

Music Therapy and Recovery in the Treatment of Adolescent Eating Disorders, 2008-2018

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Abstract

In an attempt to end the stigma towards unconventional methods of therapy, research on music therapy and its rehabilitative connections with eating disorders is imperative to the academic and medical community. Through a series of qualitative analyses of blog posts, discussion boards, and forum-based social platforms, the role of music in medicine for adolescents with diagnosed patterns of disordered eating will be examined and analyzed. Upon completion, this research will fill the literary gap in the scholarly conversation in an attempt to shed light upon unconventional art-based therapies.

Over the course of one year, qualitative data was collected via narrative analysis from 15 sources to build a repertoire of information pertinent to the connection music therapy has on adolescent eating disorders. This data fell within the parameter of a 10 year span (2008 - 2018). These sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, and blogs/discussion boards/forums from both patients and music therapists alike. The parameters of this narrative analysis are exclusive to both patients and music therapists. For patients, parameters are as follows: 1) American and of adolescent age between 2008 - 2018, 2) officially diagnosed with Anorexia nervosa and/or Bulimia nervosa, and 3) treated for eating disorder

with music therapy within the aforementioned 10-year gap. For music therapists, parameters are as follows: 1) certified music therapists by the American Music Therapy Association, and 2) treated patients (see patient parameters above) diagnosed with Anorexia nervosa and/or Bulimia nervosa as categorized and defined by the DSM-V.

Within the ten-year span between 2008 - 2018, the United States witnessed a surge in two areas: the use of journal-style, blog-based platforms (Brook, 2020), and diagnoses of eating disorders in adolescents across the country (Gilboa, 2017). In order to view how music therapy has directly influenced eating disorder recovery in the

technological age, this specific timeframe was put into place as an opportunity to connect the relevance of online sharing to a rapidly growing illness among American adolescents. With both “internet diaries” and eating disorders on the rise, popular blog-based, freeform social media platforms like tumblr.com, a platform used in this analysis, became reservoirs of information for adolescent psychological researchers.

Out of the 15 sources cited in this narrative analysis, 9 of them were first-hand accounts on how music therapy influenced eating disorder recovery in American adolescents between 2008 - 2018. In order to abstain from bias, both positive and negative experiences were collected and expanded upon. This was done not as a means to push for music therapy as a rehabilitative tool above other therapies, but rather to increase awareness for such unconventional therapies and the effects it might have in relation to previous past experiences. These first-hand accounts were collected from blogs, forums, and discussion boards such as Tumblr.com, EDtreatmentreviews.com, and EmilyProgram.com.

CONCLUSION

By the conclusion of the data collection period, 9 first-hand blog-, forum- and discussion board-based accounts of adolescents diagnosed with Anorexia nervosa and/or Bulimia nervosa between 2008 – 2018 were successfully analyzed.

After the qualitative analyzation of these posts, it can be concluded that many patients benefited from the rehabilitative services it provided. From creating uplifting playlists and connecting emotions to music, to playing music as a coping mechanism and putting mental-illness-inspired poetry to melodies, music therapy changed the lives of every individual in this analysis in some way or another. Every patient who posted an account of their experience had something positive to say about the therapy, and though a few mentioned negatives and/or the treatment resulted in negative/relapse in behavior, each patient was influenced by the art-based therapy as a whole.

In conclusion, from 15 cited sources ranging from patient to therapist, blogs to peer-reviewed articles, and relapse to recovery, every patient involved in this analysis somehow made a connection between music therapy and their recovery from disordered eating. Patients’ posts ranged from before, during, and after music therapy treatment over the course of their battle to recovery, as did the posts of music therapists who worked with similar patients. The biggest conclusion to be drawn from this qualitative narrative analysis is that every life was changed over the course of music therapy used as a rehabilitative tool in adolescent eating disorder treatment, including the lives of the music therapists themselves.

References

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