoort specifically focused on the musical aspects of performing a rap such as the power in a client's voice, or the body position as he raps. Throughout the study, Hakvoort discovered that by not focusing on the lyrics individuals felt less pressured to find the right words, and were able to express inner feelings through the power of the music. Alongside the original goals set at the beginning of the study, Hakvoort also discovered that clients were simply motivated to engage in treatment when the session featured rap and music.

Elligan (2012) found success in utilizing rap in psychotherapy with adolescents. He explains "the goal is to use rap music to help the client gain insight, restructure thoughts or behavior, and eventually use rap music to give a voice to the changes they would like to pursue in their life" (p.36). Although he did not provide a specific case study, the author explained how a client's favorite rap music can be integrated into regular psychotherapy in order to help build rapport and understanding into an adolescent's world. He first simply asked about the client's favorite music and began to explore the meaning behind the themes and expressions found most in the client's choice music. This exploration, Elligan explains, can aid the client in tuning into their thoughts and feelings, and potentially the influence that the music has had over their interpretations and thought patterns. Perhaps this music can help bridge into the client's presenting issue and serve as a vessel into an interpersonal understanding and exploration with the therapist. Elligan goes on to explain how not only listening but writing rap can

be beneficial for clients to work through their presenting issues. This concrete product can help the therapist understand how the client uses different coping methods, as well as give the client an opportunity to problem solve and manage [life difficulties]. The process of creating rap not only gives a concrete product and reminder of both progress and accomplishment, but also provides individuals with a skill set that they can continue to use after psychotherapy has ended (Elligan, 2012).

Beats, Rhymes, and Life is a program that has been developed by Tomas Alvarez to help youth of color by integrating rap into therapy. Alvarez describes Rap Therapy as “the purposeful integration of elements of Hip-Hop culture in a therapeutic setting to achieve catharsis and facilitate psychosocial development” (p. 122). The author has found much success in utilizing rap with adolescents, and has implemented the program across 10 different areas. He stresses that rap can be used as a segue into positive peer interaction, and a safe platform to talk about their struggles. It also gives youth a chance to re-write their stories in a way that can instill hope and increase coping skills and positive thoughts (Alvarez, 2012).

Ierardi and Jenkins (2012) ran multiple group therapies in which they implemented music, rap, and improvisation. They worked with individuals at a juvenile detention facility between the ages of 13 and 17 as a part of an educational program. The authors worked from a trauma based, person-centered orientation, and used brief therapeutic models in order to account for the [quick turnover] of detainees. They highlighted Winnicott’s theory of play which [says] that the ability to play (or improvise/freestyle), relies on trust; “when trust exists to the extent that play is possible, it allows for experimentation with roles and behaviors that are not generally available”

(Ierardi & Jenkins, 2012, p. 258). This allows for freer expression of emotion, as well as gaining a sense of self-understanding and connectedness with other group members. The use of music in their study was backed up by studies highlighting the intrinsic, humanistic qualities of music, as well as the ability for music to aid in emotional expression. They also noted that the act of *playing* music, can assist adolescents in becoming aware of their own and others' feelings, and assist in internal organization and impulse control. The authors started the group by educating the clients on African drumming, which was specifically highlighted due to the majority of clients being African American. They then introduced instruments, including many types of drums, shakers, and a xylophone into the group, and initiated a group-drumming technique, and call-and-response exercises. The group was then free to follow its own course, which the authors discovered often results in a "leader," as well as some clients who refused to participate. Refusal to participate by individuals was addressed by allowing the individual to solely use vocals, or solely instrumental expressions. Refusal to participate by the majority of the group was addressed by utilizing pre-recorded music to then analyze and discuss with the group. The authors concluded that the adolescents in their studies indeed used rap lyrics to express loss, regret, abandonment, and eventually the hope of change. They state that the use of African Drumming helped to provide a culturally supportive environment in which to express themselves, and, "successful musical/instrumental risk taking and expression of plans for the future' via rap improvisation were part of a therapeutic approach in this short-term environment to encourage the envisioning of their full potential and a more positive future" (Ierardi & Jenkins, 2012, p. 272).

Summary

Many studies have shown the positive effects of music therapy such as its abilities to help ease anxiety, depressive moods, and improve general functioning (Chang et. al., 2015; Chen, Leith, Aaro Manger & Gold, 2016), as well as decreasing arousal due to stress (Pelletier, 2004). Music can also help improve symptoms in patients with dementia (Chang et. al., 2015), and psychosis (Silverman, 2003). Music therapy has been found to help within an incarcerated population in particular due to its effectiveness in improving offender's general mental health symptoms (Chen, Leith, Aaro Manger & Gold, 2016).

It has been found humans have a natural connection with rhythm and beat which is believed to be a feature in detecting language (Patel, 2015). These studies explain that neural entrainment to a beat intrinsically occurs, suggesting that humans are biologically programmed for beat perception, and further that beat perception is a process that involves multiple areas of the brain and the physical body as well (Chen, Penhune, & Zatorre, 2008; Grahn & Rowe, 2009; Nozaradan, Peretz, Missal, & Mourax, 2011). This intrinsic beat perception has been shown to improve bilateral communication through strengthening auditory and movement synchronization such as clapping to a beat, due to activation of multiple areas of the brain (Grahn & Rowe, 2009; McGrew, 2013; Tierny & Kraus, 2014).

Group drumming has been one commonly used method of using this intrinsic beat connection within a therapeutic setting (Dickerson, Robichaud, Teruya, Nagaran & Hser, 2016; Fancourt et. al., 2016; Maschi & Bradley, 2010). Maschi and Bradley (2010) found that the simple act of learning to participate in a drum circle can help reduce stress, and increase relaxation. Group drumming within therapeutic groups have shown to help

clients increase self-esteem (Dickerson, Robichaud, Teruya, Nagaran & Hser, 2016), reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms (Fancourt et. al., 2016). Studies have even shown that by moving in synchronization with others, particularly in a group, empathy and social bonding is increased (Overy, 2012). Interestingly, just as our brain tends to naturally attune to a beat, humans tend to naturally attune to one another in physical movements as well (Codrons, Bernardi Vandoni, & Mernardi, 2014). This phenomenon is hypothesized to have evolved in efforts to increase tribal survival through synchronized movements, as well as feelings (Codrons, Bernardi Vandoni, & Bernardi, 2014; Patel, 2015).

Expressive writing has been effective in many therapeutic endeavors to help express inner emotions (Barclay & Saldanha, 2016; Niles, Byrne, Mulyvanna, Lieberman & Stanton, 2014) By utilizing the techniques found in expressive writing, one can utilize songwriting within therapy to aid in reducing anxiety, anger and tension (Chen, Leith, Aaro, Manger, & Gold 2016; McFerran, Baker & Kraut, 2011).

