

Lesley University

DigitalCommons@Lesley

Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses

Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences
(GSASS)

Spring 5-16-2020

The Effect of Songwriting on Identity Formation After a Diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder

Barbara Rose Marese
bsmith29@lesley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses

Recommended Citation

Marese, Barbara Rose, "The Effect of Songwriting on Identity Formation After a Diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder" (2020). *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses*. 338.
https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/338

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences (GSASS) at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu, cvrattos@lesley.edu.

The Effect of Songwriting on Identity Formation After a Diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder

Barbara Marese

Lesley University

May 5, 2020

Barbara Marese

Specialization: Music Therapy

Thesis Instructor: Annette Whitehead-Pleaux, MA, MT-BC

The Effect of Songwriting on Identity Formation After a Diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder

Abstract

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that causes manic and depressive symptoms and is characterized by mood episodes that could last for days to months. The diagnosis of bipolar disorder has various social, emotional, and practical consequences. Among the impacts of the diagnosis of bipolar disorder on individuals are self-concept and social identity. The discovery of a mental illness can cause one to struggle with accepting who they were before the illness and who they have become after being diagnosed with the disorder. The conflict can cause individuals to lose their identity and self-image. When this happens, they may require treatment to aid in rehabilitation and self-acceptance. Music therapy has been a commonly used form of treatment with people who have mental illnesses. Songwriting allows individuals to express their feelings and emotions and reflect on their past, present and future. In the end, the diagnosis and process of songwriting work towards reconciling their image and identity. The focus of further research should be on the specific areas of impact of songwriting in bipolar disorder patients and how the intervention promotes self-acceptance, self-esteem, and identity development at the individual and society level.

Introduction

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness which is characterized by episodes of mania and depression among those affected. Some of the symptoms of mania are irritable mood, heightened levels of energy, inflated self-esteem and talkativeness, as well as little or lack of sleep. The periods of mania are followed by depressive episodes, which have symptoms that include low mood, decreased energy, insomnia or hypersomnia, and a diminished ability to think or concentrate (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Bipolar disorder is persistent and individuals with the illness may experience multiple episodes within a year. The impacts of the bipolar disorder differ from one person to another depending on surrounding environmental conditions.

Being diagnosed with a mental illness such as bipolar disorder can impact one's sense of identity and transform their course of life. Those with the disorder may experience challenges when it comes to self-concept. Even when undergoing treatment, such persons may occasionally experience symptoms of bipolar disorder. The decision that an individual makes in treating a mental illness significantly affects their physical and emotional well-being. The discovery that one has bipolar disorder could have positive or negative impacts on their self-identity and social image. The consequences of such could be damaging to an individual's social life in different aspects such as family, education, work, and community. Mental health providers work to find treatment options that maximize the health and wellness of patients with bipolar disorder.

Various forms of treatment are available to bipolar disorder patients. The effectiveness of the method used depends on different factors surrounding the disorder and the mental healthcare

provider. Music therapy is an applicable treatment for patients with mental illnesses, like those with bipolar disorder. Song lyrics are effective in assisting individuals in rediscovering their self-image and identity. Songwriting allows individuals to express their emotions related to a variety of experiences, including depression and anxiety. Community programs help in bringing together individuals with the same or similar disorders and allow them to assist one another in coping with mental illness. Thus, music therapy or song writing can be an effective form of treatment on self-image and identity formation following diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Literature Review

Bipolar Disorder

The symptoms of bipolar disorder differ from one person to another depending on the episode that they encounter. An episode of bipolar disorder interferes with the functioning of a person and could last from days to months during a given time citation. It is characterized by periods of mania, whose symptoms include inflated self-esteem, a decreased need for sleep, distractibility, and an increase in goal-directed activity; it is then followed by periods of depression, whose symptoms include a decrease in energy, insomnia or hypersomnia, feelings of worthlessness, a diminished ability to concentrate, and a markedly diminished interest in activities the person typically enjoys (APA, 2013). People who are diagnosed with bipolar disorder may also experience challenges such as damaged self-concept (Inder, Crowe, Moor, Luty, Carter, & Joyce, 2008). In some situations, bipolar disorder is hereditary as parents can pass it to their offspring (Ironsides, Johnson & Carver, 2020).

Diagnosis is an essential step in mental healthcare practice as it helps in determining the appropriate treatment that an individual should get. According to O'Connor, Kadianaki, Maunder & McNicholas (2018), a psychological diagnosis can have intense practical, social, and emotional repercussions on children, teenagers, and the elderly. For young persons, the diagnosis of such mental disorders like bipolar disorder impacts critical times of development of self and identity (Ironsides, Johnson & Carver, 2020). The impacts could either be positive or negative depending on how the patient responds to the knowledge of bipolar disorder. Hence, the first step after diagnosing mental illness is seeking treatment that will assist the victims in coping with the consequences of the diagnosis.

