How Does Music Therapy Affect College Students?

Briana Kaiser

Submission to the School of Liberal Studies and Continuing Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

Purchase College

State University of New York

May 2022

Instructor: Ursula Heinrich

Abstract

Background: First use of music therapy was in the 1800s. The experiment was used in New York at an institute for music to try and alter dream states in psychotherapy. Music therapy has grown since when it was first founded. Everett Thayer Gaston was a trained psychologist called the father of music therapy and helped expand the therapy. Music is a massive tool that humans use daily to overcome social bonding, self-expression, pass time, entertainment, and many more.

Objective: This study aims to identify how music therapy can affect college students in a positive or negative way.

Design and Method: The research is a qualitative and descriptive study. Finding out this information, Purchase College Library databases were used. All the articles were peer-reviewed and found on: Academic Search Complete. ProQuest, Academic One File, and Gale. When conducting the literature search had to look for opposing viewpoints. The questions this research aims to address are: *How does music therapy affect college students?*

Results: If you are constantly listening to songs about sex, drugs, and alcohol, that can affect your mind. These findings are significant because college kids can take this knowledge and discover their positive and negative triggers if they struggle at home or school. Beliefs and opinions are a big part of this equation because some might only listen to Christian music and say it's calming, while others can find scream music calming. Music therapy affects the mind of college students based on their preferences and what they relate to positively.

Conclusions: Music therapy affects the mind of college students based on their preferences and what they relate to positively. This therapy can include but is not limited to writing or singing songs, playing an instrument, western music, exchanging information using music, and more. Students need to find out what music can negatively affect them to stay away.

Keywords: Music therapy, college students, college, music, harmful, helpful, history, and college students.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Music and college students go hand in hand regarding the health of their minds. Mental health disease is at an all-time high for youth and young adults. Music is crucial for the mental health of college students because it often influences their view of the world. Music education has also been proven to help mental health in college students (Li, 2021). Music has become a catalyst for the improvement of college students' mental health and college experience. Music can improve mood, fight depression and anxiety, and improve self-esteem (Pierce, 2015). However, music therapy, like anything else, comes with its dangers.

With music there, it is an endless stream of cheerful songs, but some songs could drive people even further into depression. Our brains are very susceptible to music, and there is much popular music. Currently, this music can bring people down, whether it be depressive lyrics or promoting a toxic lifestyle. Some songs even go as far as talking about committing suicide. Are these the songs that our college students should listen to? I don't think these students should listen to these types of music. The music enforces and validates what the student is feeling. Imagine being depressed and listening to a depressing song. The depressive song will make you more depressed and could even trigger the person’s trauma. Instead, listening to classical or feel-good music can stray away from those depressive episodes.

Reasoning

As mental illness continues to rise in America and we continue to find new pathways for treatment, it is. This research aims to address the following questions: After the pandemic, people seem to be acting irrationally. Expanding the knowledge of music therapy can be a catalyst to help prevent the rise in mental illness that is afflicting college students.

Expectations

The literature review will take a deeper look inside the research question. First, the background and history of music therapy will be spoken about. Next, the methodology is in chapter 3 of the study and explains how it was performed. The final chapters will show the results of the research question and the status of the study.

Research Question:

The study will be focused on the main question:

RQ#1: How does music therapy affect college students?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Music therapy has been spoken about since the 1780s, with its first use in the 1800s. The experiment was used in New York at an institute for music to try and alter dream states in psychotherapy. However, music therapy has grown since when it was first founded. Everett Thayer Gaston was a trained psychologist called the father of music therapy and helped expand the therapy. Music is a massive tool that humans use daily to overcome social bonding, self-expression, pass time, entertainment, and many more.

Music can help develop social, emotional, language, and even intellectual skills starting at a young age. The brain is fully developed at the age of 25. The research will be focused on students in college. This research aims to dive deep and discover the positives of music therapy affecting college students. The opposite viewpoint will be looking if music therapy can be harmful. People also have opposing views and believe music can create confusion, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and many more.

