

Digital Harmonies: Analyzing Media's Interplay with Sense of Agency in Music Therapy

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Abstract

Music therapy is commonly used to improve people's mental and physical health. However, the role social media plays in this therapeutic practice has not yet been thoroughly explored. One study looked at the benefits of music therapy in 40 Australian adolescents. Another study found how music affects the perception of agency in 44 adolescents. Though these papers reveal the positive effects of music, they do not consider an important factor in their research—how much their subjects are exposed to media. This study seeks to explain research questions such as the extent to which social media usage influences the efficacy of music therapy interventions and how individuals' interaction with social media platforms shapes these musical experiences. To achieve these objectives, the author conducted a comprehensive review of existing literature, analyzing articles and journals related to music therapy and social media. This will provide an understanding of the synergies between music therapy and social media in aiding mental and physical well-being. Our study aims to explore the impact of social media exposure on the efficacy of music therapy interventions, illuminating the interplay between digital environments and therapeutic outcomes to inform and enrich practices tailored to the needs of the digital age.

Keywords: Music therapy, Sense of agency, Adolescents, Social Media

1. Introduction

Music therapy (MT) is a developing field in healthcare in which music therapists employ music in collaborative therapeutic settings to improve emotional, physical, and mental health. This method has become well-known because of its influence on the sense of agency, which is the perception of control over one's actions. Though music therapy is growing in its use as a method of treatment, there is still a lot to learn about the role social factors can play in a sense of agency in musical therapeutic practices.

We base our framework around researcher McFerran's observations on music's psychological and emotional benefits. 40 young Australians were asked to recall instances in which music did not benefit them compared to the instances when it did. McFerran's study implied that adolescents turn to music for feelings of comfort. McFerran's seminal work highlighted the significance of music in adolescents' lives, revealing its role as a source of comfort and emotional support. By examining instances where music did and did not benefit adolescents, McFerran underscored the multifaceted nature of music's impact on well-being.

The second study that this paper is expanding upon is the research by Saarikallio, Randall and Baltazar. In the study, the impact of music on adolescents' daily sense of agency and contextual factors are examined. 44 adolescents were asked to self-report their music experiences during their everyday lives. The study recorded perceived levels of agencies and considered the situations, activities, and reasons for listening to music. Through self-reported accounts, the study provided valuable insights into the contextual factors influencing adolescents' engagement with music and

its effects on their perceived control.

However, the possible omission of media and technology that interact with a person's therapy experience is a prevalent problem in this field of study. The impact of media and technology on the efficacy of music therapy cannot be understated in the digital age we live in. The selection of music streaming services, the importance of custom playlists, the influence of music in virtual spaces, and the incorporation of digital music creation tools are all elements that influence how one perceives the musical therapeutic benefits on the sense of agency. Future studies should consider technology's role on adolescent mindsets so that the advantages of music therapy can be maximized in today's digital world.

Within the changing healthcare field, music therapy (MT) can improve emotional, physical, and mental well-being. This is mostly achieved by influencing individuals' sense of agency, which is an important factor in how much control they feel they have over their activities. Building upon the work of McFerran and Saarikallio, which underscored music's psychological and emotional benefits among adolescents, this study seeks to deepen understanding by exploring the often-overlooked influence of social factors, particularly media and technology, on the efficacy of music therapy interventions. By exploring the nuanced dynamics between digital environments and therapeutic outcomes, this research seeks to unveil insights that can inform and enrich music therapy practices tailored to the needs of today's adolescents. Through a comprehensive examination of the role of technology in music therapy, including its potential benefits and challenges, this study endeavors to pave the way for more effective and holistic interventions in the digital age.