Rap within therapy combines the powers of music, expressive songwriting, and the intrinsic connections between humans (Elligan, 2004; Hara, 2012). Rap music helps individuals feel heard while expressing internal emotions (Alvarez, 2012; Elligan, 2004; Hadley & Yancy, 2012). Improvising within rap therapy can help develop spontaneity, creativity, freedom of expression and sense of identity among group members (Ierardi & Jenkins, 2012; Hadley & Yancy, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of participants utilizing the elements of rap music including freestyle, community building, beat, and songwriting to create a therapeutic experience aimed at improving the general mental health symptoms of incarcerated adults. In order to capture a more encompassing understanding of the effects of rap music in therapy, qualitative data were collected from the group facilitators, site supervisor, and incarcerated adults.

Research Question

1. How is a therapeutic group incorporating elements of rap music perceived by a group of incarcerated adults, its facilitators, and supervisor?
2. What elements do participants identify as noteworthy to the experience of the group?

Ethical Considerations

This study was submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Missouri State University on the 14th of September, 2017 (Approval # IRB-FY2018-20). All participants signed a Form of Consent to participate in this study (See Appendix A-C), which includes special considerations for vulnerable populations of inmates. All information was kept in a locked Mental Health room at this Justice Center. Names and identifying information of inmates, as well as housing location have been changed for the purpose of this study and for the protection of the inmates.

Theoretical Orientation

The facilitation of the group in this study was conducted through a person-centered expressive arts approach with cognitive behavioral elements. Due to the musical freedom of expression within this group, the facilitators provided active feedback and structure while allowing for the participants to direct the group. Facilitators provided psychoeducational information as a part of each group meeting, and then allowed the group to respond. Facilitators followed cognitive behavioral tenets in providing structured activities as well as assigned homework for group members to complete in between sessions.

Participants

Ten inmates were recruited from a Missouri county justice center for this study, pseudonyms were used for the purpose of confidentiality. Participants were recruited on a volunteer basis via a flier placed in each pod of the Missouri county justice center, and the first 10 inmates from each pod to sign up were recruited for this study. Participants who were already being seen for regular therapy by either facilitator were not selected for the study due to conflict of interest. Five participants from female unit X (unit name changed) and five from male unit Y (unit name changed) were recruited. Inmates were between the ages of 25 and 67. Due to the structure of the Missouri county justice center, individuals must be housed in the same pod in order to participate in a group together. During the study, three inmates moved housing units, and were therefore dropped from the group. Participation was voluntary, resulting in three participants who declined membership in this group throughout the study. Participants received a certificate of

completion to verify participation in therapy upon completion of the group, and no other compensation was offered.

Researcher Approach and Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes a narrative qualitative approach, which follows the goal to develop an in-depth understanding the participants' experiences through several types of data collection including observation and reflective field notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This particular research approach is commonly used in the field of psychology to understand the experiences of understudied populations (Dickerson, et. al., 2012; Fancourt, et. al., 2016; Maschi & Bradley, 2010). As the present study seeks to implement a newly incorporated idea within psychotherapy, this narrative qualitative approach is considered appropriate.

For this study, the researcher adopted a constructivist epistemology, which posits that individuals experience a subjective reality based on social experiences, interactions, and cultural influences (Sadana, 2009). This particular epistemological stance purports that reality is constructed inter-subjectively and that this is the reality that is most important (Sadana 2009). As the study focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals, the researcher chose to adopt a subjective ontology. Moreover, based on the researcher's belief that what an individual deems as valuable is very subjective even within a shared experience, an interpretive axiology was chose as appropriate for the study.

Researcher's Role and Biases

As in most qualitative studies, the researcher functioned as the main research instrument. The researcher acted as facilitator for each group therapy session, including activities and processing, alongside a co-facilitator. The researcher also was the primary agent in data collection, conducting post-group interview with group members, as well as a discussion and interview of each session with co-facilitator. After the termination of the group, researcher conducted post-group interviews with each member individually, with the co-facilitator, and with the on-site supervisor.

I believe fully in the profound power of music, and its many ways it can impact our mind and body. I use music on a daily basis to affect and reflect my mood, to share my feelings, and provide a steady beat for the background of my activities. As I conducted this therapy group myself, I was more inclined to see the positive effects of music on each member, and less inclined to take a neutral stance in viewing each individual's interpretations. To ensure a non-judgmental interpretation of data, both the co-facilitator and supervisor were kept aware of these biases.

I am also studying mental health through a person-centered perspective. Although I often utilize and appreciate other perspectives, I prefer to let client's take the lead of their therapeutic experience. For this reason, I also believe that within this study, individuals used each session for what they personally need.

Rap music has been a part of my musical life for quite some time, however, it was not until recently that I learned the true origins of this music as well as its natural capacity for healing. As a white female, I could be seen as an outside perspective due to

the strong African American presence within this genre which could affect the participation of clients who may feel as if I am stepping over my racial boundaries.

I am also a Master's level student interning at the Missouri county justice center and as such I am still a novice therapist and have only facilitated a limited amount of group therapies. I received supervision weekly during the process of this study, however this may still impact my therapeutic effect during the group.

Research Design

The research design was a narrative qualitative approach. The researchers used qualitative measures of the participants' perception of the overall impact and experience of the group to provide a weekly and final description of the participants' experiences throughout the stages of the intervention (See Appendix D & E). A reflective journal was kept by the researcher throughout the study including field notes of in-session events as well as notes on interviews and supervision. These reflections are based off of summarization and recollection rather than direct transcription. After the conclusion of the group, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants, the other facilitator, as well as the site supervisor to record subjective experiences of each of the participants. Interviews lasted no more than thirty minutes. Many therapists choose narrative methods in qualitative research because they already possess the skills required to create a trusting and open environment for participants to share their story (Hunter, 2010). As such, the researcher in this study followed interview protocol (See Appendix F) in order to allow for adequate coverage of needed data, while still allowing for participants to voice their personal experience.

Procedures

Each therapy group consisted of five, 90-minute sessions over the course of five weeks. The group was closed after the first session as to facilitate group trust and growth. There were two facilitators of each group as is required by this Missouri county justice center protocol.

Session one consisted of a psychoeducational approach to introduce members to group rules and purpose, as well as drumming and music. This session was also used for completing consent forms, reviewing confidentiality, and forming group expectations. The group was lead in a guided meditation and a discussion afterwards. Members each introduced themselves to the group, followed by leading the group in a simple drum beat. Discussion and post-session interview followed.

Session two focused on group cohesion and building trust amongst the members. Session was started with a guided meditation and a discussion afterwards. The group started with an improvisation warm-up titled “Free-Association” in which each member uses a word stated by the previous member in the circle to free-associate a new word, followed by a group discussion. The members created a beat either through percussion or simple repetition related to an experience or emotion. This activity was followed by a group discussion on the experiences of the members. Homework was assigned in this session to write a poem or letter about an experience that they are currently suffering from. Session ended with post-session interview discussion.

