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Music Therapy and Counseling with Mixed-Race Populations: A Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

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Music Therapy

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Abstract

Multiracial individuals currently make up 10.3% of the United States population. While there are a few biracial identity development models in existence, there are currently no music therapy models or music therapy literature that involves work with mixed-race populations. This critical literature review examines various biracial and multiracial literature to outline the diverse and unique mixed-race experience. Music therapy research, literature, and methods that explore identity development and sense of self are also examined. While music therapy has been shown to help support identity development and self-actualization, there is a lack of qualitative and quantitative research. The literature presented indicates that music therapy can help facilitate healthy identity development in mixed-race populations. This critical literature review provides the foundation for a method that can integrate biracial identity development with music therapy. Further research needs to be done before a full understanding of how music therapy can be used in context of counseling mixed populations.

Keywords: biracial, mixed-race, multiracial, multiethnic, music therapy, identity development

Author Identity Statement: The author identifies as a mixed-race and biracial (Pinay and Italian) woman from Orlando, Florida.

Music Therapy and Counseling with Mixed-Race Populations: A Literature Review

Introduction

In the year 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau allowed multiracial individuals to select multiple race categories for the first time (Museus, 2016). Prior to that, biracial and multiethnic individuals were forced to make a choice to identify with a single race. Even though the U.S. Census Bureau has allowed individuals to make this choice, in some situations, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the choice is still absent. Individuals are only allowed to choose one option, one of which is the term other (Jones et al., 2021). What are the implications of forcing a teenager to choose an identity they may not resonate fully with, because it is not their full identity? If not willing to choose, what are the implications of choosing the term 'other' to represent personhood, especially during a time where so much of adolescence is centered around finding your identity?

As someone who is mixed/biracial, I believe that the mixed-race experience is a unique one. Not only does it vary depending on your ethnic background, but it can also vary depending on the environment, how a mixed child was parented, and the social support they had access to (Kerwin, 1993). Even though they may share similarities, it is possible that not one mixed-race person's experience is alike. Even siblings can be perceived differently based on genetic traits and phenotypes; two children from an interracial partnership could look completely different, thus leading to different lived experiences (Allen, 2013). Navigating identity can be difficult when there is an inability to fully claim one or the other due to alienation, social rejection, or being "other-ed" (Castillo, 2017, p. 238; Root, 1990).

It has been speculated by researchers that biracial children are at risk for developing a variety of problems, including lowered self-esteem, difficulty in dealing with conflicting cultural

demands, and feeling marginal in two cultures (Kerwin, 1993). So much of ourselves and our personalities are centered around identity, so what happens when you are counseling a client who may not know how they identify, and may be straddling the line between two different cultures? What happens to a client's perception of self when they are continually rejected from their own race? What happens when they have their identity mistaken throughout their life?

Music therapy participation can allow clients to engage in identity work. Through music therapy, clients can define, develop, and reflect on their understanding of their own self-identity (Lawendowski & Bieleninik, 2017). In a wide variety of ways, music therapists have talked about identity formation using terms like sense of self, self-actualization, and musical identity (Echard, 2019). Musical identity was defined by Lawendowski and Bieleninik (2017) as the link between self-image and music. This critical literature review will explore whether there is a way that music therapy can help biracial individuals become confident in their self-image and develop identity.

In a qualitative study, Castillo stated, "Traditional developmental models on multiracial identity formation omit the multifaceted cultural, psychological, and socio-economic variations that characterize existing populations" (Castillo, 2017, p. 234). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), in 2010 there were approximately nine million individuals who self-identified as multiracial, 3.2% of the population. In just ten years, that number has increased 276% to 329.5 million individuals, now 10.3% of the population (2021). While the population of multiracial people is growing, current research on mixed populations and multiethnic counseling is limited, with only five identity development methods for biracial individuals proposed by individuals (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2004; Root, 1990; Stonequist, 1937). There is no existing research on any expressive therapies or music therapy with mixed populations. It is my hope that

in this critical literature, some of these questions can be answered and information gathered can help inform the future work in music therapy and counseling with biracial and multiethnic populations.

Literature Review

In 2010, self-identified mixed-race individuals made up 3.2% of the population. In 2021, the US Census (2021) showed that percentage more than tripled to 10.3% of the population. While this mixed-race data on the US Census includes biracial individuals, it also includes an unknown number of individuals who “declared ancestry to relatives from centuries past” (Iijima Hall, 2004, p. 238). For the purpose of this literature review, unless otherwise specified, the terms ‘mixed-race’ or ‘mixed’ will focus solely on persons who are biracial, meaning that their parents come from two different racial and/or ethnic backgrounds.