Diagnosis has various functions, especially for patients seeking to use health services. One is that the process is crucial in identifying and explaining the symptoms that an individual has. For instance, diagnosis of bipolar disorder helps in identifying the symptoms that the patient displays, whether high or low mood swings, energy levels, and others. The next step is that the process is important in facilitating access to resources, care, and prognosis. Research has shown that it is easier for people who have a mental illness to seek help and make informed symptom management decisions if there is an assignment of the right mental symptoms to the correct diagnostic labels (O'Connor, Kadianaki, Maunder & McNicholas, 2018). Another positive influence of appropriate diagnosis is easier communication between the clinician and patient. In this case, there is a need for appropriate diagnosis of bipolar disorder symptoms as it helps in identifying the best forms of treatment.

On the other hand, negative consequences of diagnoses of mental disorders exist in the provision of mental healthcare. One negative consequence is when process may exclude

individuals from accessing certain services. Some mental healthcare clinics that treat young people may not accept clients with certain illnesses citation. As such, the individuals will lack access to services, and this could affect their self-identity and development. At the same time, such individuals may seem excluded from accessing necessities in the community. Another negative impact of diagnoses is that if accompanied with poor prognoses, there could be fatalism among service providers ((O'Connor, Kadianaki, Maunder & McNicholas, 2018). The accompanying effect is that the patients may be restricted to certain treatment options. As such, there is a possibility that diagnosing an individual with bipolar disorder could negatively impact their access to mental healthcare services and treatment options.

Research has shown that there is a need to acknowledge the importance of understanding the psychosocial development impacts that bipolar disorder has (Inder et al., 2008). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th edition (DSM-V), the mean age at onset of the disorder is 18 years old, with special considerations being needed to detect the diagnosis in children (APA, 2013). In many cases, the symptoms of bipolar disorder begin appearing when an individual is around 15 to 19 years old (Inder et al., 2008). Some of the early symptoms bipolar disorder are increased severity and psychosocial impairment. As the severity of the disorder increases, some characteristics such as greater comorbidity, chronicity, and heightened suicide attempts are more likely. At the onset of bipolar disorder, victims experience poor global functioning, decreased academic performance, difficulty in forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships as well as multiple hospitalizations.

Bipolar disorder also has practical complex and diverse implications that psychiatrists must consider. One is the impact on self-concept as the diagnosis of bipolar disorder begins to

change a person's beliefs about themselves citation. Another effect is on self-identity which derives from an individual's membership of social groups (Nam, 2008). Following the diagnosis of bipolar disorder, a patient's self-concept and social identity could deteriorate or improve (Inder et al., 2008). On the positive side, the patients may feel relieved and understand the reasons behind their change of character after the onset of the symptoms. For some patients, a diagnosis protects their self-image since it justifies their actions and distances them from undesirable behavior (O'Connor, Kadianaki, Maunder & McNicholas, 2018). Following a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, the clinician and patient can determine the most appropriate treatment options to curb its symptoms.

Another positive impact of diagnoses of mental illnesses like bipolar disorder is it leads to the introduction of individuals to a community with similar needs. Service users will get to interact with those that they share the same symptoms or disorder. As a result of the community introduction, such individuals may get opportunity to access to social support and champion for better services. In the end, a person is relieved of personal responsibility of finding treatment alone (O'Connor et al., 2018). There is a need for patients to work on reconstructing their social identity as a means of promoting and maintaining mental health.

However, diagnosis of bipolar disorder can have negative complications, especially for a person's social identity and self-concept (Inder et al., 2008). One of the effects of diagnosis is that if associate with poor prognosis and treatment options, patients may experience grief and despair (Nam, 2008). One may struggle with accepting the diagnosis and reconciling it with their previous self-image (O'Connor, Kadianaki, Maunder & McNicholas, 2018). At first, patients could view the diagnosis as something different or abnormal before accepting it at later stages.

One theory attributed to the risk of diagnosis a person with personality disorder is the labeling theory. The concept relates to the proposition that diagnoses serve as self-fulfilling prophecies (O'Connor et al., 2018). In this case, disclosing that an individual has a given condition influences how that person will be treated. As a result of the disclosure and treatment, the behaviors that such people display will be more likely. Diagnosis of bipolar disorder is more likely to change how one behaves as they will use the illness to justify their character.

Diagnosis of a mental illness also leads to the probability of stigmatization of individuals with such. The symptoms of mental illness have attracted stigma in society; thus disadvantaging patients at different aspects of their lives (Nam, 2008). For instance, those with mental disorders could be stigmatized at interpersonal, employment, health, education, and social welfare settings. The patients will not get equal chances to participate in activities that their peers are involved in the environment. The attitude that the victims receive will impact their social identity and self-perception development (Ahmadi, 2011). Various symptoms could be more stigmatizing than others. Generally, the levels of stigmatization that the diagnoses of mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder cause differ from one setting to another.