Session three focused on confrontation, risk-taking, and vulnerability. This session began with a group drumming activity. The group began with an activity titled

“Simuclap,” in which members attempted to synchronize their clap with one other member of the group and “pass” the clap around the room, attempting to remain synchronized. The activity was followed by a group discussion. Group members then took turns reading the work they had for homework. Either the reader or the group created a repetitive rhythm to align with the feelings of the work. This was followed by a group discussion covering the experiences of sharing with a beat. The session ended with post-session interview discussion.

Session four focused again on vulnerability and risk-taking. The group began with a guided meditation and a discussion to follow. The group then participated in an activity, which involved reading pre-written short poems by an established author and explored how each member can find a different rhythm and tone for the same poem. This was followed by a discussion. Each member was then encouraged to read their work to the group over a simple group-beat, or an individually-led beat. This was followed by a group discussion on the experiences of sharing their work. The group ended with post-session interview discussion.

Session five focused on forgiveness and letting go through a future-focused approach. The session began with a guided meditation followed by a discussion. The members then participated in Simuclap activity again followed by a discussion. Members were encouraged to share work and express their feelings and aspirations related to their progress within this group, followed by a discussion. Members again participated in a post-intervention questionnaire (See Appendix D).

The facilitator conducted a follow-up session the following week for the four participants who remained in the group for the entire five weeks, as well as three

members that participated in the first session only. The interview followed of a semi-structured format (See Appendix E) and lasted no longer than 30 minutes. The researcher also conducted final interviews with the co-facilitator (See Appendix G) and the supervisor (See Appendix H).

Data Collection

This study had three points of data; a discussion interview, individual semi-structured interviews, and a research journal. The research journal consisted of direct observations during group sessions, narrative responses gathered throughout the interviews, well as discussion between facilitators and supervisor. After each weekly session, a discussion interview was conducted in order to gain a subjective experience of the participants (See Appendix D), responses were recorded in the research journal. Researcher also interviewed other facilitator individually after each session (See Appendix I). All data was recorded in the research journal in a narrative style (hunter, 2010).

Participation was compromised by group attrition due to changing housing units or release from custody of the inmates. Members who completed all five sessions of the group were individually interviewed (See Appendix E) for a subjective review of experience in the group using a qualitative measure, which features open-ended questions to cover subjective experiences of inmates. In order to gain a more in depth qualitative perspective of the effect of the group, the researcher also interviewed other facilitator after the completion of the group (See Appendix G). The researcher also conducted a semi-structured interview of the site supervisor who oversaw the facilitators activities in

the group and conducting weekly group supervision with both facilitators (See Appendix D). Interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility within this qualitative study, data were triangulated with researcher, co-facilitator, and on-site supervisor. The researcher also kept a research journal including notes covering each session as well as notes on supervision discussion related to this study. Researcher also sought consultation with faculty members of research committee at each stage of data analysis and interpretation. Interviews with each individual member, co-facilitator, and supervisor were semi-structured in order to cover vital information while still leaving answers open-ended for more accurate explanation of experiences.

Qualitative data is often criticized for validity and trustworthiness. This was accounted for by assuring four areas of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). These all have been accounted for in this study.

Credibility was accounted for through data collection consisting of three data points, from the inmate participants, two facilitators, and the supervisor. Credibility was also assured due to the multiple methods of data collection from the inmate participants. There were post-session interview discussions, individual post-group interviews, and a reflective journal kept by the researcher of detailed happenings throughout the group sessions.

The ability of the findings of a study to be applied to different studies and potentially situations is referred to as transferability. (Shenton, 2004). Transferability was accounted for in this study as best as possible by providing an open-format for the sessions. Each session was generally structured, but participants were able to interpret and use each aspect in their own way. With this being said, the results of this study are likely to be different than other groups. Nevertheless, data was interpreted in an open-coding method, allowing for general themes to be found.

Dependability is the ability of a project to be re-created with similar results (Shenton, 2004). This was accounted for in this study through the person-centered approach of the facilitators, as well as the general structure of the group, with an acknowledgment of variability. Although each experience is unique to each group and the abilities of each participant brought into the lived experience of the group can drastically change the experience. The structure of this group allowed for a step-by-step process gradually entering the more difficult aspects of each element brought into the group, and can therefore provide a structure that is obtainable and able to be recreated through multiple experiments.

Confirmability is the ability to host objective results (Shelton, 2004). Although objectivity is extremely difficult to obtain, this was best accounted for in this study through careful observation of researcher and facilitator biases, as well as active weekly supervision.

Data Analysis

The researchers provided recollected summaries to paint a picture of the sample at each phase of the case study. The primary researcher wrote weekly notes detailing the experiences of the group members upon conclusion of each session as well as after each of the semi-structured interviews that took place after the conclusion of the five-week group. These were subjected to open coding to find themes and triangulate them with the participants,' facilitators,' and supervisor's experiences. Open coding consists of identifying any unit of data that might be relevant to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data was coded by identifying repetitive patterns of actions and consistencies in recorded answers and stories of all participants (Saldana, 2009). Data from group member participants, co-facilitator, and supervisor interviews were then triangulated to find common themes.

A qualitative narrative approach was taken to analyze the data, and an open coding method was used to organize the data in effort to examine how participants constructed their stories. For the purpose of this study, open coding is defined as “the labeling of concepts, defining and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions” (Khandkar, 2016, p.1). Due to the small sample size and limited amount of data, open coding is appropriate. Data were gathered from inmate participants via post-group session discussions, post-group individual interviews, as well as descriptive journaling by the researcher. Data were also gathered from post-session and post-group interviews with the co-facilitator, as well as on-site supervisor. Interviews lasted no longer than 30 minutes, most averaging to 15 minutes, participants often answered in

short-answer format, rather than descriptive narratives of experience. This allows only a limited analysis of themes and subthemes.

Researcher Positionality

Conversations with the co-facilitator and supervisor took place throughout the study in order to continuously ensure that I am not allowing my personal biases to affect the results. In relation to my personal biases, I stayed aware of my personal desire for the success of this group, particularly during interviews and data analysis and attempted to bracket it. I was also aware that throughout the processes my gender may have impacted the mode of story-telling and self-exploration of both the male and female participants. I was also aware of my previous relationship with some of the members of the group due to previously mental health work with them, and how these individuals might have tried to skew their answers in order to support my ego. To assure awareness of biases and accuracy within recording data, I often clarified with participants in order to co-construct their narrative, as well as discussing with co-facilitator and supervisor about my interpretations.

Summary

The goal of this study was to gather the lived experiences of incarcerated adults as they participate in a group incorporating elements of rap music. In gathering and analyzing data, I used a method that best represents participants' narratives and finds themes that best represent the overall experience of individual members as well as the group as a whole.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of incarcerated adults who participated in a group therapy incorporating elements of rap music. The findings of this study are based on individual interviews with each of the participants as well as interviews with the facilitators and supervisor of the group. The following section represents the results of ten incarcerated individuals as a narrative interpretation of their experience as a result of this group, and three mental health participants. The findings of the analyzed data included three main themes that were present across the data collected from each participant: (a) affirmation and reflection of identity; (b) connection to others and building relationships; and (c) escape from the present. Pseudonyms were used to insure confidentiality.