Although mixed persons are not rare, many may still consider the mixed-race experience an unusual phenomenon and there is limited research on this topic to date, a majority of which utilize the case study method. They involved an intensive description of one or a few individuals (Cauce et al., 1992). Case studies may be used to intensively analyze an issue or phenomenon, but they are limited in the extent that “their findings may be generalized” (APA, 2022, para. 1). It is not surprising that the bulk of research presented on the mixed-race experiences are case studies, but the lack of diverse research paradigms and methodology limits our knowledge on this subject and our ability to have generalizable or transferable findings. While there seems to be a few publications of literature in existence about the mixed-race experience, there is not much information on counseling methods for this population. While there is music therapy research on identity formation and development, the author was not able to locate research on music therapy or creative arts therapies within a mixed-race study population. The only two

articles found that integrated ideas of music therapy and mixed-race persons are two chapters by Rafieyan (2013, 2017). One is a personal narrative on her experience as a mixed music therapist, and the second is a reflection of identities that fall in between with a discussion on the end on implications for music therapy. The intention of this literature review is that the information presented can act as a foundation for new methods to be created and future research within the scope of music therapy.

The Mixed-Race Experience

Although it has been speculated by researchers that biracial children are at risk of developing a variety of problems (Kerwin et al., 1993), it is important to note that many case studies of biracial persons have left us believing that the biracial individual is a poorly adjusted one (Buchanan & Acevedo, 2004; Cauce et al., 1992; Gibbs, 1987). The biracial individual is often painted as a person confused by their identity and weighed down with self-esteem issues and family difficulties (Gibbs, 1987; Kerwin et al., 1993; Phillips, 2004; Root, 2004). It is important to remember that a few case studies are not representative of an entire population, and the mixed experience is a unique one that has dozens of variables (i.e., ethnic/racial background, socioeconomic status, social environment, ecological factors, if a monoracial identity is claimed, etc.). The issues surrounding biraciality can also vary by age and development. The experience a 3-year-old biracial child who is not aware of their status will not be the same as a 30-year-old biracial adult who is fully comfortable in their identity (Cauce et al., 1992).

While the lived experiences of the mixed-race individual can be very different (Kerwin et al., 1993), there are common themes and issues that seem to emerge. In evaluating responses to a questionnaire for a study on biracial siblings, Root (2003) compiled a list of 50 questions or comments that mixed persons often received. Often heard were phrases such as, “You have to

choose; you can't be both" and "You don't look/aren't really Black/Asian/Latino, etc." as well as comments about how a person's surname didn't match their appearance (Root, 2003, p. 133-134). It was also common to hear questions such as, "What are you?" and "Where are you really from?" (Root, 2003, p. 133). Mixed individuals also received comments such as, "You look exotic" and "Mixed people are so beautiful or handsome" (Root, 2003, p. 133). They would also be subjected to jokes about mixed-race people (Root, 2003). Common themes identified by mixed-race individual's lived experiences throughout the literature will be presented in the following section.

Belonging/Acceptance

Belonging and a sense of acceptance is a primary need of all individuals (Maslow, 1968). Common issues of belonging and acceptance are most seen in adolescent populations, but still exist among studies done with adults. In hopes of fitting in on a college campus, mixed students were forced to assume a monoracial identity and choose a side (Harris, 2016). McDonald et al. (2020) found that "general oversimplification of the construct of race and racial mislabeling happens in multiple settings" (p. 19). Although mixed persons were born to a particular race, they may not have learned the history or culture of the group (Yakima Hall, 2004). Nonacceptance, being ostracized, or being questioned about one's identity and affinity can be painful, and not being accepted by one's "ethnic family" could feel similar to being rejected by a parent (Iijima Hall, 2004, p. 239). Feeling a lack of cultural connection can provide additional obstacles to a healthy self-esteem and sense of identity (Paladino & Davis, 2006).

Biracial women, in particular, defy established racial hierarchies. Not only do they occupy the spaces of the racial classification system, they also challenge its existence (Phillips, 2004). Mixed persons can face unique issues of identity due to their dual heritage (Root, 1994).

