

Evaluation
of a
Drum Circle Program
at an
In-Patient Eating Disorders
Program

For
St. Paul's Hospital

By
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Hypothesis: Participation in the drum circle experience reduces anxiety for eating disorder in-patients.

Summary of Results

1. 75% of participants in the Drum Circle Program reported a decrease in anxiety following the drum circle.
2. Participants rated the helpfulness of the drum circle:
 - *increasing their sense of well being* at 3.9 on average
 - *distracting them from eating disorder thoughts* at 4.2 on average(on a scale of 1-5, 1 being "not at all helpful" and 5 being "extremely helpful")

Background

This Drum Circle Program was conducted over a period of 12 weeks between 3 March 2007 and 19 May 2007 at the Eating Disorder Program at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The program was facilitated by Lyle Povah, an African drummer, recording artist, writer and educator (see biography in Appendix).

The Drum Circle Program ran for a total of 12 sessions and involved African drumming, playing percussion instruments and singing (see Appendix for a description of a drum circle). The sessions had an average of 6.5 participants each of which an average of 5.5 completed pre- and post-session questionnaires. Sessions had between 4 and 7 participants each. All of the participants were female.

Of the 67 completed questionnaires by 28 patients over 12 sessions, the range in participation in the one hour drum circle varied from 11 patients who participated in only one circle to one patient who participated in 9 circles. On average, 2.5 questionnaires were completed by each patient.

The drum circles took place from 9 - 10 a.m. on Saturday mornings, immediately following breakfast and were compulsory (the exception being patients who were unable to partake because of health concerns).

Staff also attended the Drum Circle Program. Of the 17 completed questionnaires by 11 staff members, the range in participation varied from 6 staff members who participated in one circle to one staff member who participated in 3 circles. On average, 1.5 questionnaires were completed by each staff member.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire included four scaled questions, one pre-session and the remainder post-session. These questions asked participants to scale their level of anxiety before and after the session and to rate how helpful the session was for increasing their sense of well being and as a distraction from eating disorder thoughts.

Scales

Scales used for questions rating anxiety were from 1 to 5 (right to left), 1 = low anxiety, 5 = high anxiety. Scales used for questions rating helpfulness were from 1 to 5 (right to left), 1 = not at all helpful, 5 = extremely helpful.

Results

Anxiety

The change in reported anxiety (anxiety after the session minus anxiety before the session) was an average decrease of 1.1. 75 per cent of participants reported reductions in anxiety, 19 per cent reported the same level of anxiety after as before and 6 per cent reported an increase in anxiety following the sessions.

The range of the change in reported anxiety was from a decrease of 4 to an increase of 2. There were 2 reports of an increase of anxiety (out of 67 completed questionnaires) and these were both in the first drum circle session.

Reported anxiety before the sessions:

Average: 3.2
Range: 1 - 5

Reported anxiety after the sessions:

Average: 2.1
Range: 0 - 5

Helpfulness

Helpfulness for increasing sense of well being:

Average: 3.9
Range: 1 - 5

Helpfulness as a distraction from eating disorder thoughts:

Average: 4.2
Range: 1 - 5

Qualitative Questions

Qualitative questions were asked of participants and staff. The questions and a summary of responses are shown below.

Participants

What did you like most overall (please explain):

There was a wide range of responses. Some common ones included:

- Call and response/mixing the rhythms (8)
- Drumming and playing the instruments (7)
- Lyle singing, playing the guitar, his energy and ability (7)
- Drumming with guitar (4)
- Everything/all of it (4)

Some specific comments included:

- "This is my third drum circle and each week I lose a little inhibition and am enjoying it more each time"
- "I used to play my bass guitar and it reminded me how much I missed it"
- "The end where we get to yell out our frustrations"
- "Expressing myself in a different area. Connected me to something else rather than always being solitary"
- "Kept my mind off the food"
- "It felt like a type of meditation which I appreciate"

What did you like least overall (please explain):

The largest number of questionnaires included no response to this question or the responses were "nothing" or "n/a" – a total of 23 questionnaires (34%).

There was a wide range of responses. Some common ones included:

- too short, should be longer (10)
- singing (5)
- noise/volume (3)
- feeling sleepy (2)
- losing the rhythm (2)

One interesting comment was: "The songbird song brought out some unexpected emotion – sense of unexpected is what I didn't like".

Please comment on the group facilitator:

24 responses (36%) included "great", "awesome", "wonderful", "excellent", "fabulous", "very good" and, "Yay!"