HISTORY

Humans have had a fascination with music for centuries. Many Greek philosophers have written about music and its therapeutic effects. However, music therapy hadn't been written explicitly about until the 18th century (Zanders, 2018). Then in the 1940s, music therapy had become an official clinical profession in which doctors were taught and trained. E. Thayer Gaston wrote the first book on music therapy, describing three principles as a foundation for the practice (Zanders, 2018). In the late 80s, music therapy was definitively described and separated from music in therapy. The distinction between music as therapy versus music in treatment has been a major focus for the practice during the past thirty years. Over that same period, there have also been a plethora of studies on music's effect on the brain. These studies have been used to

develop further and understand the practice of music therapy. Since then, music therapy has developed many methods, components, and subsections (Zanders, 2018). As music therapy continues to grow and popularize itself, More studies and developments will be made.

Music therapy is a technique for humans to improve their life by using music and its various components as a medium (Haase, 2012). Music therapy is used individually or with others. The therapy assists in numerous aspects of human lives, including physical, emotional, spiritual, and many more. Humans connect with others also their inner self very passionately through music. Music therapy is the professional use that attaches music and its power to help people in an alternative way. This therapy is not necessarily just about the sound of the songs. Generally, this type of therapy is about tapping into a person's relationship with music and self, thus opening them up to improve their lives. Music therapy is a great alternative to talking therapy (Haase, 2012). Music is an exceptional way to indirectly open someone's intellect and emotions. This therapy can include but is not limited to writing or singing songs, playing an instrument, western music, exchanging information using music, and more. These various music therapy techniques can help an individual change their mood, develop a positive mindset, relax, and develop systems to relieve stress or even cope with issues.

Music therapy can be broken up into four separate categories. These categories are communication-accentuated music therapy, neuropsychologically accentuated music therapy, learning theoretically accentuated music therapy, and psychodynamically accentuated music therapy (Ahonen-Eerikäinen, 2009). Communication accentuated music therapy encourages communication in a setting where music can be used as a talking point or a comforting tool. In this specific form of music therapy, sometimes control over the music is given simply to tempt the patient into communication. Neuro-psychologically associated music therapy is absorbed in

the sensory experience of music and neurological pathways in the brain. Our brain can use definite sensory experiences to trigger different responses equivalent to verbalism and the resurgence of memories. This form of music therapy takes advantage of this ability of the brain, using music as a catalyst for specific sensory responses. The learning theoretically accentuated music therapy method is a very effortless concept. Music therapy in this form directly means using music as a tool for learning. Therefore, this can mean using music to teach behavior or stimulating the brain while learning. Psychodynamically accentuated music therapy utilizes music to help someone connect with their inner self and emotions more indirectly. This form of music therapy also helps people learn to sort through and control their feelings better (Ahonen-Eerikäinen, 2009).

Instruments

When clients first step into a music therapy space, they are faced with a big decision of what instrument they want to use or avoid. Generally, this is not just a random choice; it was studied that information is gathered based on the choice of an instrument a client decides (Gilboa & Almog, 2017). Instruments often have a subconscious meaning in the client's minds and are categorized as an extension of themselves. The identifying explanation of an instrument can change based on various factors. However, there can still be information drawn from that choice. There can be a sensory reason for an individual picking a specific instrument (Gilboa & Almog, 2017). For example, one client would choose to play the wind chime at the end of sessions because they connect with wind chimes and peace. A symbolic example of this phenomenon is a client who chose the flute because the instrument is linked to life and death.

Musical instruments are the key components in all practices of musical therapy. How an instrument affects the treatment depends on the individual client and the context surrounding the

instrument. Often, an individual's choice of an instrument can be linked with their gender and sexuality (Halstead & Rolvsjord, 2015). Studies show that musical instruments are not just passive objects but hold a deeper meaning to the person using them. The electric guitar is a prime example of how instruments can betide to gender and sexuality. The electric guitar has been linked to masculine energy and is mostly chosen by men. Often when females choose the guitar, it is to express some type of gender disruption (Halstead & Rolvsjord, 2015). This concept is just an example of the kind of information that can be gathered by a client's choice of instrument.

College Students & Music Therapy

In recent years therapy has become more commonly used and has grown exponentially, developing with new techniques and methods. Music therapy has explicitly been evolving and developing more popular at a rapid pace. Music therapy has become very popular among college students. College students are revealed to have positive results using music therapy as a tool to fight stress and improve mood. Among college students, they are being discovered that music therapy could regulate brain activity and stimulate strong emotions in the brain (Hou, 2022). Using music therapy to regulate brain activity does not limit itself to only the time the therapy is utilized; it helps an individual develop emotional maintenance and regulation consistently throughout the day. For college students, music therapy also allows itself to be a medium for the communication of emotions. For students having struggle expressing their feelings is a lot. Some have emotions that are too hard to describe; music can be helpful as a second language. This form of therapy has shown to be exceedingly efficient and effective when performed correctly (Hou, 2022). In a time where college students are more pressured than regularly, and mental health is at an all-time low, music therapy serves as a solution.