When mixed persons may not immediately appear to belong to any specific ethnicity, questions such as, “what are you?” may be common (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2019, p. 34). For an individual in college, constantly hearing race inquiries and assumptions can be emotionally exhausting (Paladino & Davis, 2006). Feeling special or unique may also contribute to a lack of acceptance and belonging (Deters, 1997). Castillo et al. (2020) found in a qualitative study including ten biracial Black-Asian individuals that nearly all participants voiced experiencing some level of conflict in claiming their racial identity. The frequent inability to claim one or both cultures sometimes led to an avoidance of Black or Asian spaces due to anticipation of social rejection, with others explicitly stating they were shunned from such spaces. The experience of being othered and having to “pick a side” was also mentioned, and most participants discussed the duality of their biracial identity as a hindrance to being accepted by monoracial Black and Asian people (Castillo et al., 2020, p. 238). Many participants mentioned feeling alienated by Asian communities, and that they had experienced encounters of being “othered, ignored, or rejected by monoracial Asians” (Castillo et al., 2020, p. 238). Some biracial youth combatted feelings of marginality by joining alternative peer crowds (Phillips, 2004).

Denial of identity could be linked to feeling as if you do not belong. Psychophysiological stress responses were measured in response to bicultural and biracial identity denial in a quantitative study facilitated by Albuja (2019). It was the first study done of its type to highlight the negative physical health consequences of identity denial within this population, showing the necessity for biracial individuals’ need for acceptance and belongingness within their cultures (Albuja, 2019). Using 141 bicultural undergraduate students, a prescreening survey was given where participants did not realize they were participating in a study related to bicultural identity. In the prescreening, their bicultural identity was rejected and denied, and shortly after their

cortisol response levels were measured and a stress scale was given. Bicultural participants reported high levels of stress when their White identity was denied, and more than half the participants (66.1%) reasserted their identity shortly after (Albuja, 2019).

Physical Appearance and Hypersexualization/Exoticization

Mixed individuals may be perceived as ethnically ambiguous depending on their ethnic background and phenotype. Mixed persons may learn from their families to identify as biracial, but may be denied this identity and not perceived as such in interactions with peers (Townsend et al., 1999). In a qualitative and narrative research study, a theme amongst the ten participants was having their identity questioned. The major precursor to these questions was usually racial ambiguity, or having indistinguishable ethnic or racial features (Jackson, 2010). Each participant described feeling uncomfortable when approached about their racial background, and that the questions often made participants feel “strange and different” (Jackson, 2010, p. 50). Biracial persons have been hypersexualized and fetishized within Western culture, and biracial women can be stereotyped as exotic, sexual, passionate, immoral, and promiscuous (Nakashima, 1992; Root, 2004). Phillips (2004) research showed that biracial adolescent girls attempted to gain acceptance through conformity to racialized sexual stereotypes. This manifested in girls engaging in frequent sexual activity, largely with White boys who “might not otherwise date them” (Phillips, 2004, p. 223).

Harris (2016) found within her studies that participants relayed how they were tokenized, objectified, and exoticized for their mixedness. While the term ‘exotic’ might be seen as a compliment, it can also possess negative connotations and be a double-edged sword (Root, 2004). A qualitative study by Waring (2013) underscored the racial and sexist undertones when applied to biracial women, and participants in the study were aware of what their racial

ambiguity meant to their partners in regard to initial romantic interest, sexual excitement, and sexual expectations (Waring, 2013). Mixed-race women have historically been thought of as “exotic” or “an unusually sexual being” (Root, 1994, p. 20-21). This idea can be oppressive to biracial women and harmful to young biracial girls who are coming to know their sexuality (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2019).

In another qualitative study, 34 male and female participants discussed how their appearance invited superficial attention and attraction instead of genuine interest (Museus et al., 2016). The women reported exoticization as a significant part of their mixed-race life experiences. Several participants felt as though the comments did not have malicious intent, and that sometimes being exoticized made them feel unique. However, the message often conveyed to participants that they were dehumanized and objectified (Museus et al., 2016). Perhaps this can be related to the term exotic being defined as “not native to the place where found” and “mysteriously different or unusual” (Merriam-Webster, 2022, para. 1-2) thus adding to a mixed person’s struggle with acceptance and belonging. Perhaps the unsettled feeling of being labeled exotic can be paralleled to ethnic objectification, and the societal belief that the European/White standards of beauty are the norm (Buckley & Carter, 2004; Iijima Hall, 2004; Lee, 2004; Nishimura, 2004; Phillips, 2004). Being referred to as exotic suggests that a mixed person does not align with that societal norm. It is simply another form of being othered.

