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Applications of Music for Migrants

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Abstract

The importance of music for health and wellbeing dates back to antiquity. Its role in society as a whole, but also on an individual level, has remained seminal, and its therapeutic efficacy is indisputable whether it is part of larger group-based activities or for personal emotion regulation. Music therapy is an eminent resource in building cohesion in and between groups. Music is often considered a universal language; this, combined with its capability to address psychological, physical, social, and spiritual issues, lends itself to therapeutic appositeness. This can be seen in individuals and groups who have undergone huge upheaval, whether geographical or otherwise. This chapter addresses the use of music therapy with migrants, methods and interventions applied in such situations, and the potentials in treating symptoms resultant of such physical, emotional, and cultural upheaval.

Keywords: music therapy, migrants, music, and communication

Applications of Music for Migrants

With current possibilities for worldwide travel, *intra-* and *intercultural* exchange has become an increasingly important topic in today's society. Several issues arise relating to the political ramifications of mass forced migration or asylum seeking, however when focusing on other reasons for migration – such as the search for employment – issues such as identity formation, cultural fusion, and personal and group expression nevertheless remain integral. Indeed, around 3% of the world's population is migrants (Castles & Miller, 2009) and we are urged to consider how migration influences our conceptualization of community and indeed music (Phelan, 2012).

The way in which indigenous music is introduced to a new culture may be seen as a metaphorical and artistic representation of the introduction of the “other”. Immigrants in Europe have been seen solely as workers and were not expected to be a stakeholder in arts or culture. This has developed over generations to unveil their influence on multiculturalism. The fusion of their histories with the receiving community such as in stories of migration and/or discrimination, cultural fusion, and their unique way of influencing musical output and artistic exchange, may be shown in examples such as the incorporation of Jazz music into mainstream American popular culture (Martiniello & Lafleur, 2008). The fluidity of music and its change under various influences becomes increasingly complex the more influences are imposed upon it (Phelan, 2012). Yet, the question arises: how can music be utilized as a means of helping migrants become a member of their adoptive culture? This chapter addresses how cultural fusion can be compared to musical output, how it can be both creative as well as a tool for creating connections between individuals, a means of understanding ourselves and others in contexts of migration, and how music

– the universal language – can be a way to traverse barriers in communication.

Community music initiatives are presented as a way to contextualize these concepts, highlighting how music-making encourages and fosters self-discovery, socializing, and bonding.

Music in Communication

Juliette Alvin – a pioneer in music therapy – considered music a means of discovering oneself. Playing or engaging in music without the imposition of rules and regulations displays our characters, pathologies, and inner conflicts/issues as a sonic product (Kim, 2016). This product is a representation of one's inner being and is translated into a language that others can more easily comprehend. Music may thus be considered a *lingua franca*, which displays the delicate nuances of expressing emotions and experiences.

Understanding how individuals are affected by geographical, social, and emotional change helps decrease the divide between “us and the other.” Creating a therapeutic space and relationship conducive to change through creative output and communication helps reduce this divide and affords self-discovery and support during a time of change. Music therapy is one such therapeutic and creative process used with migrants.

Music has long been used as a medium for therapy – both within clinical settings or used for individual emotion regulation (Wigram, Nygaard Pedersen, & Bonde, 2002). However, even though there has been relatively little research on the use of music therapy with migrants, several aspects are to be considered. Although these aspects are nonetheless important in clinical work as such, cultural background and its effects on therapeutic relationship building may be especially important as a focus within this particular context (Hunt, 2005). Additionally, identity formation –

or rather identity reconstruction – and the new environment, peer acceptance, and migrants’ experiences of being such are also to be considered.

Migrants are often viewed as problems for the receiving country and portrayed as victims (Kiwani & Meinhof, 2011). The narrative presented as regards how migrants are or wish to be perceived may be somewhat taut, as communication between the “host” country and the “visitors” may be hindered by cultural, social, or linguistic differences. Music – often considered a universal language – helps to break down these barriers, working towards creating social harmony.