Identity and Self-Concept

O'Connor, Kadianaki, Maunder & McNicholas (2018) conducted a systematic review to explain the impacts of psychiatric diagnosis of could impact young people's self-concept and social identity. The authors searched ten electronic databases and 38 out of identified 3892 citations met the inclusion criteria then evaluated 38 studies to be moderate-to-high quality research. The findings of their studies showed that the diagnosis of mental illness affects the

self-concept and social identity of the targeted population in various ways. In some instances, diagnosis can threaten and devalue self-concept, whereas in others, the diagnosis can aid them in understanding themselves better, legitimizing their behavior, and improving their lives. In addition, they found that the diagnosis of a mental illness can make individuals feel distanced and invalidated from the community. Another negative impact is stigmatization, especially in cases where patients are not self-accepting. On the contrary, the diagnosis can promote social identification as one gets to interact with people with the same condition in the community. The authors sought to understand the experience that young people face following the diagnosis of a mental illness. The findings showed the importance of ensuring that diagnoses are communicated and managed appropriately in a way that leads to effective mental healthcare.

Inder, Crowe, Moor, Luty, Carter, & Joyce (2008) explored the effects that a mood disorder has on one's journey in developing a sense of self and identity. Through a qualitative study, the researchers tried to close the gap that had not been explored; the psychosocial impacts of bipolar disorder. The findings of the research showed bipolar disorder can affect self and identity construction. Those with the disorder can become confused, contradict and doubt themselves, thus finding it challenging to discover their worth. One way to develop a better self and identity for those diagnosed with bipolar disorder is to accept their conditions and incorporate various traits of themselves. Inder et.al (2008) found that there is a need to look at bipolar disorder from a view of the impacts that they have on psychosocial development and the development of self and identity. Facilitating acceptance and integration is one way for patients to cope with the diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Ironside, Johnson & Carver (2020) considered the aspects of self and self-concept in bipolar disorder. Their definition of bipolar disorder is “an illness where its patients display manic symptoms that incapacitate one’s psychopathology”. The symptoms that a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder shows depend on psychosocial and social forces surrounding their lives. Ironside, Johnson & Carver (2020) analyzed the concepts of self and identity in bipolar from two perspectives. The first one suggests that people with the illness have increased ambitions as they seek to achieve certain goals and recognition from others. In this case, individuals are more aggressive in seeking getting what they want and are relentless until they attain specific goals. The second perspective is that of self-worth which is determined by the ability of individuals to succeed in different aspects. The authors considered literature from three findings, self-report, behavioral, and neuroscience, in researching the viewpoint. According to them, the symptoms of the disorder could cause various challenges among patients. Thus, the impacts of bipolar disorder on self and identity have different viewpoints depending on the symptoms that the diagnoses show.

Nam (2008) conducted a qualitative sociology review to determine the development of self-identity among patients with chronic psychiatric disorders. The research focused on the autobiographic narratives of patients with mental illnesses in South Korea. South Korea passed the Mental Health Act in 1995 which gave rise to a rule where all the chronic psychiatric patients were required to receive treatment and be managed. Initially, the mentally ill had been stigmatized in the community. However, the Mental Health Act in 1995 ensured that the population received treatment and medication in rehabilitation facilities (Nam, 2008). The primary aim of the study was to comprehend the mechanisms that psychiatric patients apply to

cope with their new surroundings. Nam (2008) used autobiographic narrative analysis to understand the mechanisms that the mentally ill used in coping with their new medical environments. The study considered two aspects in the development of self-identity among the patients. The first one is that medication is essential for patients before they leave the hospitals to take part in rehabilitation programs. The second concept is that social integration can be evaluated using a patient's ability to return to a normal biographic stage.

According to Nam (2008), medications do not give patients the chance to practice control over their emotions and bodies. At the same time, the patients receive opposition from those around them, such as family, friends, and labor market. As a result of the challenges that the mentally ill face in their lives, they should stick to their own interpretation of mental illness. The patients should also understand that their experience is different from that of the expectations of experts in the field. The study showed that the new mental health environment plays a significant role in establishing patient communities. In the end, those with mental illnesses can form their own subculture and discuss and understand their experiences. The implication for those with bipolar disorder is that they could strive to form communities where they interact and discuss their experiences with one another. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the study was conducted in South Korea, and that there are many differences in culture that need to be accounted for when comparing and applying the study to patients in the United States.