Stereotypes

The mixed experience has been pathologized, with the assumption being that mixed people are psychologically imbalanced, developmentally challenged, and confused about their identities (Museus et al., 2016). Early research on biracial adolescents assumed they have low self-esteem, attributed to a marginalized status (Bracey et al., 2004). Biracial women can be

threatened by negative stereotypes of heightened sexuality and a difficulty integrating dual heritage (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2019). Multiracial college students may become emotionally exhausted from hearing race inquiries and assumptions (Paladino, 2006). Negative socialization messages may occur within mixed families, where negative stereotypes are expressed by a parent intentionally or unintentionally to a multiracial youth about a racial group with whom they share heritage with (Atkin et al., 2021). Sometimes, mixed person's parents may express prejudice through stereotypical assumptions or negative statements made about the other parent's racial group. Other times, parents may reinforce stereotypes or expect their children to behave in line with a stereotype (Atkin et al., 2021).

When biracial individuals identify more strongly with one aspect of their racial heritage, the chance they are subjected to stereotypes and racial biases increases (Albuja et al., 2018). Even when not aligning oneself with a monoracial identity, mixed persons can still be stereotyped based on physical appearance. One Black-Asian participant in a qualitative study on how internalized oppression impacts identity development disclosed that being perceived as a Black male as opposed to an Asian or biracial male subjected him to stereotypes and barriers. Even though he did not feel a connection to the Black community, he was still subjected to the Black male experience due to his physical appearance (Castillo et al., 2020). Another Black-Asian participant disclosed how her Black relatives ingrained the idea of the "strong Black woman" mentality as a key aspect of her identity, even though she is trying to distance herself from this ideology (Castillo et al., 2020, p. 239). Khanna (2011) found that some Black-White biracial adults drew attention to their mixed identities in white contexts to avoid being marginalized and stereotyped. In contrast, they drew attention to their mixed identities in black contexts to access white racial privilege (Khanna, 2011). Instead of challenging negative Black

stereotypes, respondents called attention to their biraciality, thus maintaining the status quo of the American racial hierarchy that positions Black people at the bottom (Khanna, 2011).

Ethnic Identity

When examining biracial identity in biracial children, Kerwin et al. (1993) found in six participant family interviews that there was a nonuse of racially identifying labels for the family and the children. Ferguson (2016) found that even though interracial couples may have shared doubts about their children's development, the couples "believed they would develop a healthy personal identity if the right conditions, created by them, were achieved" (p. 35). Overall, a major finding in this qualitative study was that parents did not wish for their children to adopt a monoracial identity, and instead wished their children would adopt their biracial heritage. The evidence demonstrated that interracial parents who participated in the study actively engaged in the identity formation of their children (Ferguson, 2016).

In a qualitative investigation with 10 multiracial adults aged 21-37, it was found that all participants shifted how they expressed racial identity during different periods of their lives or in diverse social contexts (Jackson, 2010). The participants described shifting their expressions of identity to often align with the social group and others' racial identities. There were also findings of participants changing their racial identity due to environmental pressure to claim a monoracial group. Additionally, as the participants got older, they became more comfortable with their multiracial identity, leading to fewer shifts in identity (Jackson, 2010). In Khanna's (2011) qualitative study with forty Black-White biracial adults, one participant stated they identify as biracial in black contexts as a way to access white racial privilege. A majority of the other respondents described how they draw on ethnic and racial symbols to highlight their white backgrounds (Khanna, 2011).

Making multiracial respondents on forms select a single racial identity forces them “to categorize themselves in a way that does not reflect their actual identification” (Townsend et al., 2009, p, 188). Fourteen college student participants in a qualitative study made comments recalling incidents where they had to choose only one aspect of their racial identity to identify with, most often in regard to forms where they were only able to check one box (Kellogg & Liddell, 2012). Instead of being able to make an assertion of their own racial identity, students did not have a choice to identify with the way they saw themselves. Instead, they were forced to choose “other,” a decision that one participant said didn’t “feel good” (Kellogg & Lindell, 2012, p. 533). Participants of the same study felt that sometimes their racial identity was questioned by friends or other people of shared monoracial heritage. Other participants said they felt challenged by others about their perceived lack of knowledge of a language or their cultural background (Kellogg & Lindell, 2012). Many mixed people will enroll in ethnic studies courses and become more versed in their cultural history than many of their monoracial peers (Iijima Hall, 2004). Additionally, culture “was appreciated more when it was longed for and voluntarily learned” (Iijima Hall, 2004 p. 239). Coping mechanisms for multiracial persons included forming communities of similar backgrounds and educating peers about their identity, culture, and history (Museus et al., 2015).