Affirmation and Reflection of Identity

Many of the participants reflected the benefit of using the group to help explore elements of their identity, discovering things about themselves that they did not know, finding new ways to cope, as well as finding new ways to look at things. Through exploring the theme of affirmation and reflection of identity, three subthemes arose; (a) freedom of self-expression; (b) sense of individual identity and humanness; and (c) finding a voice.

Freedom of Self-Expression. The open format of this group allowed for members to explore themselves in a safe environment, and many participants expressed a freedom that allowed them to do so. Barbra specifically explained how this was helpful to her because this group was “not closed, not specific content of alcohol and drugs” and it

was helpful that members were “not forced to stay within those lines...we could lay it all on the table.” The male group featured much more discussion than the female group, and both members expressed how they appreciated the freedom to speak their minds. Bruce noted that these discussions “made me explore the mind to find where I was going,” and often spoke how this group allowed him to look at things differently than he was used to. Clark appreciated the relief of stress related to the ability to share creativity in his work, and “let us vent and say what’s on my mind.”

Sense of Individual Identity and Humanness. Particularly in a setting such as a jail, a loss of identity can be a strong source of discomfort and loss of hope. In post-session reflection discussions, ability to feel “normal” and to “be yourself not just your jail front” was an important feature of this group. The female group spent time discussing how this treatment felt more like it was for the individuals because of the open format, there were not specific steps to follow that felt more like a generalized group therapy instead of expressing individual differences. Shiera stated that the group “didn’t feel clinical to me, there’s no right or wrong answer to a beat.” Although he only was able to participate in the first session, Tony expressed that it impacted him to see that people thought about the individuals of the group; “this group helped to bring back hope in humanity because the facilitators see us as people.”

Use of Beat and Rhythm in Self-Identity. The use of beat and rhythm was also a noted aspect of this group that helped members find a sense of identity, particularly in self-expression. Shiera often explained how this group was very out of her comfort zone, not only in having time in the spotlight, but also in the sense that she had never explored musical expression before. She noted that it was “helpful that I had to start a beat.” Shiera

often spoke rapidly and nervously when explaining how she felt; however she often stayed at surface level insights, never connecting to her emotional feelings and bodily reactions to her environment. Upon asking her to pause her story and create a beat that the group could join in, she showed signs of anxiousness expressing that she felt pressured when told to create a beat in front of the other members. Her nerves were often expressed in movements such as leg twitching and hand motions, and in this moment she ran her fingers up and down her thighs. Natasha spoke up, noting that Shiera's nervous movements *were* her beat, and the group members began mimicking the thigh-stroking motions as Shiera began speaking again. However she was creating her beat, she spoke about her heartbeat and the connection between her mind and body within her environment. The moment she stopped the movement of her hands, her words became rapid and less insightful. Some of the other participants, particularly Barbra and Diana expressed how expressing themselves through beat was "easier than words." Bruce noted that by creating a beat within sessions helped him to begin doing beats and singing more outside of the group. It helped members to find their voice without the pressure of finding specific words for how they feel, and pushing them out of their comfort zones made it easier to express themselves in other situations.

Connection to Others and Building Relationships

A recurring pattern among the data collected was building a connection with others on a level deeper than their normal interactions, particularly while incarcerated. Three subthemes arose; (a) Sense of connection to others; (b) use of beat and rhythm to aid in communication; and (c) use of writing to aid in communication.

Sense of Connection to Others. Like most therapy groups, the intimate space can help individuals connect to one another (Codrons, Bernardi, Vandoni, & Bernardi, 2014; Overy, 2012), and especially in an environment such as a jail, this connection can be very impactful (Chen, Leith, Aaro, Manger & Gold, 2016). Many of the participants, particularly in the female group expressed how they better learned to communicate with others even outside the group. Natasha stated that “I got close to people I didn’t really like before, I was able to learn more about her.” This helped her to understand her story and recognize why she did certain things that used to be annoying. Shiera noted that she even had more strength to ask for help from others outside the group, and “interacted with others that I didn’t normally interact with.” Through conversation and sharing within the group members were able to learn more about each other to build a better connection, “a lot of us are going through the same thing,” Barbra noted. The male participants recounted the same feelings of a sense of belonging and connecting to those they normally would not have, “I allowed myself to be open to others’ ideas and listen to others with similar problems...I’m not alone in this,” stated Bruce. He also noted that It was easier to talk in the Pod when normally he would not interact with certain others. There was also a sense of helping others, Bruce and Diana both found that their confidence helped them to encourage others to speak up as well, Diana specifically noted, “I feel like others were kind of tense, I helped them to find their own originality.”

Use of Beat and Rhythm in Communication. Beat and rhythm helped build connections not only with each other, but with the self as well. Clark, although he never mentioned it directly, expressed a better sense of support from the group while sharing a poem that he wrote. He asked the group to create the background beat while he read,

because he was unsure of what he felt, which each member tapped an individualized beat that represented the tone they personally received as Clark read. In discussing the experience afterwards Clark stated that he felt supported and like the group was with him as he read, which was more comfortable than just reading in silence. The beat created a sense of “being with” the reader as he shared his personal experience. Both members of the male group agreed that “the beat creates a safety net” when exploring personal thoughts and emotions. During the post-group interview with Clark, he noted how the awareness of beat “brought to the forefront the fact that our heartbeat is on the forefront, everything relates to a heartbeat, anxiety, fear, joy, all related to a heartbeat.” Steve, another member that was only able to participate in the first session also highlighted that music and rhythm is helpful in exploration and it is “good to coordinate that with self and feelings.” The female group discussions highlighted how the beats and rhythm were helpful to “feel others’ emotions” and express themselves without having to talk about it. Diana in particular noted that she felt “connected with the group by harmonizing with them musically,” and also how this helped her to learn how to “identify with how I am feeling through sounds.”

Use of Writing in Communication. Between each group, members were asked to write down their thoughts and feelings in the form of poetry, letters, or journals. Although these assignments were intended to help boost the effects of beat and exploration within the group, many individuals expressed how the writing itself helped them in different ways. Five participants noted that writing was the most beneficial aspect of a particular session, most expressing how writing has helped them better communicate with themselves and explore their own thoughts and emotions. For example, Barbra

stated that when it comes to personal emotions, it is “easier to write it than say it,” and Tony expressed how “it’s different to say it, write it, hear it.” Diana also noted how writing is “helpful to slow my thought process down” instead of being caught up in the thoughts that run through her brain on a daily basis. Two participants mentioned how it helped them to reconnect with aspects of their selves that they felt like they had lost in recent times. “I used to write all the time, but I lost it, this helped me to get back in tune with myself,” Barbra stated in relation to both the group and the process of writing. The two male participants also noted how the use of writing helped them to look at their overall self-control. Clark, who often exhibited positive attitude and used humor as a coping method, stated that putting his feelings on paper “makes me take it seriously.” Bruce, who reported that he had often had difficulties controlling his anger, was able to “stay out of [trouble] by knowing you can write it and look forward to [group].”