Adaptation

The process of acculturation (Kim, 2001) – our process of learning social norms and adapting to elements of a host society– begins when one enters a new culture. This includes the *un*learning of familiar customs and identities to be replaced with the new. According to Kim, forming a new identity requires, to a certain extent, losing our old one; a process of acculturation through deculturation. However, this definition and conceptualization of this process eludes the ability of humans to react to new situations based on previous knowledge and experiences, how we as humans learn by experience. By dismissing that which was learned as children and starting the process from the beginning would mean that we are to define our world view and ourselves as only relative to the adoptive culture, rather than using the past experiences as a means of broadening our knowledge when combined and fused with experiences we encounter in our future. This reductionist approach ignores our ability to adapt – Darwin’s theory of evolution propagated nature’s ability to adapt to new situations based on a change in its environment, meaning that change and learning from and developing from previous scenarios are necessary for adapting to one’s new environment. We do not forget or dismiss what we have previously learned, rather use

that knowledge as a calibration tool. Previous experiences and learned behaviors are the basis from which we can move towards future understanding and communication. As Croucher and Kramer (2017) highlighted, cultural adaptation does not account for how the “other” impacts the adoptive culture. The abandonment of one’s previous cultural knowledge in an attempt to assimilate disregards the process through which both “host” and “newcomer” go (ibid.). For migrants, music’s place in cultural and personal identity acts as a means to opening dialog and expression of both “new” and “old” cultures.

Music as a Tool in Cultural Adaptation

Music does not only serve the purpose of entertainment; rather the effects reach much farther. Music’s role in rites or rituals, religious practices, and military arousal, to name a few, show the pertinence of music application for regulating and establishing coherency between and among groups of people (Spintge & Droh, 1987, p.12). Indeed, Stige (2015) insisted that culture is not only a construct that influences our behavior, but is also an integral part of human interaction and creativity. Taking this thought further, music is not only a tool that can be used to mold us and our behaviors, rather can also be used as a means of understanding ourselves via human and musical interaction, with cultural cohesion, communication, and comprehension at the core.

Music can be used both by individuals outside of the therapeutic setting as part of everyday life, e.g. adolescents using music listening as a method of emotion regulation (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007), or within clinical music therapy practice itself (Moore, 2013). Knowledge on how to regulate or elicit specific emotional reactions, however, is needed for regulatory music to be effective. In this vein, preferred music produces desirable activation, whilst complex, dissonant music with

surprising musical events can be considered as inducing undesired activation (ibid.). These are not as universal as once thought; the cultural ties one has to music are instrumental.

The therapeutic use of music has often been used in nursing practice in the United States however the idea that certain musics are universally liked and equally therapeutic has pervaded. This has also presumed that others hold similar beliefs and values, if this fundamental universality is present (Good, Picot, Salem, Chin, Picot, & Lane, 2003). In fact, these authors explained that there are significant cultural differences in musical preference regarding therapeutic purposes and the use of music for pain relief. For example, orchestral and popular piano music were important to Caucasian Americans in this respect, whilst jazz was most frequently chosen by African Americans, followed by gospel music used for the same purpose (ibid.).

Much of previous research on creativity and migration relating to music has focused on song lyrics (Bailey & Collyer, 2006). There is a strong connection between song writing/composition and social experiences, as both may be driven by either positive or negative emotional experiences as well as identity. Lomax (1959) expressed this connection succinctly in the ability of music to serve as a function of society (p. 929):

...from the point of view of its social function, the primary effect of music is to give the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolizes the place where he was born, his earliest childhood satisfactions, his religious experience, his pleasure in community doings, his courtship and his work—any or all of these personality-shaping experiences.

His explanation underlines the importance of one's roots as a facet of personal experiences – one's way of understanding one's own place within one's own culture and community. In entering a new culture, a new society, one's past may inevitably become a source of comfort and is the foundation upon which new experiences are built. This underscores the importance of previous experiences and

learned behaviors from one's home culture in providing solace and a sense of familiarity in the adoptive one. The process of migration is not an individual endeavor, rather a group process resultant of social change, affecting not only the person migrating, but also those receiving this new culture (Castles & Miller, 2009; Croucher & Kramer, 2017). Music is a source of social stability and means of communication within this chaotic social change.

Music therapy can focus on relationships and all these encapsulate. As Bruscia and Burnett explain (1998), music experiences can be created, molded, and designed to highlight relationships within a person, between a group of people, and between a person and their (new) environment, as well as to explore one's feelings and emotional responses. Although these types of explorations need not be led by a therapist, rather can be a solo act and means of self- and individual discovery (Wersal, 2006), music-making can be a powerful way to discuss and dissect relationships, as music is inherently a social activity, either as a group playing/experiencing or as a relationship between the listener and the artist.