Hine, Maybery & Goodyear (2018) sought to understand what literature discloses concerning how people develop positive identity as a process of personal recovery. Mental illness has been identified to have an impact on personal identity and patients need to recover from that. The authors evaluated the importance of the mothering role in developing positive

identity, a role in the recovery process has been ignored. The researchers conducted a systematic literature search of five databases. The search led to a review of 27 articles that were used to analyze the topic using comparative analysis. The researchers applied the conceptual framework of personal recovery to look for evidence from the conception and scope of identity construction among mothers previously diagnosed with mental illness. Their findings showed that identity is a concept that is rarely described in literature. However, the researchers' results paid more attention to the view of motherhood. Some of the barriers that prevented uninterrupted and rewarding motherhood include discrimination from those around them, self-criticism, mental illness and treatment, and lack of a supportive family. Another difficulty is that intense and difficult emotions make it difficult for mothers to form better relationships with their children. The findings revealed that psychiatric services play a significant role in recovery of self-identity. Supporting mothers are essential in facilitating personal recovery from mental illness and leading to the formation of positive, realistic, and diverse identities. The discovery of self-identity among mothers leads to the acknowledgement and response to mental health without fear of losing their parenting role.

Music Therapy as a Treatment Intervention for Bipolar Disorder

One form of treatment for mental disorders is music therapy. Music therapy allows individuals to process their experiences in life and express their feelings, musically and verbally. At the same time, individuals get an opportunity to explore their thoughts. Through a literature review, Krauss (2019) sought to evaluate how music therapy affects individuals affected by mental illness. The purpose of the study was to understand the effective methods and approaches

in music therapy. At the same time, the author evaluated the psychological and physiological impacts of music therapy on participants.

Music therapy has shown to be useful in treating those with psychological disorders, such as bipolar disorder, anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Kraus, 2019). The primary findings of the research show that music therapy is used widely and has been an expanded form of treatment citation. The secondary findings show that there has been limited literature review seeking to identify the effectiveness of music therapy among psychiatric patients. The tertiary results show the impacts of music therapy on the brain. Music can be used as a reward system to ensure that patients' character transforms.

An interim study done by Gebhardt, Dammann, Loescher, Wehmeier, Vedder & von Georgi in 2018 examined the effectiveness of music therapy as a non-verbal form of treatment in psychiatry. However, there is little research showing its effects on changing emotions and on personality dimensions. Gebhardt et. al. (2018) sought to assess how music therapy offers a connection between personality features and emotion alteration approaches. The researchers compared the changes with those of individuals who were not treated with music therapy. The researchers collected data from 137 patients for analysis. The findings of the research demonstrate how individuals involved in music therapy used music to solve cognitive problems and for positive stimulation. The predictors of the non-music therapy group showing how music can lower adverse activation were cooperation and carefreeness.

Johnson & Rickson (2018) explored the impacts of songwriting on adolescents with mental illness. The researchers also examined the particular songwriting methods that a student

applied in her group and individual music therapy. The secondary analysis was used for a previous research and was helpful in determining how effective the form of treatment can be effective among individuals with mental health difficulties. The first step in the therapy was identifying the approach that adolescents would prefer when writing songs. The second was evaluating the methods and techniques that would be effective in meeting the needs of the participants if appropriately integrated. In individual and group sessions, each student was asked to write the ideas of their songs as a form of expressing their thoughts and experiences. The facilitator listened to the songs and assisted the students in choosing the appropriate tools that would be used to improve the music and enhance creativity. As the students shared their ideas and their work, their confidence increased, and they became more meaningful.

The environment plays a significant role on the therapeutic songwriting process. Through a qualitative research, Baker (2013) sought to assess environmental conditions that can either reinforce or limit the success of therapeutic writing process. The researcher interviewed forty-five music therapists from eleven nations. The purpose of the process was to understand factors such as environmental factors that are more likely to affect the songwriting process. Grounded theory methods were used for the study where the researcher coded interview transcripts. An analysis of the data showed how the environment affects therapeutic songwriting process among individuals using music therapy as a form of treatment. Baker (2013) identified four factors affecting the environment: “organizational structures, the physical space, the private space, and the organizational culture” (p. 232). The above factors can either support or constrain music therapy. The findings suggested that clinicians can address various issues and that they have the capacity to address to ensure the effectiveness of the music therapy sessions. Some of these

factors to address are interruptions, privacy, and staff culture. However, other factors like organizational structures are constant and clinicians should try to accommodate them. Generally, music therapy practitioners should understand their environment and the impacts that it can have on the therapy process.

Children who are homeless and or victims of violence have limited chances of accessing proper learning, communal, and recreational supports. Nevertheless, music has been seen as an essential component of the daily lives of children. In their article, Fairchild & McFerran (2019) explored how songwriting can be used as a hands-on arts-based study approach to help individuals understand how they can use music to talk about homelessness and family violence. The research involved fifteen children between the ages eight and fourteen. They took part in music-based focus groups whose primary objective was for the participants to write a song about the meaning of music to them. The researchers used collaborative songwriting research method with the primary purpose of engaging kids in creative and child-centered methods. The methodology was effective throughout the process of collecting, generating, and analyzing data. For the study, two songs were used to artistically represent the experience of the children and to understand music as an essential resource. During the entire process, the kids explained how songs and music have played a significant role in their lives. According to the children, songs allowed them to escape the ordeals they went through in their personal lives and provided them with hope for a better future (Fairchild & McFerran, 2019).