2. The Effect of Music and Social Media on Adolescents

Social media platforms have changed how teenagers express themselves. 81% of teens state that using these platforms makes them feel connected to their friends' lives. More than that, they could express themselves by uploading pictures, videos, artworks, and music to present their interests. One in ten tweens (a child who is between the stages of childhood and adolescence) and adolescents (11% of tweens and 13% of teens) will use digital platforms to create art or music. However, social media can bring dangerous experiences as well. While individuals who express themselves on social media platforms display a keen sense of self-assurance, they may also encounter pressure to conform to societal norms. Additionally, though teenagers can engage in communication through online platforms, they can also be exposed to online harassment. As such, one characteristic of social media is its immense emotional influence, especially on teens. Although there is a considerable number of adolescents who find support in these online communities, there is also a subset that encounters adverse experiences stemming from unpleasant interactions and comparisons to their peers.

A strategy to better teenagers' health is to employ music to set limits on social media use. Implementing music therapy can urge teenagers to disengage from social media platforms at designated intervals. Adolescents who have an increased amount of time on social media are prone to psychological distress and depression. However, the incorporation of music into their screen time activities may enhance their time management skills by serving as an outlet for their emotions. This hinders the tendency to disclose personal information over the Internet. Moreover, listening to music can create positive emotional states among adolescents. This evokes feelings of fulfillment among teenagers, which enhances their feelings of control. This idea is especially beneficial because it can mitigate some risks of social media.

2.1 Sense of Agency

The sense of agency is a part of human consciousness that focuses on how one perceives their control. It is integrated in everyday life, referring to how much power one has over their daily actions. People tend to feel a stronger sense of agency when being able to confidently perform an activity under their control.

A sense of agency is a prevalent problem in people with health issues. For instance, agency is most researched in schizophrenia. In Daprati's study, healthy individuals and patients with schizophrenia were examined. They were tested on whether they would be able to decipher if their hand movements were theirs or the experimenters, and the patients had more difficulty.

2.2 Positive and Negative Aspects of Social Media

Social media is a platform where adolescents can feel empowered. Sharing music on social media is a way for young people to express online spaces and indicate social affiliations. This use of music allows adolescents to create a social identity on social media. Since music has the special power of stirring up emotions in listeners, sharing music-content in social media can serve to set up emotional connections between users and their followers. Sharing musical tastes also reflects the person's personality, giving them the opportunity to express themselves. Social media platforms make it possible for communities to bond and find their identities using music. Social media can enhance a sense of agency by serving as a platform for teenagers to connect and express themselves with others on social media.

According to Anne Marie Albano, particularly those with mental health issues spend more time engaging in social media activities while decreasing their time physically interacting with others. However, increasing time spent on social media can cause adolescents to develop neurotic tendencies. Neuroticism is characterized by an increased predisposition to experience harmful emotions, including self-consciousness, irritability, emotional instability, and depression. These emotions can cause an adolescent to perceive their personal agency differently. For instance, adolescents with elevated levels of neuroticism constantly worry about how they are viewed and whether they conform to societal norms, and comparing themselves to others online makes these neurotic tendencies worse. This can affect their agency by making them feel wary before making decisions because of their fears of being judged. Their desire to fit in these modern standards on social media may cause them more harm than good.

2.3 Role of Influencers

Society's influences have begun to impact how adolescents perceive themselves. According to SagePub Journals, there are around 44 million influencers worldwide all across social media. With the growing number of influencers, the effects on adolescents are only increasing. Though influencers work to promote lifestyles, their good intentions can inflict negative effects on their audiences. For instance, their influence can create unhealthy comparisons and expectations. These unhealthy comparisons may cause an individual's sense of agency to be affected, as they feel their sense of worth decreasing.

Lady Gaga and Taylor Swift create strong connections with their listeners through their lyrics and this leads fans to believe that they can relate to the artist personally. Even if the listeners have never met the artist physically, the connection the songs convey positively impacts listeners' social development.

In the study of researchers, Click, Lee and Holladay, Lady Gaga's fans, "Little Monsters," report that they feel close to Lady Gaga, their "Mother Monster," on a personal level due to her interactions with her fans on social media platforms. In her direct interactions, Lady Gaga validated her fans, helping these fans feel a stronger sense of self-identity and an increased feeling of self-worth. These interactions further demonstrate the impact influencers can have on the development of fans' identities.