Counseling Methods and Implications for Mixed Individuals

After realizing the deficit of counseling models that could apply to the diverse and complex biracial experience, Poston (1990) paved the way with the first biracial identity development model. This model was a challenge to Stonequist’s (1937) Marginal Person Model, a problematic model that assumed a biracial identity would only produce negative outcomes. Implications of Poston’s (1990) biracial identity development are outlined in five stages, (1)

Personal Identity, (2) Choice of Group Categorization, (3) Enmeshment/Denial, (4) Appreciation, and (5) Integration. Utilizing a lifespan focus, it underscored the uniqueness of biracial identity development. The structure of the model introduced several assumptions, most notably that biracial individuals might internalize outside prejudice leading to identity problems, that factors that may influence identity choice, that integration can lead to positive mental health, and how choosing one identity over another could lead to feelings of guilt and disloyalty. Root (1990, 1994, 2003, 2004) has contributed extensive knowledge on biracial and multiracial individuals. She proposed a developmental model that rejected the linear model of progression from Poston (1990) and instead reflected a fluidity of identity formation. Root (1990) suggested that a biracial individual's strongest conflict in their identity development is the tension between one's self racial components. To positively cope and resolve feelings of otherness, she suggested four resolutions: (1) Acceptance of the identity society assigns, (2) Identification with both racial groups, (3) Identification with a single racial group, and (4) Identification as a new racial group (Root, 1990). Shortly after Root's developmental model, Kich (1992) presented a heuristic developmental model that broke down biracial identity development into three stages: (1) 3-10 years old, (2) 8 years old into young adulthood, and (3) late adolescence/young adulthood. Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) further broke down development into six stages: (1) Preschool (0-5 years old), (2) Entry to school, (3) Preadolescence, (4) Adolescence, (5) College/Young Adulthood, and (6) Adulthood. In each stage, awareness of racial identity is addressed. The final and most recent model was the only one to look at multiracial identity development from an ecological lens. Renn (2004) based five non-exclusive identity patterns on the results of several qualitative studies done in higher education institutions. These patterns recognized are: (1): Monoracial identity, (2) Multiple monoracial identities, (3): Multiracial identity, (4) Extraracial

identity, and (5) Situational identity. Similar to Root (1990), Renn (2004) addressed the fluidity of identity development, and the stages she presented are non-linear (Renn, 2004). Deters (1992) reflected that the “development of a healthy self-esteem and integrated sense of self” can be particularly complex for biracial persons (p. 373). As clinicians work with biracial individuals, there are some therapeutic considerations they should keep in mind.

Counselor Proficiency

To avoid harm when working with mixed and biracial individuals, it is best for counselors to be aware of the common issues and microaggressions that these individuals face. It is also important for counselors to realize that regardless of minority or majority culture, the ethnic background of a client has implications for acceptance (Poston, 1990). Counselors should also be aware of the ethnic-specific components of the biracial experience. Biracial identity and self-concept can be shaped by parental ethnicities and the historical specifics that may entail (Phillips, 2004). Multicultural competence is expected when working with a diverse client population, and beliefs and attitudes about race, including their own, should be examined. Personal thoughts on interracial relationships and families should be examined as well (Nishimura, 2004; Poston, 1990). Attitudes should fully be explored, because they could vary depending on the specific ethnic mix of the client (Lee, 2004). Counselors should be knowledgeable about historical events and current issues that impact biracial women, as well as work to create an alliance with the client that empowers them to acknowledge the multifaceted aspects of their lives (Nishimura, 2004). Clinicians may have to be prepared to treat biracial individuals who have experienced racial discrimination (Lee, 2004).