In a phenomenological study, Chen (2019) explored the impacts of single-session group music therapy on patients' wellness. The researcher assessed the experience of ten therapists and nine patient participants to understand the concept. Chen (2019) developed a pre-designed

protocol where each participant was involved in a single-session group musical improvisation as well as a verbal discussion. Chen analyzed the data comprehensively and thematized the findings of the research. The first theme identified was the experience that patients had during the period of inpatient hospitalization in psychiatric care. The second theme was the experience of the therapist when providing psychiatric care. Other themes were participants' experiences, challenges, and therapeutic components of group musical inventions in single-session therapy. The research showed that the single-session music therapies provided individuals with a sense of safety and structure; thus enabling them to process their emotions, thoughts, and issues. The study also pointed out the challenges that participants went through when taking part in the therapy sessions.

In a qualitative study, Ahmadi (2011) sought to evaluate the impact of song lyrics on image alteration. The setting of the study was in Sweden with the population being cancer patients trying to develop a new self-image following a diagnosis of the disease. The researcher used semi-structured interviews where they interviewed 17 cancer patients aged between 24 and 73 years. One defining characteristic of the sample is that they had music, either listened or played, as a coping mechanism to their illness. In the study, four case studies highlighted the primary finding. Ahmadi (2011) found that religious, cheerful, and hard lyrics can be helpful to cancer patients in gaining a balance in their inner feelings. The patients tended to identify themselves with the person that the lyrics of the song address. The implication of the finding is that clinicians may find it useful to use music therapy among patients suffering from serious illnesses such as bipolar disorder.

Individuals who have survived spinal cord or acquired brain injuries may lack quality life and care. Baker, Tamplin, Rickard, Ponsford, New & Lee (2019), through randomized controlled trial and care-as-usual control groups sought to evaluate the impacts of therapeutic songwriting intervention on the promotion of self-concept and well-being following a neurological injury. Among the 47 participants were patients who had acquired brain injury, where 3 of them were in-patients and 20 were community participants. The patients who had experienced spinal cord injury included 12 in-patients and 12 community participants. The program that the researcher introduced to the intervention group consisted of twelve sessions aimed at rediscovering one's identity. The participants were asked to write three songs that reflected upon the views their past, present, and future selves. On the other hand, the control participants received care as usual (Baker et al., 2019). The researchers assessed the outcomes of the intervention using various measures of baseline, post-intervention, and follow-up. The participants were evaluated based on their overall health, emotional regulation, and satisfaction with life. The results of the research showed that song writing improved individual's satisfaction in life. For the songwriting group, their emotion regulation suppression decreased with time whereas the cohort group experienced an increase in emotion regulation.

The challenge that the researcher experienced is that of the small number of individuals eligible to participate in the study. The community-dwelling cohorts experienced a heightened retention rate (Baker et al., 2019). The research demonstrates that researchers may experience difficulty in recruiting individuals to take part in a music therapy investigation. The results show that therapeutic songwriting protocols are helpful among patients who shift from in-patient to community settings. Individuals should provide consent and be willing to complete the

intervention. Patients diagnosed with bipolar disorder can be involved in music therapy at the community level, as this form of treatment will allow them to learn to process and manage their emotions.

Neurological disability can lead to multiple physical, cognitive, and/or emotional changes that are more likely to impact self-identity or self-concept. Victims may require some form of therapy or treatment to help them cope with the negative impacts of the neurological disability. Baker, Tamplin, Rickard, New, Ponsford, Roddy & Lee (2018) studied the impact of songwriting in early neurorehabilitation during meaning making and recovery processes. The pilot study comprised of fifteen participants in early rehabilitation who were asked to explain their songs six to twelve months after taking part in composing their songs. The intervention that the researchers used in the study was a songwriting program that lasted for six weeks and which targeted the concept of identity. The authors focused on the processes of making meaning and identity restoration in the songs that the participants wrote. They administered semi-structured interviews and used interpretative phenomenological analysis to analyze the collected data. The researchers identified themes that were unique to each participant and proceeded to identify recurrent themes and subthemes. The findings of the research showed the effectiveness of songwriting during the meaning making and recovery processes. Therapeutic songwriting program was effective in providing hope or self-recognition to the participants following the neurological disability. Another positive impact is in reconceptualizing values and shifting perspectives that an individual has about themselves. Music therapy is also useful in confirming values that one held before the disability and in the continuing process of self-rediscovery. Finally, the form of treatment was significant in reinforcing prevailing values and recognizing

resources and coping tactics (Baker et al., 2018). The findings of the study show the effectiveness of songwriting as a therapeutic tool in facilitating identity reconstruction.

