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EN111S

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Research Outline

Thesis Statement: Music therapy is a safer alternative to medication in treating individuals with depression. [*Editor's note: This is not the actual thesis.*]

I. Listening to music can calm the body.

A. The body automatically finds the beat of the music.

1. The body will begin to relax mentally and physically while listening to a melodic tone.

2. Heart beat will begin to conform to the beat of a song.

B. The slower the beat, the slower the heart will beat which will lower blood pressure.

II. Different types of music can provoke different feelings and emotions.

A. Therapists will use soft, instrumental songs to allow a patient to become comfortable and open up to them.

B. More different song choices are considered on an individual basis to stimulate a variety of emotions.

III. Music can also be used to create a restful night of sleep.

A. Playing soft music while a person falls asleep can help them relax and fall into a deeper, and sounder sleep.

B. Being well rested can play a significant part in dealing with depression.

Conclusion: Music therapy is helpful in treating depression by lowering blood pressure, discussing difficult issues, and helps sleep come easier. [*Editor's note: This is the actual thesis.*]

Music as a Healing Medicine

Imagine the feelings that are evoked from within the mind and heart when a song is played on the radio that brings the time back to the summer of seventeen. All the smells of the mild summer nights and the sounds of cricket's chirping comes racing back to the mind as if it were happening all over again. Maybe what comes to mind is the scent of a fresh glass of cold lemonade, or the feeling of the cold water hitting hot skin when jumping into the lake for the first time that summer. Or, contemplate the thought of a certain song that brings back the memories of a long ago forgotten friend or a loved one that has passed away. Songs have an amazing power to bring about a medley of emotions within the mind. Songs have the ability to transfix themselves to a specific memory or image of the past to be brought out of the dark whenever the song is, by chance, heard. As referred to by Dave Berry in his article "Bad Songs",

"The songs we hear a lot- particularly the ones we hear when we're young- soak into our psyche, so that forever after, when we hear certain songs, we experience sudden and uncontrollable memory spasms taking us back to specific times- some good, some bad- in our lives" (475).

This spectacular event has led to professionals believing that music can hold a more beneficial purpose than merely the enjoyment of listening. Martin Luther King had the idea when he said, "Music is the art of the prophets, the only art that can calm the agitations of the soul" (qtd. in Elkins 1). Since music is so deeply linked with the emotional sections of the brain, it only makes sense that it could provide a deeper level of involvement in healing the mind, body, and soul. Music can be used therapeutically, as a safer alternative or in conjunction with medication, in treating depression.

There is no specific reason as to why music therapy works, but there are many evidences to provide explanation to its wonderful results. To begin to understand this phenomenon would be to realize how easily a human can find the beat of a song. As explained in the book The

Mozart Effect, when someone dances, their body automatically falls into place with the beat and rhythm of the sound. Their body becomes in sync with the beat of the drums. This would be the same with an aerobics class working out to the rhythm of disco music. The body is responding by exhibiting an organized pattern of response to the music. The heartbeat can also follow the pattern of the beats. The faster the rhythm, the faster the heart will beat. If this is practiced for several minutes, the body will fall into a deep calm. (Campbell 123). This also works with slower songs, specifically instrumental music, to slow down the heartbeat, which in turn, can lower blood pressure.

The website, Surviving Depression, also acknowledges these results. Music therapy can alleviate the feelings of sadness, anger, or isolation when used daily. Certain songs are chosen by a doctor, for example calm and soothing songs, which would be used to relieve these feelings. More specific songs would be chosen to evoke certain feelings or issues that one might be keeping bottled up inside (1). A psychiatrist could use instrumental or soft melodic tones to help a patient open up during a session: then use more particular songs to help the patient come to terms with the specific cause of their depression. This use of music is proven to be effective among patients who have difficulty coming to terms with their depression in any other way. Of course, someone would not want to listen to music that is overly melancholy, as this can worsen the symptoms. A person would also not want to listen to songs that are overly exerted. Rock and roll music, as described by Michael J. Budds in his article “From Fine Romance to Good Rockin’- and Beyond” is “often raucous, insistent, and amplified” (482). This kind of music could cause more harm than help, depending on the situation.

Another battle in dealing with depression is being well rested. If a person is not getting the recommended amount of sleep every night, this can attribute to the severity of their depression. As mentioned above, music can calm the mind and the body. This would work not only during therapy sessions, but also in aiding the sleeping process. The article “An Insomniac

Tries Music Therapy” in Health magazine uncovers how music was the only thing that really worked in helping this specific individual fall asleep. This article describes a process called “Brain Music Therapy.” This is where a person’s brain waves would be recorded and then translated into a ten to fifteen minute CD that sounds like classical music. It is described as “your own personal lullaby”, and is shown to significantly reduce the amount of time it takes to fall asleep, less interruptions throughout the night, and less nightmares (162). Obviously, there are other already written songs that could ultimately achieve the same purpose. As long as the selection was slow, soothing, and quiet, it could ultimately work in the same way.

Some would argue that music therapy is not a proven scientific method for curing depression, although progress has been documented. With the wide variety of medications available to treat anything from social anxiety to extreme hyperactivity, why experiment with music? Music is a virtually free form of treatment that anyone can come across- without a prescription- to try as an alternative to medication that may not be working for them. Music will not be recalled in the future by the FDA because of unforeseen side effects. There are thousands of songs (medications) to choose from that can coincide with any mood. It might be the only natural “drug” that can truly cure the feelings of depression. One example from the book Musicophilia gives evidence to this claim. A crowd of people were observed listening to a man playing a violin, which happened to be on the fifth anniversary of September 11th. The author, Don Campbell observed “When the music ended and the crowd quietly dispersed, it was clear that the music had brought them some profound consolation, in a way that no words could ever have done” (300). Listening to music has such a mysterious effect on people and can leave a feeling of awe that is unlike any effect that medication can provide. There are infinite possibilities that are still undiscovered as to the effects of music therapy.

Since music can play such an influential part in the process of healing the mind, it’s questionable as to why music isn’t incorporated in so many more areas of healing and

rehabilitation. Listening to music can calm a racing heart, evoke certain feelings during therapy, and be the perfect lullaby for falling asleep. This is all accessible by just the touch of a button. So, the next time a song comes on the radio, really listen to it because so much could be learned from just taking the time to realize the effects of music therapy.

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