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## PSYCHOLOGY

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### MUSIC THERAPY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH APPLIED IN PERSONAL GROWTH TRAINING

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the role of the music therapy in general psychotherapeutic practice. The phenomenological approach to the problem helps to evaluate the efficiency level of the personal impact achieved by listening to music. The authors of the following article present a number of exercises with the comprehensive guidelines for their successful implementation: "Free listening", "I can trust myself." The psychotherapeutic effect of these exercises lies in their ability to acquire such distinctive qualities as: immediate genuine emotions, personal body trust, individual freedom (self-sufficiency), creativity.

**Keywords:** Music therapy, phenomenological approach, personal growth, music therapy exercises.

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**Introduction**

According to the phenomenological approach, "subjective music" may include almost anything (the sound of blowing wind, rain, whisper of the grass, children's laughter, voice of the beloved one) if it corresponds with the way a person perceives the world. Hence, a person with a good ear for music has a particularly keen understanding of the reality. According to the Brentano and Husserl's principle of the unity of consciousness, the perception of music is based upon the inner (phenomenological) processes [1]. Comparing with other art forms, music has a more profound influence on human emotions. It has the unique features like duration and reverberation. Hence, the perception of music has a higher affective level compared with static objects (pictures, buildings, etc.). Figuratively speaking, a person "activates the inside energy" since listening always involves structuring of the external perception constituents (sensory, cognitive, etc.).

The studies devoted to the perceptual processes showed that perception is based upon multiple needs for information about the reality in a sensuous form. The educative value of a logical system is impossible without individual sensory perception which cannot be logically explained. That is why individual perception or imperception of a certain kind of music is always clearly and emotionally expressed. In case of imperception, it looks like a conscious act of listening but without a profound effect that music produces as a *phenomenon*. A person will define it as noise, clanging or rattling sound, a music score (that has to be played) but not music. The sound is defined to be a *musical* one when it produces a sense of order. A person gets an insight of the significant life values. Powerful emotions that are felt cannot be defined as positive or negative ones. Some people say that when they were listening their thoughts got all mixed up and they cried with joy and sorrow. After all, they had a sense of tremendous relief.

It could be explained this way: music is an example of the harmonious psychophysiological functioning of the human body. Thus, if perception of music is *phenomenological*, a person will internalize this model of individual harmonization (in the shape of a musical piece) which influences cognitive and affective processes in the person's consciousness. Meanwhile, while listening, a person tends to realize (all of a sudden) the most significant life values.

**Methodology and data**

During the personal growth training sessions, music is used as a psychological tool to regulate the sphere of meaning and values. Music is used in the following key aspects: *intonation* (a

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client sings a melody to themselves, and it stimulates their cognitive functioning); *duration* (facilitates adaptation for the change of the former life patterns during psychotherapy); *reverberation* (stimulates sensitivity, helps to release emotions).

Experience shows that a specific music repertoire tends to be more effective in the psychotherapeutic musical treatment. It should have a vague structure where it is impossible to define a particular music style, genre, keynote and harmonic value. In other words, the client is not familiar with it.

Such kind of musical material is extremely useful for those who have a special background in music. This procedure has a personal value for the clients because it helps to evoke mental images and deep emotions. This is the kind of music that is subjectively important. The clients themselves suggest listening to their personal music preferences during the group or personal sessions.

Phenomenologically, self expression during the process of music perception is a difficult task. To cope with it, an individual should be relaxed, able to feel their own body. That is why the first simple step during the training is to learn how to listen to music in a special way, i.e. to feel and live out the experience. The therapy sessions are carried out in groups or individually. Listening should be performed on the high quality acoustic system of high quality in a private room with a high volume sound. Sometimes it is more convenient to use headphones. The musical pieces can be suggested by the client. It is necessary to focus on verbal analysis concerning the following points:

1. **sensory perception**, which is very often described as "goosebumps..., sick of the sound..., shiver runs through the body..., rhythm growing from the inside..., etc."

2. **affective perception**, the modality of senses is a key issue (positive or negative emotions). It is important to define the emotional intensity, for example: "I really like it..., I hate it..., something in between..., etc." The clients should evaluate their emotions on the given scale, for example: "Evaluate the personal impact of the following musical piece on a scale of 0 to 10: positive impact from 0 to +10 points, negative impact from 0 to -10 points."

3. **association for images**, listening to music can evoke some mind images. The qualitative and informative analysis of those associations gives a possibility to specify the relevant aspects (realization or confirmation) of the current values and principal aims. It is proved that association for images that were brought by the highly-affective and positive experiences has a good influence on the actualization of motives and values.

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Considering examples of the author's exercises based on a person-oriented therapy ("Free listening", "I can trust myself"), the music influence is focused on the immediate genuine emotions, personal body trust, individual freedom (self-sufficiency) and creativity.

**Exercise "Free listening"**

The objective: To concentrate on the sense of inner freedom while listening to an unknown musical piece, experiencing deep emotions. The exercise is carried out in a group or individually. The participants take comfortable positions. At first, the preliminary discussion takes place. It is organized to define the feelings at the beginning of the therapy session (those could be the feelings related to the present working day). The wide musical repertoire used in the sessions should include different styles and genres and be unfamiliar to the participants.

