Music Therapy and Evolving Sense of Hope Among At-Risk Adolescent Boys: A Qualitative Group Case Study Based on Yalom's Principles of Group Psychotherapy

Jacklyn P. Neforos
University of Dayton, stander@udayton.edu

Joy M. Willenbrink
University of Dayton, stander@udayton.edu

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Music Therapy and Evolving Sense of Hope among At-Risk Adolescent Boys: A Qualitative Group Case Study Based on Yalom’s Principles of Group Psychotherapy

Co-Investigators: Jacklyn Neforas, student; Joy Willenbrink, student
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Susan Gardstrom, MT-BC

Introduction
The evolution of group music therapy with at-risk young men will be described emphasizing the role of the Therapeutic Factors of group psychotherapy, as termed by Yalom (2005). The clients participating in music therapy were residents of Alma’s Place, a homeless facility for clients ages 15-18 with behavioral, emotional, and mental health issues. Some research on mental health and homelessness has shown that being homeless can diminish hope as a life-driving force (Hughes, et. al., 2010). One definition of hope is a “positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder, 2000). Music therapy previously had not been a component of treatment at Alma’s Place. Following an agreement with the University of Dayton, a music therapy practicum site for senior students was established, and music therapy groups were held twice weekly.

Study Focus
1. How were Yalom’s Therapeutic Factors apparent throughout group music therapy?
2. How did group dynamics and functioning support progress toward therapeutic aims and increase a sense of hope among residents?

Method
Design: Qualitative Group Case Study

Participants
1. 10 clients ages 15 - 18
2. Varied musical preferences and backgrounds
3. Common past experiences:
   o Gang associations
   o Drug Involvement
   o Abusive and/or neglectful environments
   o Homelessness/Poverty
   o Criminal Offenses

Goals
Treatment was client centered and based upon evident and emergent needs of the group. The following became goals of the treatment process:

Intrapersonal Goals
- Increase ability to express emotions
- Increase sense of hope (agency and pathways)
- Improve ability to use music making as an expressive medium

Interpersonal Goals
- Improve social interaction
- Improve ability to music as a group
- Improve communication within music

Music Therapy Methods
1. Receptive: song communication (Bruscia, 1998)
2. Improvisation: referential and non-referential Instrumental
3. Re-creative: arranging parts in completed composition, percussion rock “groove”
4. Composition: collaborative, free form composition

Yalom’s Therapeutic Factors in Treatment
- “Cohesiveness”
  o Musical arranging of group composition
  o Free form improvisation, clients initiating sharing instruments
- “Universality”
  o Composition of chorus
- “Recapitulation of primary family unit”
  o Facilitation of composition process by SMTs
  o Reliable and predictable presence of SMTs
  o Provision of a safe and accepting environment for expression.
- “Altruism”
  o R offering to teach others the composition and/or how to play an instrument
  o Other group members encouraging B to participate in music experiences and validating his contributions
  o Other group members reinforcing D’s development of a positive self image
- “Existential Factors”
  o Considering how his actions would affect future generations, especially his unborn child
- “Catharsis”
  o S’s outburst of crying and revealing of emotions about his sister
- “Socializing Techniques”
  o Group response to B’s interruptive behavior, encouraging positive changes

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Procedures
1. Two 45-minute sessions per week
2. Initially, sessions were led by two SMTs and supervised by a faculty MT-BC. Eventually, the two SMTs led independently.
3. Typical session structure:
   a. Introduction
   b. Description of music therapy (if needed)
   c. Warm-up experience
   d. Core experience
   e. Summary/close

OUR STRUGGLES COME TO OVERCOME

Verse 1 (rapped):
1. I sit back and I listen, like this, and reminisce
2. of times when it was hard in the hood
3. I see God given blessings to people all around,
4. but it seems all of mine come from underground.
5. A mother’s love for her son, never was it there,
6. so I resorted to the streets who showed me they would care.
7. When you’ve only got two reasons to live,
8. you hold the ones you got close to your heart.
9. Even though you try to never let them leave.
10. you never even know when they’re gonna go.
11. Gotta keep my mind set, start making me strong.
12. You can’t get close to someone for too long.

Discussion
During treatment, a few Therapeutic Factors were consistently present as dynamic forces of change: initiative behavior, interpersonal learning, and self-understanding. However, “imparting information” and “instillation of hope” were not recognized during treatment. Because psycho-educational techniques were not employed during music therapy treatment, direct learning did not occur. Although sense of hope appeared to increase among group members, instilling hope, as defined by Yalom was not observed. This factor presents when group members are at varying stages of treatment and members of the group serve as examples of success. Since the group was mostly homogenous in regard to stage of treatment, this factor was not evident.

Although “instillation of hope” as a Therapeutic Factor was not directly observed, anecdotal evidence and observations by the SMTs indicated an increase in the overall sense of hope in the group. For example, an increase in sense of agency was evidenced by increased engagement and involvement in music therapy over the course of treatment. An increase in perception of pathways was epitomized by the final chorus of “Our Struggles Come to Overcome” in which the group members display their ability to see opportunities for positive change.

Limitations
Although effort was made to make therapeutic decisions based on client needs, treatment did take place within the context of an undergraduate music therapy practicum. Thus, methods used were somewhat influenced by professional development needs of the SMTs.

Conclusion
Based on conclusions drawn from this study, the authors recommend that further investigation be performed on the topic of group dynamics during the composition process. An additional topic that merits further research is possible unique properties of rap in the therapeutic context, especially in composition.

Literature Cited