Escape from the Present

A predominant theme among the participants of this group was an escape from the present. Not only did the group itself provide an opportunity for a change of structure and scenery, different activities and elements of the group aided participants in removing themselves from the day to day routine of the stresses involved in incarcerated life. Three subthemes included: (a) mental relief; (b) safe place; and (c) new methods of coping

Mental Relief. The daily stresses associated with being incarcerated are a constant battle for inmates, and it can often be very difficult to find a sense of relief (Chen, Leith, Aaro, Manger, & Gold, 2016). Therapy can help individuals find sense of ease, but can also provide emotional strain when individual work is prominent.

Particularly regarding some of the activities that were a part of this group, a common theme among both the male and female group was the positivity, peace of mind and mental relief as a result of participation. It provided a sense of escape from the constant stresses of jail. Both Clark and Barbra noted a sense of lower anxiety, even outside the group. Bruce and Natasha stated that the group, particularly the guided meditation “took me out of this place.” Tony expressed how this type of group is a really good “outlet in a place like this.” Post-session discussions as well as post-group interviews consisted of many responses of positive experiences that many of the members appreciated, such as “freeing,” “motivated,” “open,” “uplifting,” “enjoyable,” and “positive.”

Safe Place. Jail can often be a difficult place to feel safe, particularly when reputations are everything, and safety is never guaranteed. Having an environment that feels safe can be a saving grace come times of stress and grief. The mental health coordinator and supervisor noted how therapy groups in general, but this group in particular can be a safe way to share emotions for inmates. In comparison to other groups, which often feature specific topics or steps of progress, this group was able to provide structure to assure a productive environment while allowing freedom for creativity and expression. In post-session discussion many participants noted that “getting out of the pod” and “getting into a neutral environment” was one of the most beneficial things about this group. Diana stated that she really appreciated the opportunity to “be goofy, and to make goofy beats.” Natasha noted that it was particularly helpful that the facilitators “don’t look at us differently in here, looking at us equal for once, even though we’re in stripes.” This provided participants with a safe environment to really explore their own creativity and express themselves without the extra pressure of incarceration;

“venting in a safe environment where we are not going to get into a fight was nice.” The male group also noted how it was a sense of relief to “laugh without defending, [and to] be with others.” Tony stated that there was an “individual group inside the jail, it was a sense of belonging inside the chaos.”

New Methods of Coping. The unstructured, expressive nature of this group could be a concern for those who need specific devices and coping methods in order to better live their lives. However there was much evidence from the participants of learning and improving their habits and thinking. Steve expressed a connection with the awareness of personal rhythm in relation to environment was something that was very important to him, particularly as he had a previous background in music. Clark gained a similar awareness, expressing that he “gained an understanding that everything revolves around a beat, I really enjoyed the focus on “life beat” rather than musical beat.” Bruce noted that he often dealt with difficulties regulating his anger, and this group helped him to re-channel and re-think about his anger, stating that he has learned that he can “use hands for something constructive in place of destruction.” He mentioned that when he gets angry at someone, he thinks about utilizing his talent for something better than for physical violence, “I can rap about punching them, and be using my hands [for beats], but I’m not punching them, I’m using them for better things.”

It was a common theme among the female participants that they were able to get along better with others. “I can bond with people and different personalities, I can work on, and rely on them, as well as read them more easily.” Noted Shiera, “we can lift each other up.” She expressed that she thinks about things more positively rather than negatively, particularly in reference to her personal journey. She stated that she has been

learning to cope without drugs and medication since being in jail, and meditation and this group has helped her to develop methods of doing so, stating that “I can do it in the future too, instead of going and using, I can stop and take a step back. I can write it down and think about it in a different way.” She noted that the experience of getting out of her comfort zone in the safety of this group, and with the support of the other girls, she feels more ready to take risks in the future. Natasha stated that she is able to think about things differently to help her keep calm, “instead of getting annoyed, I hear things as a beat.” Barbra also mentioned how the meditations in particular help her look at things differently, “it’s a different outlook, and I have a better insight...and I’m not biting my nails anymore.” She also expressed that this insight has brought a new awareness to her, she explained that she realized that she had less control over her past heroin addiction than she thought as we participated in a body scan she stated that it felt like a hit of heroin, and as much as she tried to stay in a meditative state, it felt like “he had his foot in the door and I was trying to shove him out, but he wouldn’t leave.”

Summary

There have been three main themes that express the lived experiences of the inmate participants within this group. The first theme, affirmation and reflection of identity was expressed through three sub-themes; freedom of self-expression, sense of individual identity and regaining a sense of humanness, and the use of beat and rhythm in discovering a sense of self-identity. The second theme, building relationships, found to include a sense of connection to others, and the use of beat, rhythm, and writing to enhance interpersonal communication. The last theme that was predominant among the

participants of this group was an escape from the present moment, including a sense of mental relief from the hectic life of incarceration, the sense of being in a safe place within this lifestyle, and finding new methods of coping and thinking about things differently.

DISCUSSION

Rap music has been used for personal therapeutic endeavors for many generations and has evolved into many different forms that continue to represent self-expression and internal beat. By utilizing the power of both music and language together, we can help define, discover, and communicate our individual emotional experience to those around us (Ierardi & Jenkins, 2012; Hakvoort, 2015).

Music combined with language provides a universal way to communicate the unique world that resides inside our individual minds and bodies. This study tapped into the power of rhythm and words to help us not only better understand our own experiences in relation to our environment, but it helps us to connect to others around us. Individuals in this study found that by providing a beat that represents the feeling behind their words, it was easier to connect, and to feel heard by others around them. The creation of rap music can bring together the most natural aspects of both our limbic system and physical experience of emotions, and the cognitive interpretations of these emotions, to create an emotionally rich expression that can be a very effective part of therapeutic interventions (Alvarez, 2012; Chen, Penhune, & Zatorre, 2008; Patel, 2015; Salimpoor, et. al., 2009; Tierney & Kraus, 2014). Although this study had a very limited amount of fully comprised pieces, or combined freestyle and beat creation, the elements were very much used throughout the experimental exploration of the participants. Many individuals found that through creating a beat, they were better able to recognize the rhythm of their heart beat and breathing in relation to their environment, both within and outside the group experience. As within music therapy, this intervention helped individuals to lower

their anxiety and increase their experience of positive emotions (Chang and colleagues 2015; Pelletier, 2004).