The instruction:

(Background music is off) *"Imagine your ordinary working day. Try to describe the feelings that it evokes."*  
(Background music is on) *"Try not to think whether you need to listen to music or not, whether you like it or not, do not evaluate it. What do you feel when you are just listening and not evaluating?"*

*"Try to imagine yourself as a part of this music, as if you are the whole one. Finally, what are your impressions?"*

*"Try to analyze whether you felt something unusual. Can you explain it? Try to describe it by any appropriate means."*

*"Once again, try to imagine your ordinary working day. Now try to group these feelings together: your latest impressions from music and thoughts about the working day. Tell us, HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE REALITY after that?"*

At the end of the session, it is possible to discuss the following issues: "What is a NEW experience?", "A BRAND-NEW outlook on an ordinary working day."

**Exercise "I can trust myself"**

The objective: To adopt a positive attitude to the new physical sensations produced by listening, to focus attention on understanding the state. The exercise is carried out in a group or individually. The participants take comfortable positions. At first, it is necessary to discuss the feelings the participants have at the beginning of the session. It is recommended to do the exercise in the end of the working day. The musical repertoire used in the sessions should include different styles and genres. In this case, the musical pieces can be suggested by the participants.

The instruction:

(the tasks are carried out while the music is playing)

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*“Imagine that music fills your body. Describe these feelings as fully as you can. Think of yourself as an outside observer.”*

*“How do you feel when you are completely honest about your feelings? Try to describe them by any appropriate means.”*

*“Imagine any difficult and stressful situation that can occur at your workplace (school, college, university,...), when you need to make an important decision. Can you describe your feelings then?”*

*“Try to project your genuine emotions of listening on the situation discussed in the previous exercise. How do you look at it now?”*

At the end of the exercise, it is necessary to analyze the emotional state of the participants. It is possible to discuss the question: how could you explain the feeling “Am I acting appropriately?” (The discussion can be held without the musical background).

**Results and discussion**

Experience shows that music tends to reveal the feelings that do not exist without the listening. For example, in his LSD research, Grof mentions that the study participants were extremely sensitive to any sound. The outside noise like water dripping was considered to be a melodic illusion. Throughout the experimental sessions, the participants were fully absorbed in the process of listening. It seemed like music resonated with their bodies evoking extremely strong emotions. The majority of the participants reported that during the experimental sessions they got a feeling of listening to music for the first time [2].

Since ancient times, people have considered music to be a source of enrichment and improvement. In ancient India it was a way to the intuitive and spiritual state of the highest bliss which is called “Rasa.” The studies devoted to the notion of a primitive mentality have shown that a ritual dance in the tribe was considered to be an instrument of protection from the dangers of supernatural that could not be predicted. The psychotherapeutic effect lies in the fact that by means of a real psychodramatic experience of their own selves as intimidating characters in the ecstatic state, a person develops a feeling of peace and confidence. It happens because a person identifies themselves with something that previously was hostile and opposite. In this case, ritual dance and singing as a rhythmic and dynamic act creates an effect of living themselves in the present moment, accomplishing the mode. The accomplishment

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is a very important psychotherapeutic notion that shows that the present mode is no longer individually essential.

Finally, a person is released from the feeling of anxiety and fears that are caused by a social differentiation between the "individual" and the "opposite", something that is considered to be hostile and may do harm. It is similar to the modern "anticipatory coping" [3] method used for correction in the stress preventative treatment. This method helps to manipulate deliberately the stress factors until the following adaptation to them. Thus, music can play a role of a social and individual support for a listener in a difficult life situation. A person brings up to their mind an immediate intimate image which they are addressing in a personal kind of a "dialogue." In psychotherapy, music is an efficient tool of a psychological influence which can contribute to the individual's self expression. For example, "psychological and musical activity" with the help of different acoustic means is considered to be "an organic form" of self-expression [4]. Music is applied in "figure-ground" perception [5]. It is treated as an internalized configuration of rhythm and sound which is also called "a bionic model" [6] similar to a human organism. Studies have shown that a facilitating (or stimulating) effect occurs only when the individual is focused on affective experience (regarding the most critical points and their close intervals) [7].

**Conclusion**

In summary, music therapy is an effective additional tool successfully used in the personal growth trainings due to its individual regulating techniques. According to the fact, psychologists should try to analyze the immediate listening reactions of the training participants, comparing their inner visual impressions with the physical ones. Furthermore, it is necessary to follow the overall negative or positive mood of the musical pieces. The cheerful melodies demonstrate the development of personal body trust and individual freedom while pessimistic melodies activate different psychological defense mechanisms. Such analysis is extremely valuable. In case a participant experiences the negative reaction (irritation, resentment,...) to the musical piece, it will present an opportunity to examine their personal psychological defense mechanisms. In this context, music can set a foundation for further analysis in the sphere of projective psychology. All in all, the analysis offers exciting prospects of music therapy in the training area.

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