Music-Making as an Individual and Collective Action

As moving itself is constituted as a collective action, so too can music-making and music reception occur as a collective. Several methods are used within music therapy for migrants such as improvisation, song singing and writing, music and movement, as well as in various genres such as hip hop and rap. In cases where traumatic experiences are part of the narrative, methods such as holding (where the musical improvisation serves as a means of providing comfort; see Brusica, 1998), or guided imagery are used (Orth, 2005).

The ever-changing, adaptive nature of humans leads to a complex phenomenon when this is intermingled with the upheaval associated with migration. The collective nature of this act – a geographical move and a social change – is allegorically represented in group music making and the possible therapeutic change and exchanges occurring within group music therapy. In individual therapy – one-on-one sessions – the music acts as a means of explaining that which cannot be verbally described. As Hans Christian Andersen famously wrote: where words fail, music speaks (The Hans Christian Andersen Centre, accessed April 24, 2017). In music therapy practice, music-making and music reception are regarded as a way meaningful discussions and interactions may be initiated; music opens us up and acts as a way to express our innermost thoughts and feelings in a safe and nurturing environment. Music-making acts as a bridge between therapist and client and is capable of addressing psychological, physical, social, and spiritual issues (Bruscia & Burnett, 2014). This therapeutic appositeness affords flexibility in approaches and target groups. Music therapy can be seen as a psychotherapeutic method in which the musical interaction, for example improvisation – as well as verbal discussion – is used as a means of communication (Erkkilä et al., 2008).

Improvisation may have several connotations; however, it serves a different function than entertainment. Regarding musical improvisation, the various interrelated and interacting mechanisms at play offer a plethora of possibilities; even though the act of producing music may not be considered taxing, the responsiveness necessary to improvise with another is indicative of the willingness to disclose and discover oneself mirrored in one's own creative output. MacDonald and Wilson (2014) presented various ways of defining or understanding improvisation, highlighting the importance of the social aspects of this practice:

Most musical improvisation is social, involving the idiosyncratic contributions of two or more individuals, each interpreting and musically responding to the other(s) and their playing. It is spontaneous in that music is formed as it is played through moment-by-moment responses to immediate musical contexts. It is creative in that improvising musicians produce novel music each time they play that may be similar to, but is different from, any previous performance. Finally, while masterful improvisation garners most attention and may be what comes to mind first when considering this musical practice, musical improvisation is something in which anyone can engage (para. 3).

The social, creative, and accessible nature of improvisation within a music therapy context means that this can be a suitable way of building contact and relationships with migrants. As migration may often take place because of political or social persecution, the traumatic, cultural, social, and physical upheaval resultant of these experiences can be addressed through and with musical activities.

Making time, making music

The happenings within time on a social level may be understood and tolerated through musical expression and reception. If the possibility to return to one's origins and familiarity does not exist, the absence of home can lead to an experience of limbo – neither being a part of the home community, nor truly accepted in the new one (Bailey & Collyer, 2006). Perhaps, the lack of predictability connected to migration and the feelings associated with displacement may be regulated by the temporal and spatial regularity of music. Music and sounds are sometimes conceived as ways in which humans understand time, as musical compositions present themselves as, among other things, a manipulation of time conveyed through frequency, rhythms, beats, and so forth (Eagle & Harsh, 1988). Therefore, if music were used as a tool through which one could understand their current situation and place within time, it may be argued that this exploration of current situation is a gateway to exploring past times, past experiences, and past manifestations of self – the music is used as a temporal reference point.

Musical and Cultural Fusion

Fusing experiences and knowledge gained in migrants' home contexts with those they gain in their "host" countries is represented also in musical contexts. "Host" countries give migrants a voice – in all senses of the phrase – through music; it helps bridge the gap between the past and present, former and current, the familiar and unfamiliar. In this way, cultural fusion and adaptation are representative of music fusion. In mixing traditional Irish jigs and reels with arrangements of jazz, popular music, Irish-American ballads, and classical music, Irish musicians *Frankie Gavin and De Dannan* underscored the passion for what is beloved and known with a simultaneous igniting of a passion for new and undiscovered territory (Haynes, 2017). In this way, the musical output acts as both a reference to what came before and a presentation and discussion of development. The same can be said of migrants' music becoming a fusion of previous experiences with new ones.