There was limited racial and ethnic diversity within this study, and as such, the historical connection of rap music and the African American community was not highlighted within this group. However, members of this group were outwardly open to other opinions and interpretations apart from their own. In the future, this type of intervention, should it host longer duration and higher participation, could better incorporate the healing nature that represents history of rap music, as well as the more modern improvised freestyle that emboldens one's emotional expression as well as the risk-taking behavior that can build not only self-esteem, but better self-awareness.

The human body has an intrinsic connection to rhythm and beat, as our senses use a variety of patterns to detect and decipher the world around us (Chen, Penhune, & Zatorre, 2008; Grahn & Rowe, 2009; Nozaradan, Peretz, Missal, & Mouraux, 2011). Activities within this group, such as "simuclap" which attempted to bring the group together by synchronizing claps with one other group member at a time while "passing" the beat around the circle. Much like the intrinsic beat entrainment represented in the study by Nozaradan, Peretz, Missal, and Mouraux (2011), individuals were able to synchronize to the same beat, both within specific activities, as well as while listening to others' written works. Although this study did not have such precise data collection such as brain scans and quantitative representation of individual experiences, self-report found that individuals did indeed find a better understanding of their emotions, as well as strategies to better cope with and influence their struggles in emotional regulation.

As with studies on group drumming and group synchronization, (Fancourt et. al., 2016; Dickerson, Robichaud, Teruya, Nagaran & Hser, 2016; Machi & Bradley, 2010; Patel, 2015), this study found that creating a beat with others can increase feelings of belonging, connection and lower anxiety. Although this study attempted to highlight the natural human connection, many participants noted the desire for actual instruments rather than using the human body. Particularly among the males, it was evident that instruments, or even a table to create beats on would make them more comfortable and more willing to explore through beat creation. The female group was much more diverse in their beat creation, utilizing not only their hands to create beats on their thighs, arms and chests, but also in creating emotionally representative beats through shuffling their feet and running fingers up and down their thighs.

There has been a number of studies incorporating rap music into therapy (Hara, 2012; Hadley & Yancy, 2012; Elligan, 2004; Tyson et. al., 2012), however this group aims to begin the utilization of separate elements of rap music within a group setting for adults. This study highlights the cathartic experience of focusing on the rhythm and expression of beat and emotions, rather than dissecting a pre-made musical piece or focusing on the lyrical creation of a song itself. As within many person-centered-approach groups which follow the group as different needs arise, this study aims to open the door into expressive freestyle both within the musical aspects, as well as the group itself in respect to both members and facilitators. Improvising in general can help develop a number of skills, and within rap therapy, it can help develop spontaneity, creativity, freedom of expression and sense of identity among group members (Hadley & Yancy, 2012; Ierardi & Jenkins, 2012). This study was just the first step in creating a protocol for

utilizing elements of rap music within expressive group therapy, and can pave the way into developing a better structure for future groups.

Data Limitations

There are several limitations to the data collected in this study. One impactful limitation is the attrition rate and number of participants in each group. Due to policies at the facility, combined with policies of ethical participant confidentiality, recruitment procedures were compromised as nine applications for consideration for this group were submitted after the first session had begun, and therefore these nine individuals could not be accepted to participate in the group. Additionally, of the ten participants that were approved and attended the first group, four (75% male) were dropped from the group after the first session due to moving housing facilities and therefore could no longer participate in the group per facility policy. This left two participants in the male group, and four participants in the female group. The small sample results in low transferability of findings.

As in most qualitative studies, the data is limited to what the researchers view as important. This could prove bias as the researcher has a personal connection and desire for the success of this group. Thematic findings are also based on the person-centered phenomenological approach of both facilitators and researchers and therefore could influence the importance of certain data points. Due to the facility policies and work with special populations, audio and video recordings were not permitted within the group. This results in a lack of direct transcription of data, and therefore primary data collection was

based on the possibly biased recollections of facilitators as well as summarized note taking based on in-group discussions.

Another limitation to the quality of data collected and participation would be the individual incentive of leaving one's cell and other motivations to participate due to escapist motivations. For example, participation in this group could be more due to a motivation to escape one's cell, rather than an authentic desire of participating in the group per se.

Facility policy also prevented complete privacy in the therapeutic environment, which could limit the effectiveness of this intervention. Throughout the sessions, particularly the male group, there were officers and other facility professionals present in the room, which likely impacts the level of comfort and risk-taking of the participants.

Although faculty advisors provided supervision and direction of data analysis, there was primarily one researcher analyzing the data, again increasing potentially bias. There are however, three data points being analyzed including facilitator response, participant response, and on-site supervisor response that help to assure a wide perspective in the qualitative data.

This study is also based off of novel ideas, and facilitated by novice counselor interns, which could have an impact on the outcome of this study. Facilitators were supervised by the on-site mental health professional, however lack of experience and wide knowledge base of interventions could have impacted the overall effectiveness of this intervention. This intervention is also based off of vaguely similar interventions, the majority of which worked with juvenile individuals, as well as general research ideas,

rather than an established protocol, which could also have an impact on the results of this study.

Applications

This study is intended to open the door to utilizing elements of rap music and the natural rhythm of the human body to help connect to the self and others, and ideally pave the way for future similar interventions. These groups have helped to begin to form what will ideally become a fully implemented therapy group involving beat and freestyle. As with other similar interventions, this intervention might be used with multiple populations.

Practical Implications

There are many successful group and individual therapy methods that have been empirically based such as music and art therapy, however it is important to continue discovering and implementing new methods in counseling. This study helps to highlight methods that are less empirically-explored, however it brings to light a new medium through which individuals can explore their inner worlds. Especially with incarcerated individuals, emotional-exploration can often be shunned, if not dangerous, particularly for men. Music has historically been a medium through which both men and women can express, explore, and relate to their emotions and personal stories. Rap in particular has been a way for oppressed individuals to find their voice and share their story. The implementation of rap and improvisation in freestyle brings both the enjoyment of music and rhythm, while tapping into the creative side that can help individuals discover

themselves in a new light. This group can help tap into this socially accepted method of emotional exploration and implement it in a safe, therapeutic environment.

Future Research

This study is ideally paving the way to begin future studies and help to create a protocol for therapy groups including elements of rap music for both incarcerated adults, as well as other populations, including adolescents and those outside of incarceration facilities. In future research, an open-group might be implemented in order to account for the attrition rate due to various factors. Although this may make group cohesion more difficult, the increased number of inmate participants and wider variety of individual talents brought into each session may make for a more productive environment, particularly in relation to beat and rhythm.

A more structured group may be beneficial to this group as well. Although the freedom of expression and space to self-explore is imperative for this type of group, the nature of beat-making and risk-taking can bring hesitancy among the members, and therefore more verbal discussion and silence occurred. Members may benefit from a more involved facilitator that provided more structure related to implementing beats and rhythm into emotional and interpersonal exploration.

In future studies, groups may be held outside of an incarcerated environment, which may allow for direct transcription in order to more accurately gather and code the data. This could provide for a more encompassing picture of participants' experience in the group. In regards to data-collection, a mixed methods approach in order to incorporate

validated measures will also be an improvement on the accuracy and replicability of this therapy group.