Counseling Approaches and Implications

Multiracial persons can become frustrated by the lack of racial choice on forms and become tired of having to justify their identity in conversation or on written forms (Jackson, 2010). For clinicians looking to create an inclusive space, steps could be taken to change intake and assessment forms to allow multiracial clients the ability to racially identify in multiple ways. Jackson (2010) suggests allowing clients to “describe your identity” (p. 55). This could mean having a fill-in-the-blank area on forms, perhaps following any multiple-choice questions that are related to identity.

While being biracial may not be the reason a person seeks out counseling, the lived experiences of microaggressions, discrimination, isolation, and weak sense of self might present themselves as problems in the therapeutic work (Lee, 2004; Rafieyan, 2017; Root 1994). When moving into the therapeutic process, viewing biracial clients from a strengths-based perspective as opposed to pathological-based perspective might allow personal resources to be explored and developed (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2004). Solution-focused therapy, narrative therapy, fostering resilience, and hope therapy might be positive approaches to take when working with biracial clients (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2004). Biracial individuals, especially adolescents, may face social tensions that are deeply rooted in history. These tensions are larger than themselves, but can have personal consequences (Phillips, 2004). An ecological approach could also be warranted, with counselor and client examining the significant tensions and the confluences, as well as the resources that a client can draw from (Phillips, 2004). West and Maffini (2019) suggested that it might even be best to begin the therapeutic process by exploring social connectedness. Exploring family structure, family relationships, and engagement in a cultural community could help provide insight on a biracial college student’s connectedness and involvement in their cultures

(West & Maffini, 2019). The “cultural, social, and physical specifics that define each adolescent client’s life-space” could also be analyzed (Phillips, 2004, p. 234). Relations between the client’s physical features and racial and ethnic groups identified with, as well as how physical appearance has affected psychological experience could be explored. The experiences and demographics of the school attended could be examined. Counselors could also explore the parental messages and examples received, how the client responded to these messages, and the levels of support offered by parents when discussing feelings of race with the client (Lee, 2004). Additionally, a therapist could attend to the intersectional experiences a biracial client may face (Phillips, 2004). What are the specific stereotypes society created around their existence, and how do these stereotypes impact and intersect with the client? Things to consider are if the client has any figures, whether real or fictional, that they can “orient for purposes of self-comparison, role modeling, or even inspiration” (Phillips, 2004, p. 235).

Counselors could work with biracial clients to develop and affirm an identity. Answering the question, “who am I?” might seem easy, but for many biracial individuals is a complex question that may be difficult to examine and answer (Hud-Aleem, et al., 2008). Together, counselor and client could come up with an answer to the inevitable question and microaggression, “what are you?” that the client feels comfortable and confident with. It may be beneficial to affirm a both/and identity, and discuss ethnic labels or identity and a positive way to talk about self to help a client determine their own positive identity (Lee, 2004). Root (1994) suggests supporting a flexible multicultural/multiracial identity. There may be strength in the fluidity of a biracial identity (Root, 1994). A counselor can help a biracial client recognize the flexibility and benefits of a “situational identity” (Lee, 2004, p. 211) that comes with ambiguous features. A counselor can suggest an increase in community connections to biracial clients to

minimize and prevent the isolating effects of the biracial experience (Lee, 2004). Within a biracial support group, topics such as name-calling, hypersexualization, and benefits of being biracial can be discussed (Lee, 2004). It may be beneficial for younger biracial clients to be exposed to multiracial figures and role models within media. Parents and clinicians can provide biracial children with books and stories that detail the interracial experience (Lee, 2004).

Music Therapy and Identity

It has been suggested that music is a suitable metaphor for identity (Aldridge, 1996). Music can play a role in how someone formulates, develops, and expresses their individual identities. It serves as the raw material in how our lives are oriented, and can anchor ourselves and our important relationships. Bruscia (1987) outlined the various ways improvisational music therapy can help develop or strengthen identity and sense of self through various techniques such as Free Improvisation and Analytical Music Therapy (Bruscia, 1987). Music can provide important experiences that strengthen how our identities are formed and how we feel meaning and purpose within our lives. It also provides a means to share emotions, intentions, and meanings (Ruud, 1997). Forrest (2001) addressed the limited research on exploring issues of ethnicity in music therapy practice.