2.4 Coping and Socio-Emotional Communication

Music can serve as an adaptive or maladaptive coping mechanism that affects adolescent's neuroticism. Though music can have positive effects when helping manage emotions, it can sometimes have negative effects and cause an unhealthy dependence on music. Adolescents who develop this unhealthy habit may show a decrease in their sense of agency as they begin to focus their lives solely on music.

Understanding more about the sense of agency is an important field of research to further discover the science behind behavioral changes. Turel discovers that people experienced a stronger perceived agency when restraining themselves from social media use. Being on social media too often causes adolescents to lose their self-confidence. However, relighting this sense of agency is important for therapists to help their patients' set limits for their time on social media. Turel suggests that a way to restore a sense of agency is by experiencing abstinence. However, he does not consider the possible application of musical therapy to strengthen feelings of agency. Although abstinence is a treatment to this problem, music therapy can give more benefits than simply limiting social media time. For instance, music therapy can give adolescents the opportunity to discover their creative identities and find their passions.

2.5 Personal Taste in Music

Understanding the connection between musical taste and behavior can expand research on how behavior functions. For example, some songs have lyrics centered around risky behaviors like drug use, violence, misogyny. Exposure to these lyrics can cause a negative impact on adolescent mindsets. “Young people who viewed risk behavior presentations in social media overestimated the extent to which their peers engaged in these risky behaviors (Black et al., 2013), thus likely developing skewed risk behavior norms and increasing their likelihood of engaging in them”. As highlighted by Black, adolescents who are often exposed to risky behaviors in the media may develop warped perceptions of society’s norms. This altered perception may influence adolescents to involve themselves in dangerous activities.

However, sometimes, musical lyrics can be empowering. Songs with energetic, strong, and cheerful lyrics may inspire adolescents and instill positive emotions in them. These songs can also provide adolescents with positive insights on life. Artists like Rihanna, Lady Gaga, and Pink aim to express the positive aspects of themselves through the lyrics in their music.

2.6 Therapeutic Benefits of Creating Music

People create music all the time, but few of them know about the impact this could have. Ways people can create music include beat-making, starting to learn how to play an instrument, creating a monologue in music, composing, and more. Beat-making (creating metrical rhythms on a digital audio workstation) allows adolescents to express their emotions in the beats they write. They can highlight their feelings through rhythms and melodies, allowing them to express themselves when they cannot in words. Having the freedom to experiment with these beats can aid adolescents in feeling a sense of control, as the notes being written are under the adolescents' control. Moreover, the music styles they create may allow adolescents to discover what kind of person they wish to be. This can especially be beneficial after their sense of worth is decreased from constant exposure to unrealistic standards in social media. With their own beat-making music, adolescents can discover their identities beyond what they fake on social media. Creating music can healthily set a boundary between teenagers and social media.

2.7 Negative Consequences of Integrating Music Therapy with Digital Habits

Although music therapy has many beneficial effects, sometimes it can have negative consequences as well. For instance, one risk is that social media can lead to increased distraction and reduced attention span. Adolescents are more likely to react to constant notifications than adults and are drawn to the allure of social media content. This constant addiction to media information can reduce their ability to focus during music therapy sessions, which require a high level of concentration to be done properly. If adolescents are continuously distracted by notifications on their phones, it is likely that the music therapy treatments will not be effective.

Moreover, though many friendships bud on social media, there are many negative interactions as well. Adolescents may be subject to cyberbullying, negative comments on their posts, or distressing content, which can alleviate their depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. This increase in negative emotions has the ability to counteract the positive effects of music therapy.

Furthermore, relying on social media and digital interactions for music therapy might lead to an increased dependency on digital devices, which inspires adolescents to reduce in-person interactions. Music therapy is most effective when there is a personal and physical connection between the therapist and the client. However, digital interaction may weaken this bond, which would lead to music therapy being less effective.