Summary

There are many limitations within this study, however it has helped to open the door into building a protocol for utilizing elements of rap music in group therapy. Many studies have explored the individual effects of music, language, group, drumming, and beat and rhythm in different scenarios, however none have attempted to pull all of these aspects into a single therapy group. Many future studies will need to be implemented before developing a fully realized rap therapy group such as the one in this study. Based on the results of this study, there are many benefits to participating in this type of group therapy, although many could be due to general therapy group protocol.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Consent to Participate in a Research Study **Missouri State University** **Department of Counseling, Leadership, and Special Education**

A Qualitative Study of Group Therapy Incorporating Rap Music with Inmates Conducted by Abigail Richards

Introduction

Before you agree to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the study and the procedures involved. The investigator will also explain the project to you in detail. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, feel free to ask any questions to the investigator (Abigail). If you have further questions you may contact the investigator through submitting a “Sick Call” to Mental Health free of charge.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to determine whether utilizing rap and group drumming within a therapy group can be a beneficial experience for inmates and improve general mental health symptoms such as anxiety, emotional regulation, and self-expression. This is an experimental group that has been developed by the investigator. We are hoping to gain insight as to the positive and negative effects of this group in efforts to improve the experience for future groups.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to be part of this study, you will participate in a 5-week psychotherapy group including group-drumming, song and/or poetry writing (no experience needed), and reflective conversation. Each week is designed to tap into your personal experiences, past histories, and/or emotional experience in efforts to help you gain a better understanding of yourself. Each session will last 90 minutes. At the end of each weekly session, a discussion about your personal experience will be conducted with one or two specific questions. At the end of the five weeks, a one-on-one interview will be conducted by the investigator to further evaluate your experience, and is expected to be approximately 15-30 minutes. This group is expected to have up to ten participants from your pod, as well as two mental health intern therapists. Participation in this group will not affect your standing at this Jail.

What are the risks?

This psychotherapy group includes self-disclosure and personal growth which rests on a trusting environment. There is a potential risk of re-experiencing past injuries and trauma that may cause emotional discomfort, however this will be done in a therapeutic environment followed by discussion. Should you need further assistance with any discomfort, Mental health services are available to all inmates free of charge, feel free to contact the Mental Health department through “sick call” requests for follow up services.

What are the benefits?

You may not benefit directly from this study, as this is an experimental group. However, the experience and information from this study will help you to build coping mechanisms to improve living conditions while incarcerated as well as tools to help manage stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health symptoms. You will also help to determine positive and negative aspects of this intervention for future groups following similar formats. Your participation will also benefit the field of Psychology and Counseling to aid in future endeavors to better the experiences of not only Jail inmates, but of the general population whom seek mental health assistance.

How will my privacy be protected?

The results of this study are confidential and only the investigators (Abigail, Makayla, Dr. Ussery) will have access to the information which will be kept in a locked facility at this justice center. Your data will be de-identified and kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the facilitators and supervisors (Dr. Ussery, Dr. Walker). Your name and any personal identifying information will not be used in any published reports of this research, nor will any identifying information leave this Jail. You will be provided a participation number which will be used for your data during this study, your name and personal information will not be used outside of this Jail. All information gathered during this study will be destroyed 1 year after the completion of this study.

Consent to Participate

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. If you agree to participate in this study, A Qualitative Study of Group Therapy Incorporating Rap Music with Inmates, you will be asked to sign below:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix B: Consent to Participate as Facilitator in a Research Study
Missouri State University
Department of Counseling, Leadership, and Special Education

A Qualitative Study of Group Therapy Incorporating Rap Music with Inmates
Conducted by Abigail Richards

Introduction

Before you agree to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the study and the procedures involved. The investigator will also explain the project to you in detail. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, feel free to ask any questions to the investigator (Abigail). If you have further questions you may contact the investigator at avrichards418@gmail.com

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to determine whether utilizing rap and group drumming within a therapy group can be a beneficial experience for inmates and improve general mental health symptoms such as anxiety, emotional regulation, and self-expression. This is an experimental group that has been developed by the investigator. We are hoping to gain insight as to the positive and negative effects of this group in efforts to improve the experience for future groups.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to be part of this study, you will participate in two 5-week psychotherapy groups including group-drumming, song and/or poetry writing (no experience needed), and reflective conversation. Each week is designed to tap into participants' personal experiences, past histories, and/or emotional experience in efforts to help gain a better understanding of oneself. Each session will last 90 minutes. At the end of each weekly session, a discussion about personal experience will be conducted with one or two specific questions. At the end of the five weeks, a one-on-one interview will be conducted by the investigator to further evaluate your experience, and is expected to be approximately 10-20 minutes. This group is expected to have up to ten participants from each pod, as well as the researcher-facilitator and yourself, the facilitator.

Specific Facilitator Procedures

If you agree to participate as a facilitator in this study, you will be expected to attend all weekly sessions and help to create a therapeutic, productive environment for the participants. At the end of each session, you will take notes on the discussion conducted with the participants. After each session, you will participate in a discussion with the researcher-facilitator about interpretations of the session as a whole, as well as interpretation of individual participants in the group. There will also be weekly meetings with the Supervisor (Dr. Ussery).

What are the risks?

This psychotherapy group includes self-disclosure and personal growth which rests on a trusting environment. There is a potential risk of re-experiencing past injuries and trauma that may cause emotional discomfort, however this will be done in a therapeutic environment followed by discussion.

What are the benefits?

You may not benefit directly from this study, as this is an experimental group. However, the experience and information from this study will help you to build coping mechanisms as well as experience facilitating in group therapy utilizing elements such as group-drumming, discussion, writing, and improvisation.. You will also help to determine positive and negative aspects of this intervention for future groups following similar formats. Your participation will also benefit the field of Psychology and Counseling to aid in future endeavors to better the experiences of not only Jail inmates, but of the general population whom seek mental health assistance.

How will my privacy be protected?

The results of this study are confidential and only the investigators (Abigail, co-facilitator, Dr. Ussery) will have access to the information which will be kept in a locked facility at this Justice Center. The data will be coded and kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the facilitators and supervisors (Dr. Ussery, Dr. Walker). Your name and any personal identifying information will not be used in any published reports of this research, nor will any identifying information leave this Jail. All information gathered during this study will be destroyed 1 year after the completion of this study.