In one survey on goals for song writing within clinical music therapy settings with various target groups (Baker, Wigram, Stott, & McFerran, 2008), reasons such as *developing self-confidence, enhancing self-esteem, choice and decision making, telling the client's story, and gaining insight* were cited. The intention to gain insight is inherently one of the main goals in therapeutic activities, however, with respect to migrants, the goal of telling the client's story or stories is perhaps most intriguing.

Songwriting and singing are powerful tools of self-expression within clinical music therapy. Singing, as Austin (2002) explains, facilitates deep breathing, which slows the heart rate and calms the autonomic nervous system, and stills the mind and body. In a sense, singing bridges the division between mental and physical manifestations of experiences. It is a very personal way of making music and communicating, as it uses our own voice as a means of conveying a message.

Musical instruments, such as the piano, which we use as self-expressive vehicles, are extensions of our physical selves. They are tools we use to communicate. Our own voices are however inherently ours, and this ownership may be taken as an important mode of communication, particularly for those who have figuratively lost their voice or feel unable to express themselves in their newly adopted foreign culture and country. Relating to Lomax (1959), this personal expression may be connected to home, to one's origins and roots, to all ways one can be defined as being oneself. The new context in which these are then sung bridges the gap between old and new, past and present, and paving the way towards integrating these previous aspects of self with those yet to develop.

Song singing may not be the final product or intention – improvisation on the themes brought up through song singing and writing creates a possibility for deeper exploration (Orth, 2005). Aiming at a clearer picture between the blurry lines of belonging and newcomer, the lyrics of the song could be seen as the narrative which the client or group of clients present to the therapist. Orth further discussed that traumatized refugees are not always capable of discussing their experiences. Music as the tool through which therapeutic rapport is built lends itself to the creation of a safe mode of expression. They find it difficult to talk about their issues and trauma, but singing – although certainly personal – is not as invasive.

Music as Language

On a practical level, the divide is not simply a cultural one, rather also a linguistic one. The beauty of music therapy lies in the ability of this expressive art form to be an international mode of communication – thus, if there is no common spoken language, this is not always a hindrance. Orth (2005) also explained that, although the therapist may not understand a client as they express their thoughts,

memories, feelings, and experiences in their mother tongue, the expression is more fluid and natural as a result of using their native language. The lack of a common language is not a barrier, rather a safety net. The music and language barrier initially create a space in which the migrant can feel heard, not berated. As the therapeutic relationship develops within this safe space and the client is attempting to integrate with the new culture, the client's ability to slowly leave the safety net and enter a common space of understanding and communication is supported.

Traversing Communication Barriers

The question of how much of oneself is lost in translation is another issue to be addressed. Migration influences both the place of origin and destination, which results in a deficit in development of one and a gain in the other. On an individual and personal level, cultural fusion theory (Croucher & Kramer, 2017) accounts for the merging of the origin culture with that of the host culture so that elements of both are present. The movement, flow, rhythm of social, cultural, economic, and political exchange acts as both an inhibitor and enabler of communication between the host country and migrant newcomers (Castles & Miller, 2009). However, identity boundaries become blurred when these collide and intersect; how much of one's own culture need be adapted to conform to the new? Can a migrant truly become assimilated into the new culture, and even if this were possible, is it necessary or even desired? In discussing this issue in relation to music and clinical music therapy, fusion – as also in the musical sense – is the means of combining two separate entities, a mutual effort resulting in a combination of both sources (Castles & Miller, 2009). In musically combining these, we may view the migrant's narrative as either diluted or enriched. The musical expression may sound different to the original, however the perspective of adding something to this expression (the musical style or

context of the host, for example), rather than losing something, builds upon and enriches expression and experiences; a fusion of musical styles rooted in the fusion of cultural exchange. When music expression and output adapts, conforms, or includes elements of the adopted culture, it becomes a metaphorical symbol and a memento and representation of an experience or series of experiences.