While integrating music therapy with digital habits and media platforms can benefit adolescents by providing engagement and a boost in confidence, it also introduces many risks. These include distraction, exposure to negative and detrimental content, dependency on digital devices, and more. To control these risks, it is important to develop strategies that allow for the integration to enhance therapeutic outcomes rather than negatively affect them.

3. Technological Influences on Music Therapy's Efficacy in the Digital Age

Since technology was created, it has served as an efficient and accessible way to facilitate music therapy. For instance, online platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, and more, offer avenues for accessing music therapy resources, supplementing collaboration with certified clinical professionals when needed. Moreover, a contributing factor to music therapy's success is the fact that music can be selected and modified. To give an example, on Spotify, people can add whatever songs they would like that would address their therapeutic goals.

Technology can also be used to connect people with various musical therapy experiences. Social media groups may serve to be beneficial towards music therapy users as they feel supported and comforted. For example, on Instagram, there could be Instagram group chats made with the intention of connecting people with similar beliefs and hobbies. This can instill feelings of acceptance and make the people in the communities feel less lonely.

4. Discussion

The author of the present study conducted studies through her nonprofit organization to research the effectiveness of music therapy. She performed songs like "Can't Help Falling in Love" and "My Way" for patients in local hospitals. Observing the patients' reactions showed her that music can not only serve as an alternative treatment to health issues but also promote a healthy mindset amongst adolescents. Due to some features of social media, many adolescents are prone to feeling negative views of self-worth. However, adolescents can use music to combat these issues.

For instance, adolescents can create playlists with songs they can resonate with. However, it is important to consider the lyrics of the songs and what kind of message they are trying to convey. To give an example, some songs with churlish lyrics can negatively influence adolescents. On the other hand, listening to songs with positive lyrics can give them a sense of encouragement and positivity. A way to spread positive musical genres is by sharing playlists. Because of social media, teenagers can feel a decrease in their sense of agency, as they are prone to self-comparisons with unrealistic standards. However, a way to combat these standards is by utilizing music. With music, they can limit their time spent online.

"Musicking" can be correlated with the notion of a sense of agency and music therapy within the framework of this research. "Musicking" refers to when individuals participate in the creation of music, emphasizing that music can be much more than just listening. Patients can feel a stronger sense of the control they have in their lives through musicking.

Researchers can empower adolescents to begin to take control and manage their own lives, their emotions, and their boundaries with the social media world with further research.

5. Conclusion

The exploration of music therapy's intersection with social media usage among adolescents reveals a multifaceted landscape with significant implications for both therapeutic practices and individual well-being.

Firstly, the incorporation of social media platforms into adolescents' lives has transformed how they interact with music and express themselves. While social media offers avenues for creative expression and connection, it also exposes adolescents to risks such as cyberbullying and unrealistic social comparisons, affecting their sense of agency and mental health. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing interventions that harness the benefits of music therapy while mitigating the negative impacts of social media.

Secondly, the concept of sense of agency emerges as a pivotal factor in both music therapy and adolescents' engagement with social media. Adolescents' perception of control over their actions is influenced by their social media usage patterns, with implications for their emotional well-being. Integrating music therapy into social media routines presents an opportunity to empower adolescents, fostering a sense of control and emotional regulation.

Moreover, the role of influencers and personalized music preferences underscores the complex interplay between individual identity formation, social media influence, and therapeutic outcomes. By leveraging influencers' positive impact and promoting empowering musical content, music therapy interventions can enhance adolescents' sense of self-worth and agency in digital spaces.

Overall, this research underscores the importance of considering social media influences in music therapy interventions for adolescents. By acknowledging the digital landscape's complexities and tailoring interventions to address both the positive and negative aspects of social media usage, practitioners can maximize the therapeutic potential of music while promoting adolescents' mental and emotional well-being in the digital age. This holistic approach not only enhances the efficacy of music therapy but also empowers adolescents to navigate digital environments with agency and resilience.

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