

Creativity in Counseling

Ashley E. Gartner

Wake Forest University

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Music, as explained in Gladding (2016), is a universal experience that can promote the development of new insights and behaviors in a client. It gives people an alternative way to communicate that fosters identity, discovery, and bonding. It helps tell stories and process experiences. It creates an array of responses, including those of an emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental nature. It allows some measure of stress reduction. It can give us insight into others and, more importantly, it can teach us about ourselves (Gladding, 2016).

Music, used in therapy, affects positive change in psychological, physical, cognitive, and social functioning (Gladding, 2016). It can foster the building of the therapeutic relationship, the creation of a relaxing atmosphere, and open the lines of communication. It can be experienced by listening, composing, improvising, or performing (Gladding, 2016). Music therapy must include the following: music or a musical activity prescribed to anyone of any age directed or supervised by trained personnel with a therapeutic end goal (Gladding, 2016). A benefit to using this type of therapy is that the possibilities of employment are limited only by the counselor's imagination and abilities. It can also build an atmosphere of understanding that allows for better communication between the client and the counselor (Gladding, 2016).

As a musician, I am drawn toward music naturally. Music has helped me through some of the worst times of my life. I will often have one or two songs on repeat, the lyrics and feelings penetrating my soul, helping to support whatever struggle I am having. I believe everyone can genuinely relate to all types of music in the same way. That everyone has that song that helps them cope, that supports them, and lifts their spirits. A song that helps them connect with others. A song that helps them connect with themselves.

This self-connection happens, even more, when they write the song themselves. Gladding (2016) states that music can facilitate expressing emotion and processing experiences. The emotional and spiritual weight of music only deepens when taken to the next step from merely listening to writing. Writing music, even if it is just lyrics, reaches an emotional depth that can be difficult, and likely terrifying, to access otherwise.

As stated earlier, the application of music and musical activities in counseling is nearly limitless. One way it can be included in practice is to have the client bring a playlist of songs that they listen to regularly as part of their assessment. This action could be an alternative form of Adlerian formal and informal assessments. However, rather than asking the client many questions in an attempt to understand them (Murdock, 2017), this simple act will allow for many things to happen. First, any themes or general feelings found linking the songs in the list will give a better idea of where the client is mentally and emotionally, and the therapy approach tailored specifically to them. Both of these things can be completed without having to put them on the spot by asking (possibly) uncomfortable questions. Secondly, it will give some insight into the client's lifestyle choices as music is often linked to lifestyle. Lastly, the songs can be used to raise awareness within the client and have a jumping-off point for therapy. By having them discuss how each song on the playlist speaks to them (i.e., what emotions it incites, what about it speaks to the client, why it is a favorite, et cetera), the client and counselor can then begin to discuss any patterns that arise from the conversation.

Another way that music can be used in therapy is to have the client write a song, or at least new lyrics to a well-known song, in an attempt to tell someone something that the client feels they need to hear, which is a musical take on Gestalt's empty chair technique (Murdock, 2017; Gladding, 2018). Whether that person is the client, someone in the client's family, or a

stranger that is going through the same thing as the client, the lyrics should reflect the intent of the message. Examples of such songs include Tracy Bonham's "Mother, Mother" (Bonham, 1996) or Cher's "You Haven't Seen the Last of Me" (Warren, 2010). This exercise is helpful because it gets the client in touch with their inner voice and helps put words to painful subjects in a way that makes it easier to have the conversation. Sometimes, directly speaking can feel impossible, but saying the words through music is feasible. It would also help the counselor discover hidden feelings that arise and support the client while they work through them.

There are some forms of creative counseling that I do not feel that I will likely use in practice. One such style is dance. I am aware that dancing and music are often mutually inclusive, so the irony is not lost on me. I also enjoy going to a dance club to dance and have fun with my friends. I have been in multiple musicals and danced while I was in the school choir. However, I am not sure that I could ever use the concept of dance as a form of therapy.

First, the idea of dancing, by myself, in front of a person who will be judging my every move is terrifying. I would never ask that of another individual. The concept of counseling is to strengthen the bond between the client and counselor, not drive a wedge into it. I would also never be comfortable judging someone based on their dancing because I am not sure how I could glean anything psychological from the movement. I do understand that, in some particular circumstances, it is an extremely beneficial therapy (e.g., movement disabilities). However, it seems that any other benefit from a method specific to the treatment can be gained using another treatment. Yet, sticking to what you understand will always best serve the client. While I can see myself possibly using some movement techniques like deep breathing or circles, I'll be sticking to what I know best, which is music and writing.

References

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