Other comments included:

- "exudes compassion and enthusiasm, very fun and light"
- "great, lots of positive energy, funny, talented"
- "Extremely positive and makes everyone feel so comfortable. Has a very good energy about him"
- "patient, very instructive, enjoyable"
- "very friendly and welcoming (important for people with anxiety and depression)"
- "Lyle is great. I like how gentle he is – and changes things when they aren't working well"
- "very good rapport with all involved"

Please comment on the length of the group session:

The largest number participants thought the length of the sessions were just right (26 = 39%) and only a slightly smaller number (23 = 34%) though the sessions were too short (could be longer, not long enough).

Ten participants (15%) simply wrote "1 hour"

Two responses were "too long".

Other comments included:

- "Just right to relieve some stress and introduce excitement for the day. I could listen to it all day though"
- "As this type of activity is REALLY not my thing one hour seemed very long"

Staff

Please comment on the group facilitator:

Four responses (24%) reported facilitator engaged participants and three responses (18%) reported facilitator made participants feel at ease/comfortable.

Three responses simply wrote "Lyle".

Two responses described facilitator as "calm, gentle, easy-going".

One was left blank.

Other comments included:

- "very supportive, innovative, open to patient's input"
- "clear direction, easy to follow"
- "great energy, respectful and encouraging to patients"
- "did well considering it was a tough crowd"

Please comment on the length of group session:

Ten responses (59%) wrote "One hour"

Six responses (35%) reported "adequate/appropriate" or "good"

One response (6%) reported "a half hour longer"

Any positive effects the drum circle may have had on the patients:

There was a wide range of responses. Some common ones included:

Observed patient's "enjoyment, smiling, relaxed" (9)

Observed patient's "involved, engaged, participating" (6)

Observed patient's "trying new instruments" (6)

Other comments included:

- "one patient stated ... makes her want to re-connect with her passion to play music"
- "build group trust"

Any negative effects the drum circle may have had on the patients:

Ten responses (59%) reported "none/no/zero"

Other comments included:

- "hard on hands" (2)
- "when performance became too difficult, some participants withdrew" (1)
- "one person became closed to participating" (1)
- "can be nerve racking" (1)
- "a couple of patients seemed to get tired so maybe a 45 minute session"

Any additional comments:

- "I love the vast selection of percussion instruments available"
- "this group seemed to be highly beneficial for the patients"
- "it's a nice alternative to programming we normally have"
- "This should be a regular part of our therapeutic activities on the ward"

Comments of interest from patients in previous 4 week drum circle program (May 20 - June 10, 2006)

- "I feel connected to the inside and outside like I haven't in a long time. It reminds me of when I was involved in music"
- "I was absolutely free from the ED for a whole hour"
- "I really felt like I had learned and been empowered. Hitting the drums was also a great release of tensions and frustrations and fears"
- "It was distracting, spiritual (for me) and grounding"
- "It gives me ideas for how to occupy my time out of the hospital"
- "This is definitely something I would consider taking part in the community"
- "Playing the drum was like a way to speak words that I was holding back"

Conclusions

Participation in the drum circle experience reduces anxiety for the majority of eating disorder in-patients.

The questionnaires completed indicate that the Drum Circle Program clearly results in decreased anxiety for participants (75% of participants reported a decrease in anxiety following the drum circle) and on average, participants rate the drum circle very helpful for increasing their sense of well being and distracting them from eating disorder thoughts.

Participants found the one hour sessions to be "just right" in length or wanted them to be longer.

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For more information

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APPENDIX

Drum Circle Description

A drum circle is a rhythm-based event where people gather in a circle to express themselves with African drums and percussion instruments. A facilitator guides the session, encouraging and supporting people as they reconnect with their innate sense of rhythm. Inclusiveness is a core principle - people of all backgrounds, mobility, ages and skill levels (even first-time beginners) can participate. The circle has potential to teach us about community, wellness, intergenerational learning, creativity, team building, spirituality, mentoring, and respect for other cultures. It becomes a model for our world family, an opportunity to engage in this age-old activity where young and old play and celebrate together.

Lyle Povah - Biography

Lyle has been a musician for over 40 years and leads retreats, events and workshops throughout North America and Europe. He has pioneered bringing the power of drumming, rhythm and music into various areas - health and creativity, leadership for managers and executives, community and team building, eating disorder programs, children and autism, and intergenerational learning. He can be reached at 1 (604) 736-6487, info@lylepovah.com or <http://www.lylepovah.com>

His credentials include:

- On the Faculty at the Haven Institute for Professional Training
- Residential Facilitator at the Bridgepoint Center for Eating Disorders in Saskatchewan
- Facilitates Executive Development Programs at the UBC Sauder School of Business for the past 8 years
- Music Practitioner at BC's Children's Hospital for the past 16 years
- Leads the longest running weekly Community Drum Circle in Canada
- On consulting team for Maxfit Movement Institute