Improved quality of life and sound mental well-being after a neurological injury is essential for individuals to develop a positive self-concept. Clinicians should consider the need for effective redevelopment of identity as the primary purpose of rehabilitation. Tamplin, Baker, Macdonald, Roddy & Rickard (2016) developed and tested a songwriting protocol to determine its effectiveness among individuals with acquired brain and or SCI. Their research focused on six primary domains, namely, physical, individual, communal, family, educational/employment, and moral aspects. The researchers aimed at evaluating the impacts of the protocols on those six domains and their effectiveness in the reconstruction of self-concept. Tamplin et al. (2016) used twelve music therapy sessions to evaluate their effectiveness among the participants. The results of the study showed that individuals created three songs that reflected their past, present, and future selves. As a result of the songwriting processes, the participants developed a deeper exploration of self. The researchers also proceeded to present a case study of a man diagnosed with spinal cord injury and demonstrated the effectiveness of music therapy in ensuing changes in self-concept. According to Tamplin et al. (2016), the songwriting protocol should be incorporated with trust to allow the songwriter to feel safe and hard. Generally, songwriting is a helpful in ensuring that patients with neurological disorders develop a sense of self-concept and identity.

Adults with mental illness require coping skills when participating in illness management and recovery programs. In a randomized pilot study, Silverman (2019) sought to evaluate the effectiveness of music therapy as a way through which mentally chronically ill patients cope

with self-efficacy in a psychiatric facility. The method of collecting data was through a cluster-randomized approach of 92 adults on a mental healthcare for critical patients. The results demonstrated that instructive music therapy conditions offered patients with a favorable means of coping with self-efficacy (Silverman, 2019). Thus, music therapy can be effective in ensuring that mentally ill patients develop life skills such as self-efficacy during ill management and recovery programs.

Literature reveals that music therapy is useful and effective in treating various forms of psychiatric disorders. Active music therapy is more essential because it treats more serious symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and mood swings. Research on the concept of neuroplasticity and brain circuitry demonstrates that music can have long-term impacts on the brain (Krauss, 2019). The impact on the brain is more intense than that of mood or emotional responses. People with bipolar disorder have episodes, which are periods of extreme and intense emotional states. Music therapy can be helpful in managing the emotions of patients with bipolar disorder and allowing them to have control over their feelings.

Music therapy is beneficial for patients as it allows them to develop a new self-image. According to Ahmadi (2011), music therapy allows patients to resolve the difference between self-perceived image and the image they believe others have of them. Through song lyrics, such people created an imaginary world that is different from the one they live, thus allowing them to view their situations from a different angle. Music therapy is an effective form of treatment for those with bipolar disorder because it allows them to reconcile their self-image with the view of others.

Music therapy is a way that allows many people rediscover their self-image and identity (Baker et al., 2019). Song writing also makes it easier for survivors to accommodate bipolar disorder symptoms such as memory impairments and mood swings. The songwriting process involves confrontation of a crisis and owning one self's experiences. The patients going through songwriting therapeutic sessions contemplate the future and stay focused in their rehabilitation and treatment (Baker et al., 2018). In this case, the effect of songwriting therapy among personality disorder patients helps in better recovery and rediscovery of self-image and identity.

Discussion

Literature review on the topic of bipolar disorder shows that diagnosis is essential in identifying the symptoms of a patient. The consequences of the diagnosis can either be positive or negative, depending on how an individual perceives them. The environment surrounding a patient determines the symptoms that they display and how they will respond to treatment. Supportive family, friends, and communities will allow patients to get better treatment and be productive people in society. The problem facing mental healthcare is stigmatization in various aspects of life. Stigmatization of people with mental illnesses has been an existing trend for long. As such, victims find it difficult to progress in their personal, education or work, or social lives (Nam, 2008). Therapists should understand patients' reactions to diagnosis of bipolar disorder to ensure they understand the best forms of treatment for them.

Some of the negative consequences of the diagnosis of bipolar disorder are often seen through the loss of self-concept and identity. When people are diagnosed with bipolar disorder, some may struggle to process various cognitive and emotional changes they experience, and

these may threaten their sense of self. The threats to self may lead to internal conflicts which may inhibit one's ability to function. bipolar disorder patients may find it challenging to reintegrate into the society successfully, go back to earlier roles, and uphold relationships around them (Baker et al., 2018). Clinicians need to find better treatment options that will ensure the clients redevelop a sense of self-concept and identity.