In discussing the music-centered dimensions of Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy (NRMT), Aigen (2014) highlighted the idea of the musical self, the core of the developing personality that acts as the cognitive, affective, and physical foundations of being into a coherent and unified self. The musical self becomes the center around which a more developed personality can emerge (Aigen, 2014). Within NRMT, musical development becomes self-development and the “variety, complexity, depth, and beauty” of the musical expression one experiences contributes to a fuller sense of self (Aigen, 2014, p. 22). Musical engagement served

as the template for self-actualization. Perhaps musical engagement between biracial individuals and a music therapist could lead to a greater sense of self. A key component to the therapeutic process in Vocal Psychotherapy is therapeutic connection. Austin (2008) found that clients needed to connect with therapist. They needed to be seen, heard, and known. They needed to “sing, laugh and cry with someone safe and supportive,” leading to an increased self-esteem and complete and realistic sense of self (Austin, 2008, p. 196).

Musical Presentation is a therapeutic tool that can be used in group settings to increase clients’ knowledge of themselves as well as help the group get to know each other via music (Amir, 1999). Musical Presentation can serve not only as a reflection of identity, but also as a means to create an identity. It can be used to mirror a client’s inner and outer world, and create a map for a music therapist to know which direction to take the therapeutic work (Amir, 2012). Musical Presentation can provide a glimpse into a client’s inter and intrapersonal communication and relationships. Not only can be it used to help the presenter gain deeper understanding of a client’s past, it can also help bring a client to the here-and-now. The Musical Presentation can also allow the presenter to tell themselves and listeners their personal and cultural identity, as well as what their wishes are (Amir, 2012). In 2010, Bensimon and Gilboa conducted a quasi-experimental study using two subgroups to examine the impact and possible benefits of Music Presentation. One subgroup contained 26 female undergraduate students studying Criminology, and the other subgroup contained 26 male and female participants who were recruited from a halfway house rehabilitation center people who were formerly incarcerated. Within both subgroups, the researchers found a positive effect of Musical Presentation. The positive effects were most pronounced in the former subgroup, and it was theorized that the undergraduate students already had a firm grasp on their identity, while the latter subgroup was formed of a

population that was characteristically in a “constant state of despair, have no faith, and no purpose in life” (p.177). It was suggested that Musical Presentation allowed a void to be filled within this subgroup, reflected in the dramatic increase in their Purpose in Life scores. However, this study outlined several limitations within the discussion. The student subgroup only contained women, the study sample size was small, no follow-up measures were included, and the quasi-experimental design had implications on the internal validity of the study (Bensimon & Gilboa, 2010).

In a qualitative single-case study, Smeijsters and van den Hurk (1999) explored whether music therapy could help a woman work through grief and find a personal identity. The participant had discovered that she lived with a false identity, and through grief, she began to question her identity. On the sixteenth session, through an improvisation intervention the participant was able to find and hold to her own melody, a discovery that was important to her own development of identity. After this session, in the following sessions the therapist continued to encourage the participant to stay true to her own musical self, asking her to not adjust her singing to match the therapist. In the participant’s own self-reflection, although she felt like she needed more development she also felt as though she was progressing and had improved self-confidence and “increased ability to cope with situations without losing [sic] confidence” (Smeijsters & van den Hurk, 1999, p. 242).

Rolvjord and Halstead (2013) explored how the relationship between the intersections of music therapy, sociocultural, and political dimensions influenced how a person managed their sense of self, health, and wellbeing (Rolvjord & Halstead, 2013). If “music affords possibilities not only for individuals to negotiate gender, but to interrupt or destabilise gender stereotypes” (Rolvjord & Halstead, 2013, p. 425), perhaps the same can be said about music and ethnic

stereotypes, especially those biracial clients might hold within themselves. Echard (2019) realized through her clinical work the “importance of acknowledging and respecting a client’s emerging sense of self” (Echard, 2019, p. 143). During her autoethnographic study, she discovered that for the teenagers she worked with, music therapy was about supporting the development of their identities in and through “meaningful music experiences” (Echard, 2019, p. 149). After reviewing literature surrounding identity and self-esteem within the context of music, Lawendowski and Bieleninik (2017) concluded that when therapists are aware of a strong connection between music and the expressive function for a client’s identity, it can allow a therapist to adjust the therapeutic direction. The knowledge that can come from analyzing a client’s music can lead to a better understanding of the participants and help support the treatment process (Lawendowski & Bieleninik, 2017). An important point made by Elliot and Silverman (2017) is that a person’s sense of musical identity, along with other identities, are not fixed. Instead, they are fluid, contingent, and ever-changing. Musical and personal identities can shift in relation to musical and personal interactions and contexts. The fluidity of race being dependent on the context is a concept that many biracial and mixed individuals might be familiar with, as discovered by Jackson (2010). Learning how music functions in the life of mixed client by simply asking can open a door to important music and songs being shared. This can help begin and establish a therapeutic relationship (Rafieyan, 2013). Analyzing a client’s music could further help a clinician understand a client’s journey, struggles, and identity.

