

Ingrid Wissink

Master in Music Therapy, Concordia University,
Director: Charles-Antoine Thibeault

SOUNDING THE BODY: GROUP MUSIC THERAPY FOR RELIEF AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN WITH UNDIAGNOSED OR ILL-UNDERSTOOD CHRONIC PAIN

Chronic pain (CP) is prevalent in Canada, affecting nearly 20% of adults (Schopflocher, Taenzer, and Jovey, 2011). Its broad impact includes "worsening overall health status, greater disability, and increased use of healthcare services" (U.S. Federal Pain Research Strategy, 2017). Chronic non-cancer pain is also frequently associated with psychiatric comorbidities such as anxiety and depression (Kroenke et. al, 2013). It represents not only a private, individual problem, but a public one, causing "significant lost work" as well as a strain on healthcare resources (Busse, 2017). Women report pain more frequently, representing 70% of chronic pain sufferers, and appear to suffer from it more intensely, yet they often end up misdiagnosed and undermedicated (Calderone, 1990, Liu 2017.) This phenomenon is compounded by other marginalizing factors such as skin colour or gender presentation (Smith, 2011). Thus there is a serious problem of women who suffer physically and emotionally as a result of gendered diagnoses and treatment in the medical system.

North American physicians frequently treat chronic pain by increasing opioid prescription for chronic pain patients, a risky solution due to the potential for overdoses and substance abuse disorders (Busse, 2017). Considering these hazards, it is important to consider the possibilities of non-pharmacological and complementary rehabilitative options. Music therapy may represent an effective adjuvant treatment for chronic pain by reducing pain perception and distress while improving quality of life (Kamioka et. al, 2014). Closed music therapy groups designed for this population may be especially potent, as the group format represents a unique space to self-express and be witnessed by others who understand, a potentially powerful experience for socially isolated women with oft-misunderstood chronic illnesses and pain. So far, most music therapy research has focussed on passive listening experiences within the medical setting. This philosophical inquiry will focus on active, participatory music therapy experiences in the rehabilitative context, exploring it as a means to improve quality of life while empowering women to retake control of their bodies, their lives and their experiences in the healthcare system.