Brainstorming and lyric creation processes are crucial to songwriting therapy sessions. During these stages, therapists should assist clients in focusing on the specific time that they consider, either the past, present, or future self. Composing or listening to lyrics assists individuals to get a deeper understanding of their purpose in life as well as the goals that they aspire to attain (Baker et al., 2019). Therapists should motivate patients with personality disorder to talk freely and share their experiences through lyrics (Tamplin et al., 2016). The nature of songwriting therapy allows individuals to express their grief, appreciate their current conditions, and develop a new perception about their future selves. The creativity required in songwriting is required in assisting bipolar disorder patients to get accept their diagnosis and successfully reintegrate into their previous selves.

The effectiveness of songwriting in treating bipolar disorder can be attributed to various reasons. One is that there is a neurological link between music, memory, and emotions that allows a patient to progress in the therapeutic process (Baker et al, 2018). The connection motivates individuals to express their emotions and aids in memory recovery, and these are useful in getting individuals to change their self-perceptions. Secondly, music therapy is more effective than verbal therapies, especially for those with problems in communicating or who cannot comprehend languages (Tamplin et al., 2016). The songwriting process allows a person to

recall and be aware of residue identity, thus triggering pleasure networks. In the end, patients will learn to cope with depression and anxiety and be in a better position to face challenges arising from diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Music therapy allows individuals to face their fears and cope with mental illnesses. Songwriting is a meaningful process that allows a patient to talk about their experiences in a flowing manner. Expressing oneself enhances mood and leads to the development of coping mechanisms in confronting issues surrounding a person. Patients diagnosed with a mental illness will find it easier to accept their diagnosis and make sense of recurrent symptoms (Baker et al. 2018). Patients will make sense of, accept, and appreciate self-concepts, either about their past, present, or future (Tamplin et al., 2016). Generally, music therapy offers an opportunity to patients with bipolar disorder to enhance self-perception and identity as they rediscover themselves and reconcile who they were, are and who they will become.

Songwriting also allows patients with bipolar disorder to reflect on the present and how surrounding events have brought various changes. As Baker (2013) indicated, the environment surrounding a person can either promote or constraint therapeutic songwriting process. Therapists should provide a supportive environment for patients with bipolar disorder during music therapy sessions. For instance, the staff should provide positive feedback to the patients and encourage them to be honest in their songs. Mental healthcare workers should eliminate any barriers preventing effective music therapy during treatment and rehabilitation. Therapists should ensure that there is a conducive environment for bipolar disorder patients to express their emotions and reconstruct identity through songwriting.

According to Fairchild & McFerran (2019), music therapy was effective among children who experienced homelessness and family violence. This form of treatment provides a means for patients to get away from the exterior world and gives them hope for the future. Engaging those with bipolar disorder in the arts-based and collective procedure of songwriting helps in understanding the patients' resources. Identifying and exploring resources is essential in the early stages of engagement between patients and therapists. Community programs should be supportive of music therapy among mentally ill individuals. In this case, songwriting therapy for patients with bipolar disorder is helpful in helping them through self-acceptance and identity as they recover.

Single music therapy sessions have become increasingly common in inpatient psychiatric care (Chen, 2019). Music therapists need to adapt treatment goals that can be attained at the end of a given session. Single-session music therapy provides patients with a sense of safety and structure, thus enabling them to elaborate their emotions, thoughts, and issues. Therapists should work closely with patients with bipolar disorder to ensure that the music therapy sessions are successful. The therapists should identify specific patient needs that should be addressed for maximum results during treatment. Hence, songwriting therapy sessions should be effective enough to allow patients to cope with depression and anxiety as a step towards their healing and wellness.

The effects also differ from one person to another depending on how the clients process emotions and messages. Some lyrics could be harmful to a patient, whereas others could be beneficial. The symptoms of bipolar disorder differ from one episode to another depending on the surrounding environment or situations surrounding a patient. Coping mechanisms differ from

one individual to another and therapists should be careful to address personal needs. Irrespective of the differences in the impacts of songs, music therapy is useful in the process of rediscovering self-concept and identity. Thus, mental healthcare providers should use different forms of music for therapy sessions to allow patients to cope with bipolar disorder. This is dangerous turf to tread upon. It can be applying our values and culture on others.

Past studies on the topic of music therapy provides various implications for practice in mental healthcare of patients with illnesses like bipolar disorder citations. One recommendation is that therapists must consider a range of creative arts therapies or conventional verbal interventions to meet specific patient needs citation. The type of songs to use during therapy sessions should consider the coping mechanisms of the patients. The effectiveness of the form of therapy will depend upon the level of trust that therapists build with and among their clients. Therapists can be good listeners and encourage patients with bipolar disorder to express their problems without fear. In this case, music therapy is effective in reconstructing self-perception and identity among patients with bipolar disorder if they address specific needs.