Studies have shown that musical therapy can cause neurochemical changes in the body over sustained periods. In addition, group music therapy has demonstrated improved social connection and psychological well-being (Clements-Cortés & Pascoe, 2020). This form of music therapy has also been linked to increased self-esteem and self-awareness. Over the past few years, music therapy has furthermore proved to help early people with neurological disorders.

Throughout the years, contrasting artists or music genres have been protested due to their obstructive effects on people's minds. The songs can induce depressive thoughts, incite violence, or promote problematic lifestyles to the listener (North & Hargreaves, 2006). Therefore, music can be categorized under problem music. Music stimulates the brain in many ways. Today's music has pushed the boundaries of what can and cannot be spoken about. When it comes to music therapy, especially for college students, it becomes very problematic when they are granted the power to choose the music they listen to. Most of the popular music today can be categorized under problem music. These song choices can push college students even further down a negative path. Problem music has been associated with things like self-harm and suicide. Several studies have also shown that humans listening to problem music are more likely to commit acts like shoplifting and illegal drugs (North & Hargreaves, 2006). This study demonstrates that having college students rely on music to sort out their thoughts can be problematic. Even if a song is not meant to be depressing, it can promote lifestyle choices leading to depression.

Chapter 3: Methodology

College students are interested in learning music, so music therapy can play an important role in college students' mental health (Hou, 2022). Furthermore, music is "easy to be accepted by college students…individual music psychotherapy, and group music counseling activities…can help college students" (Hou, 2022, p. 1) with their emotions, conflicts, and personality improvement. Therefore, mental health education in colleges and universities can apply music therapy effectively. This research aims to discuss how music can affect the minds of individuals. This research is a qualitative and descriptive study. With feedback and recommendations from Professor Heinrich,-the research topic was narrowed to how music therapy can affect college students. When finding out this information, Purchase College Library databases were used. All the articles were peer-reviewed and found on: Academic Search Complete. ProQuest, Academic One File, and Gale. The keywords conducted in the search on the database were: *music therapy, college students, college, music, harmful, helpful, history, and college students*.

When conducting the literature search had to look for opposing viewpoints. A surprising number of articles were available to research, which made the selection process more difficult. The process of selecting articles was complicated because of the different viewpoints on the topic. With so many different views on the topic, narrowing down the selections was strenuous. The Purchase College Library gave thousands of articles on the topic. Selecting articles about music therapy and college students was extremely difficult due to many articles on how music therapy can help different types of patients with disabilities or illnesses. Since music therapy is very broad, many niche articles specify certain groups and music therapy in particular scenarios. The focus of this study is college students. After finding general articles about college

students and music therapy, the search needed to be for articles that did not promote the use of music therapy. The literature search was used for this search, and it yielded several articles.

I have been in the music industry for a couple of years. In the industry, you get to meet all types of personalities. When working at my music industry job, I connected to a man named Tyrone. Tyrone and I worked closely together because our chemistry was a dynamic duo. We would constantly talk about music therapy, and how much of great influence music can be on individuals. Tyrone and I also talked about how certain music can have a harmful effect on the brain. Being in the music industry, it is no secret how Satanic Music can be and how it can affect the younger generation. Tyrone and I spoke about how music is like a drug and is mind-altering, and can lead you to poor decisions. This talk led me to think about the topic of music therapy and the college student for my Senior Capstone. Music therapy can vary in many ways from one person to another. Music is not a set-in-stone medium, and many variables account for what a person wants to listen to at that moment. Music has a significant influence on a person's brain in many ways. That is why music intake should be monitored and is very powerful. Unfortunately, there were limitations during the timeframe of this study which took place over 30 weeks. Time was the most significant issue when doing this research as it is an extensive process. If there were more time-would have conducted-interviews and asked college students what they thought about music therapy and how it may have benefited them.