Music therapists afford a space within which clients can explore themselves and their context. They enable the discussion of mutual musical creations. The therapist is an active participant in the migrant's identity (re)formation within the new context. Castles and Miller (2009) discussed how a failure to learn the new language, or a staunch retention of the mother tongue, can be perceived as the migrant's unwillingness to integrate into the adoptive culture. The retention of culture and associations to one's own culture and language are needed in order to deal with resettlement, and Castles and Miller in fact suggest this problematic integration of immigrants is also a reflection of the host community's inability or unwillingness to deal with the situation (ibid). Social exclusion and discrimination may impact heavily upon one's ability to integrate into society. However, the opposite – loosening ties on culture and one's associations thereto – may also be effective in creating cohesion and dealing with re-settlement.

Creating Social and Musical Harmony

Themes of discrimination and integration emerged quickly in one group in the Republic of Ireland called *Comhceol*, meaning “harmony” in Gaelic. This community music initiative brought together members of Irish ethnic travelers and African asylees. They had weekly meetings at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick. The repertoire was constructed of exchanges from different cultures and, after one year, their efforts culminated in a performance at the

Festival of Community Music in Limerick. Members of the group explicated that they had previously felt discriminated against, however the success of this group in reducing these tensions led to some members continuing this tradition and developing other community groups (Phelan, 2012). In this instance, music acted as a way of bringing people and communities together, building an understanding of each other, especially in the context of migration. Amit and Rapport (2002) suggest that, even if our networks are developing and changing over time, with some entering and others leaving, it may be this process of formulating collective experiences as personal intimacies that affords a sense of personal continuity in the context of this migratory process (p. 64). Therefore, the constant movement of peoples, ideas, and identities, may be a means for us to create a unique bond and definition of self and experience – both inter- and intra-personally. By not constricting the definition of community, we are allowing a much broader scope for human interaction. This is evidenced in the *Comhceol* project in which Igbo, Yoruba, Romanian, and Irish songs were mixed or fused with the travelers' traditional language, Cant. Ultimately, music became the language through which they communicated, with representatives from each affording unique insight, which would otherwise have been left undiscovered. It beautifully represents how music can be a common language, even when many languages are fused together; the final product is a form of creative catharsis.

Music and Social Exclusion

Interest in social exclusion has been developing in recent times as such topics as unemployment, cutbacks in social welfare and support, and greater numbers of migrant movement have been increasingly present in the media (Belfiore, 2002). Migratory movement results in the formation of ethnic communities and minority settlements in a new country. Identity is not stationary; rather it flows, modulates,

and is influenced by a variety of factors, resulting in migrants' fusion with their adoptive culture. Cultural traditions have been receiving a facelift of sorts after the introduction of ethnic minorities' artistic productions, which emerged based on themes of discrimination or migration. One example is the incorporation of jazz into American popular culture – as Martiniello and Lafleur (2008) put it: “studying the artistic production of racialised and dominated ethnic and racial minorities, and studying African-American music, Anglo-Pakistani cinema or post-colonial literature in France, have certainly been part of a process of identity claim making” (p. 1192). Music and the arts have become an important aspect of identity formation, cultural fusion, and even political action (Bailey & Collyer, 2006). The changes in artistic production in the face of adversaries and discrimination has led to an alternative perception of culture influx; rather than being a problem, it may be seen as an opportunity for growth and positive change. Griffiths (in Cathro, 2012) noted that creativity and creative activities can be used as both treatment mediums and as a connector to others within a community. In another project on music and social inclusion, an occupational therapy and nursing initiative in the form of a community percussion-based group for adults aged 18–65 with mental health issues gathered 20 participants who reported positive experiences such as “socialising in the group made me feel less lonely” and “[the group] made me feel more positive” (Cathro & Devine, 2012, p. 36). Although this target group had not undergone a change in geographical location, feelings of social isolation and loneliness are issues common with migrants and marginalized groups, as evidenced in the *Comhceol* project. Interventions that take the form of group activities, especially those centering on creative output, help to promote positive experiences and encourage socialization and social bonding.

Conclusion

The ability of music to act as a medium for cultural exchange through musical fusion, as a means of mirroring and expressing one's inner self, and offering feelings of security and comfort, whilst being able to encourage social integration and bonding, has been presented here. Fusion of aspects from the "old" and "new" enable us to re-examine how we view ourselves within the context of others. The *Comhceol* project is just one example of how group music making can give a voice to the voiceless, and can help to work towards positive community change and development. Fusion of cultures – as with music – affords a creative passage towards both understanding migrant and home culture, as well as the human interaction and creativity that are integral to that culture.

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