In this literature review, topics of the mixed-race experience, mixed-race identity development models, mixed-race counseling methods and implications, and music therapy identity research were explored. Most of the studies addressed in this literature review are case studies or contain smaller sample sizes. The majority of the literature on the topic of mixed and

biracial individuals is older, with only thirteen articles presented in this review written in the last ten years. Of this number, only one is a quantitative research study (Albuja, 2019). The research involving music therapy and identity development is also limited, although many methods address identity, sense of self, musical identity, and self-actualization (Aigen, 2005; Amir, 2012; Austin, 2008; Bruscia, 1987; Ruud, 1987). The information presented can act as the groundwork for the beginning of the foundation for a new method to be developed. Further research and studies are warranted to explore what integration of music therapy and mixed-race counseling would look like. Once ideas can be generated about a method, it is imperative that diverse methodology be utilized that goes beyond the scope of the typical case study to diversify the research paradigms and create quantifiable data that is inclusive of many paradigms allowing for increased generalizability and transferability. Overall, the existing literature shows that music therapy could be integrated into work with mixed-race populations, and possibly aid mixed clients in developing or strengthening their identity and sense of self.

Discussion

The purpose of this critical literature review was to examine the separate research on music and identity and counseling methods related to biracial clients, and to begin building a bridge where the two can converge. No other person may feel the divided ideas about race and ethnicity as keenly as a person who is mixed (Khanna, 2010; Rafieyan, 2013). The material presented can act as the building blocks for a new method or model to be created, and perhaps music and music therapy can act as the uniting force. Much research and work remains to be done before a full understanding of how music therapy can be used in context of counseling mixed populations. Narrative therapy has potential benefits when working with clients of mixed heritage (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2004). Music therapy has long recognized the benefits of

exploring life stories through music interventions such as improvisation and songwriting (Rafieyan, 2013). Ideas from narrative-based music therapy methods can be integrated into biracial and multiracial counseling approaches to create a new approach for work with this population. Music therapy techniques such as Vocal Psychotherapy, Improvisation, Analytical Music Therapy, Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy, and Musical Presentation may help biracial clients develop or strengthen their sense of self and stabilize their identity (Aigen, 2005; Amir, 2012; Austin, 2008; Bruscia, 1987; Ruud, 1987). Music therapy has been shown to help with identity development, strengthen sense of self, and help clients achieve self-actualization. Through the use of music, biracial and multiracial clients may be able to develop or explore their identity. A new method for music therapy must be created that integrates biracial identity development models. (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2004; Root, 1990; Stonequist, 1937). It may be beneficial for a model to be created that could apply to the broader creative arts therapies as well.

Musical engagement between a biracial client and music therapist could lead to a greater sense of self. Group musical engagement could help participants feel seen, heard, and understood. Peer support in a group music therapy setting could challenge the isolation that often comes with being mixed. Between 2010 and 2020, there was a 276% increase in individuals who identified as multiracial on the U.S. Census (2021). While research is limited, it is crucial that research is continued, especially in quantifiable measures. As the multiracial and biracial population continues to grow, clinicians should become culturally aware of this cultural phenomenon and new methods should be developed to address this unique and diverse experience.

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gratitude to my origins (7.5.19)

i am the product of
two continents
two cultures
two beings who came together
in perfect love... to
create a not-so-perfect child

i owe my empathy to my roots.
i owe my persistence to my mother,
who created a home for
her family in a new world

i owe my resilience to my father
who faced resistance for the woman
he chose to love, breaking a cycle.

i owe my hope to years
of never finding my tribe
that maybe someday i would
meet someone like me

i owe my knowledge of care to
never having people to relate to
who never understood not having an identity

i owe my love to years
of a mislabeled identity
to the spitting, the taunting, the jeering
as i fought to give myself the love i needed

i owe my grace to forgiveness
and learning to forgive myself
the way i did for others

and so i water the flowers of my past
and allow empathy, persistence, resilience, care, love, and grace
to grow in the ashes of my origins
and find beauty and purpose in my history.

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

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