Chapter 4: Results

The topic question is how music therapy can affect college students. Music serves as a point of contact to promote expression. This research is being executed by taking a deeper look at the therapy side. The study aims to discover both music therapy's positive and negative effects. The database provided numerous articles on music therapy and college students. Some articles did have different viewpoints, which helped the research topic question.

Using multiple articles from the database, “Problem music and self-harming” is one of the articles that was found. The study searched for music like hip-hop, rap, hard rock, and punk. Overall, the problem music did not lead to self-injuring thoughts. Although problem music can be associated with these thoughts and behaviors, the researchers found that the relationship is formed by other factors, which ended the conclusion.

Another article called “Why that instrument?” talks about how clients get to decide which instruments they want to use or avoid. This concept is because the instrument can sometimes have a subconscious meaning and be picked out because of a sensory reason. This choice is very important to the client as the therapist wants to make sure that they have a positive outcome.

Speaking with a coworker in the music industry, Tyrone mostly spoke about how music can surely affect the mind of young adults and be very influential. Tyrone has been in the music industry for many years and saw how music could affect others. Tyrone is in the hip-hop industry, which leads to sex, drugs, and being out of control. He attended many concerts and has been to lots of venues. Tyrone also has faith, so he never got stuck in that atmosphere but always kept close to his Christian religion.

Chapter 5: Discussions

The core purpose of the research was to find out how music therapy affects college students. This research had numerous opposite viewpoints. Music therapy follows with plenty of psychology behind it. During the research, it was discovered that music came down to the client's preference, including instruments. Music can positively or negatively affect the client's brain when a certain instrument, genre, or meaning proceeds in the direction of a song. The therapist is trained to meet the needs of the client's preference and make it a safe space for them. Beliefs and opinions are a big part of this equation because some might only listen to Christian music and say it's calming, while others can find scream music calming. Tyrone and I have been in the music industry and see the adverse effects of hip hop on people. He has been in the industry much longer, so he experienced more. If you are constantly listening to songs about sex, drugs, and alcohol, that can affect your mind. These findings are significant because if college kids struggle at home or in school, they can take this knowledge and start finding out their positive and negative triggers.

Now What?

Music therapy should be associated with the college school districts. However, the college students themselves would first have to find out what type of music they like to listen to because it's all based on their preference and what instrument can trigger a certain emotion. I believe that furthermore research can go into this and branched out to not only college students but high school, even down to Elementary school. While conducting this research, I found many other articles on how music therapy can affect babies, people with all types of disabilities, pregnant moms, and much more. In conclusion, music therapy affects the mind of college students based

on their preferences and what they relate to positively. They also need to find out what music can negatively affect them to stay away.

References

Ahonen-Eerikäinen, H. (2009). A qualitative study is a different form of music therapy and the working styles of music therapists. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 8(2), 156–167.

Clements-Cortés, A., & Pascoe, H. (2020). Music and music therapy to support mental health and wellness. *Canadian Music Educator*, *62*(1), 59–62.

Gilboa, A., & Almog, Y. (2017). Why that instrument? A bibliographic study of the reasons tools are chosen by music therapy clients. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, *26*(5), 411–431. https://doi.org/10.1080/08098131.2016.1272625

Haase, U. (2012). *Thoughts on WFMT's Definition of Music Therapy*, *21*(2), 194–195.

Halstead, J., & Rolvsjord, R. (2015). The gendering of musical instruments: What is it? Why does it matter to music therapy? *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, *26*(1), 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/08098131.2015.1088057

Hou, J. (2022). Effective ways for college students' mental health education based on music therapy. *Journal of Healthcare Engineering*, *2022*, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3031064 https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/5423459

Li, J. (2021). A study on the application of music education to improve college students' mental health in the context of 5G. *Wireless Communications and Mobile Computing*, *2021*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/5423459

North, A. C., & Hargreaves, D. J. (2006). Problem music and self-harming. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 36(5), 582–590. https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.2006.36.5.582

Pierce, D. (2015). Redefining music appreciation: Exploring the power of music. *The College Music Symposium*, *55*. https://doi.org/10.18177/sym.2015.55.sr.10871

Zanders, M. L. (2018). Music as therapy versus music in therapy. *Journal of Neuroscience Nursing*, *50*(4), 218–219. https://doi.org/10.1097/jnn.0000000000000379