Consent to Participate

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. If you agree to participate in this study, A Qualitative Study of Group Therapy Incorporating Rap Music with Inmates, you will be asked to sign below:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

Signature of Participant Facilitator

Date

Printed Name of Participant Facilitator

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

**Appendix C: Consent to Participate in a Research Study as Supervisor
Missouri State University
Department of Counseling, Leadership, and Special Education**

**A Qualitative Study of Group Therapy Incorporating Rap Music with Inmates
Conducted by Abigail Richards**

Introduction

Before you agree to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the study and the procedures involved. The investigator will also explain the project to you in detail. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, feel free to ask any questions to the investigator (Abigail). If you have further questions you may contact the investigator at avrichards418@gmail.com

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to determine whether utilizing rap and group drumming within a therapy group can be a beneficial experience for inmates and improve general mental health symptoms such as anxiety, emotional regulation, and self-expression. This is an experimental group that has been developed by the investigator. We are hoping to gain insight as to the positive and negative effects of this group in efforts to improve the experience for future groups.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to be part of this study, you will participate in supervision of two 5-week psychotherapy group including group-drumming, song and/or poetry writing (no experience needed), and reflective conversation. Each week is designed to tap into personal experiences, past histories, and/or emotional experience in efforts to help participants gain a better understanding of yourself. Each session will last 90 minutes. At the end of each weekly session, a discussion about the experience of the participants will be conducted with one or two specific questions. At the end of the five weeks, a one-on-one interview will be conducted by the investigator to further evaluate the experience of each participant, and is expected to be approximately 15-30 minutes. This group is expected to have up to ten participants from each pod, as well as two mental health intern therapists.

What are the risks?

As the facilitators are counselors-in-training, your supervision is expected to inform and observe for any malpractice or potential harm.

What are the benefits?

You may not benefit directly from this study, as this is an experimental group. However, You will help to determine positive and negative aspects of this intervention for future groups following similar formats. Your participation will also benefit the field of Psychology and Counseling to aid in future endeavors to better the experiences of not only Jail inmates, but of the general population whom seek mental health assistance.

How will privacy be protected?

The results of this study are confidential and only the investigators (Abigail, Co-facilitator, Dr. Ussery) will have access to the information which will be kept in a locked facility at this Justice Center. All data will be coded and kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the facilitators and supervisors (Dr. Ussery, Dr. Walker). Names and any personal identifying information will not be used in any published reports of this research, nor will any identifying information leave this Jail. All information gathered during this study will be destroyed 1 year after the completion of this study.

Consent to Participate

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. If you agree to participate in this study, A Qualitative Study of Group Therapy Incorporating Rap Music with Inmates, you will be asked to sign below:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix D: Post-Session Weekly Interview

1. What about today's group did you feel was beneficial?
2. What about today's group do you feel could have been improved? How?
3. What was most impactful to you personally during today's group?

Appendix E: Post-Group Individual Interview

Opening Question

1. How did you feel about the group?

Component Questions

2. What did you feel was beneficial or unhelpful specifically involving drumming/creating a beat?
3. What were your impressions on writing and sharing the lyrics, poetry and/or songwriting?

Personal Involvement and Impact

4. What did you personally do during the group that helped you?
5. How did you interact with the group?
6. Do you feel like you personally impacted the group? How so?
7. What was different about this group than past therapy groups you have participated in? How did this improve or hinder your experience/impact?
8. What do you feel like you have gained from this group experience?
9. If we were to run this group again, what would you recommend I do personally to improve the experience of the members?

Concluding Questions

10. Would you like to participate in this type of intervention again?
11. Would you recommend this intervention to others?
12. Would else would you like to add that we did not discuss?

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Institution: Missouri County Justice Center

Interviewee: _____

Interviewer: Abigail V. Richards

Interview used:

_____ A. Group Member Post-Session Weekly Interview

_____ B. Facilitator Post-Session Weekly Interview

_____ C. Post-Group Individual Interview

_____ E. Post-Group Facilitator Interview

_____ F. Post-Group Supervisor Interview

Other Topics Discussed:

Post Interview Comments or Leads:

Introductory Protocol

To assure accurate data collection, I will be taking notes during our interview. Participation in this interview is completely voluntary, you are welcome to stop at any time. Only myself, the group co-facilitator, and the two supervisors, Dr. Ussery and Dr. Walker will have access to the information gathered during sessions and interviews. I have planned this interview to last no more than 90 minutes. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. At this time, you have completed the group therapy sessions that are a part of this study. As such, we would appreciate your opinion based on your experiences within this group in order to gain a more whole perception of the effects of this group. The goal of this study has been to explore the effects of elements of rap music on a therapeutic group for incarcerated adults and to identify both positive and negative factors within this group to better form this group for future endeavors. We value your opinion as a participant in this group and would appreciate both positive and constructive feedback related to your personal experience in this group. Your personal information will be kept confidential.

Post-session interviews:

Thank you all for participating today. Before we dismiss you back to your pod, I would like to spend the last twenty minutes discussing your experience this week. This will be an open discussion, so I ask everyone to be considerate of all opinions. I would also like you to be as honest as possible to ensure I get an accurate perception of your experiences today. This information will continue to be kept confidential, however I will be taking notes during this portion of the group to ensure I am able to document all thoughts and opinions brought up in this discussion.

Appendix G: Post-Group Facilitator Interview

Opening Question

1. How did you feel about the group?

Component Questions

2. What did you feel was most helpful or most therapeutic about this intervention overall?

Participant Involvement and Impact

3. What did you think we as facilitators did during the group that you think helped or hurt the most?
4. If we were to run this group again, what would you recommend we as facilitators do differently to improve the experience of the members?
5. What did you feel was uniquely beneficial about this intervention in comparison to other groups you have participated in or facilitated in the past?
6. Did you notice any specific populations that benefitted more or less than others?

Concluding Questions

7. Do you feel like this group has been overall a success?
8. What do you feel like you have gained from this group experience?
9. What else would you like to add that we did not discuss?

Appendix H: Post-Group Supervisor Interview

Opening Question

1. Based on what you observed during supervision, how did you feel about the group?

Component Questions

1. What about this group do you feel was most beneficial specifically for this population?

Facilitator Involvement and Impact

2. Based on what you observed during supervision, what do you think the facilitators did that improved or hindered the group?
3. What did you notice that the facilitators gained most from conducting and participating in this group experience?
4. If we were to run this group again, what would you recommend I do personally to improve the experience of the members?

Concluding Questions

5. Is this intervention something you would be willing to implement at this facility again?
6. Based on what you have observed, is there a specific population you might recommend for this group in the future?
7. Would else would you like to add that we did not discuss?

Appendix I: Facilitator Post-Session Weekly Interview

1. What did you feel was most beneficial in the group?
2. What did you feel needed to be different about today's group?
3. What did you notice had the most and least participation?
4. What do you think you and/or I, as the facilitators, could have done differently?

GROUP SESSION SIGN UP

Class: Therapy to a Beat

This group will meet once a week for five weeks and will be using poetry and music to help lower anxiety and improve emotional regulation.

No experience needed!

If you would like to be considered for participation in this group or if you have further questions, you may contact the facilitator, Abigail, through submitting a “request to staff member” from the pod officer on duty

Please do not sign up if you have an expected release date within five weeks.

You must attend the first session of group or you will not be called out for future sessions.