From the literature review, most studies have concentrated on the effectiveness of music and songwriting therapies on patients recovering from general mental illnesses and neurological disability citations. This researcher identified how songwriting and song lyrics can help patients in the reconstruction of self-concept and identity. The limitation of this literature review is that it considered secondary data as a source of information. Thus, this researcher did not collect first-hand experience from patients and therapists on the effectiveness of songwriting identity formation following a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Future research should consider primary research on the key population of patients with bipolar disorder. Most studies have focused on

the effects of music therapy and songwriting on the general population of patients with mental illnesses and neurological disabilities. Further research should focus on specific areas of impact of songwriting in bipolar disorder patients and how the intervention promotes self-acceptance, self-esteem, and identity development at the individual and social level.

Conclusion

There is a need to look at bipolar disorder from a view of the impacts that they have on psychosocial development and the development of self and identity. Being diagnosed with a mental illness such as bipolar disorder can impact one's sense of identity and transform the course of their life. It may cause one to struggle with accepting who they were before the illness and who they have become after being diagnosed with the disorder. The conflict can challenge the individual's identity and self-image. Facilitating acceptance and integration is one way for patients to cope with the diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Music therapy offers an opportunity to patients with bipolar disorder to enhance self-perception and identity as they rediscover themselves and reconcile who they were, are and who they will become. The focus of further research should be on the specific areas of impact of songwriting in bipolar disorder patients and how the intervention promotes self-acceptance, self-esteem, and identity development at the individual and society level.

References

- Ahmadi, F. (2011). Song lyrics and the alteration of self-image. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 20(3), 225-241.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: Author.
- Baker, F. A. (2013). The environmental conditions that support or constrain the therapeutic songwriting process. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 40(2), 230-238.
- Baker, F. A., Tamplin, J., Rickard, N., New, P., Ponsford, J., Roddy, C., & Lee, Y. E. C. (2018). Meaning making process and recovery journeys explored through songwriting in early neurorehabilitation: Exploring the perspectives of participants of their self-composed songs through the interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1422.
- Baker, F. A., Tamplin, J., Rickard, N., Ponsford, J., New, P. W., & Lee, Y. E. C. (2019). A therapeutic songwriting intervention to promote reconstruction of self-concept and enhance well-being following brain or spinal cord injury: pilot randomized controlled trial. *Clinical Rehabilitation*, 33(6), 1045-1055.
- Chen, Y. Y. (2019). *Experiences of Single-Session Improvisational Group Music Therapy: Therapist and Patient Reflections from Inpatient Psychiatry*. DigitalCommons@Lesley.
- Fairchild, R., & McFerran, K. S. (2019). "Music is everything": Using collaborative group

- songwriting as an arts-based method with children experiencing homelessness and family violence. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 28(2), 88-107.
- Gebhardt, S., Dammann, I., Loescher, K., Wehmeier, P. M., Vedder, H., & von Georgi, R. (2018). The effects of music therapy on the interaction of the self and emotions—An interim analysis. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, 41, 61-66.
- Hine, R. H., Maybery, D. J., & Goodyear, M. J. (2018). Identity in recovery for mothers with a mental illness: A literature review. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 41(1), 16.
- Inder, M. L., Crowe, M. T., Moor, S., Luty, S. E., Carter, J. D., & Joyce, P. R. (2008). “I actually don't know who I am”: The impact of bipolar disorder on the development of self. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 71(2), 123-133.
- Ironside, M. L., Johnson, S. L., & Carver, C. S. (2020). Identity in bipolar disorder: Self-worth and achievement. *Journal of Personality*, 88(1), 45-58.
- Johnson, E., & Rickson, D. (2018). Songwriting with adolescents who have mental health difficulties: One music therapy student's experience. *New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy*, (16), 115.
- Krauss, Z. J. (2019). The Effects of Music Therapy on Individuals Suffering from Psychiatric Disorders: A Literature Review and Look into Future Prospects. This is incomplete
- Nam, S. H. (2008). The construction of self-identity in the chronically mentally ill: a focus on

autobiographic narratives of mentally ill patients in South Korea. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 4(1).

O'Connor, C., Kadianaki, I., Maunder, K., & McNicholas, F. (2018). How does psychiatric diagnosis affect young people's self-concept and social identity? A systematic review and synthesis of the qualitative literature. *Social Science & Medicine*, 212, 94-119.

Silverman, M. J. (2019). Music therapy for coping self-efficacy in an acute mental health setting: A randomized pilot study. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 55(4), 615-623.

Tamplin, J., Baker, F. A., Macdonald, R. A., Roddy, C., & Rickard, N. S. (2016). A theoretical framework and therapeutic songwriting protocol to promote integration of self-concept in people with acquired neurological injuries. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 25(2), 111-133.

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

**Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Music Therapy, MA**

Student's Name: Barbara Rose Marese

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: The Effect of Songwriting on Identity Formation After a Diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder

Date of Graduation: May 16, 2020

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Annette Whitehead-Pleaux, MA, MT-BC