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# Hidden Voices; toward a trauma-informed framework of community music practice

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## ABSTRACT

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*As the field of community music scholarship continues to evolve, opening up a dialogue around music making with trauma survivors and implementation of trauma-informed practice is both timely and critical. Whilst there has been an acknowledgement of the presence of trauma connected to specific contexts, community music literature has not yet begun to respond to the potential prevalence of trauma within any community music setting. As a field in which music projects will often be operating with groups of vulnerable people, trauma-informed practice is beginning to be acknowledged, but without a broad base of research to support training and implementation. As a community musician working with known trauma survivors, it is my assertion that the question of whether pedagogic frameworks should be developed in order to promote safe and appropriate practices needs to be addressed, especially where traumatic experience can remain hidden, but still be profoundly impactful.*

*This article explores the origins of trauma-informed practice as well as providing an example framework from the York St. John University Prison Partnership Project. A literature review of community music scholarship explores the potential benefits of music making for those who have experienced trauma and emerging themes are examined through the lens of trauma-informed practice. This article also suggests that trauma-informed practice could be integrated more widely within community music in order to: (1) acknowledge that in any group or context, statistically, a number of participants are likely to have experienced trauma; (2) acknowledge that because trauma is often hidden, having an understanding of manifestations of trauma responses will better equip practitioners; and*

*(3) understand that trauma-informed practice enables practitioners to work reflexively and responsively within their groups, thereby building solid foundations on which to develop safe and secure environments in which music making can flourish.*

**KEYWORDS**

Trauma-informed practice

Prison Partnership Project

Therapeutic processes

Creative Collaboration

Reflexivity and responsiveness

**VIGNETTE**

***February 2019, HMP New Hall – YSJU Prison Partnership Project – Rowan House Emerging Voices project, weekly reflection tool***

*The women were on lock-down until about 2:20pm today, plus line route was called early. My students and I had to condense the session and work with the time we had. We structured more time for getting-to-know-you games to try to regain the fledgling group dynamic from two weeks ago. The creative songwriting was a lot more effective – we had images and quotes based around the idea of resilience, courage and hope, responding to the women's input last week.*

*We gave the group space to reflect and share their work together. One of the women had written a beautiful poem, based on the idea of "Do Not Give Up" – it was like she was not only speaking to herself but encouraging the other women to do the same. One woman had taken a picture of a tiny seedling growing out of a crack in the desert and reflected on how amazing trees are to grow against the odds from something so small. Another woman*

*had written about music and what it means to her, using some striking imagery and metaphors.*

*We re-clarified Ways of Working this week, re-iterated the ability to opt out, and spoke about keeping the space safe when reflecting or sharing responses or ideas. I had set myself a personal task of being more observant of the group and reading the room better. There was a tense moment where one of the women (J) challenged another on her writing – saying she should have written in the first person, implying it would have been more powerful. The other woman dealt with this incredibly well and was gracious in her response, explaining her decision-making process. J was also getting upset about a typo in the lyrics and I'm recognising she really hates things to be out of order.*

*There is some boundary pushing going on but a lot less than last week, and the women did seem more able to voice their participation, including in things like Pat on the Back. One of the women wanted to explain her reaction to the warmup last week – it was obviously a trigger for her, and we will know not to use it again. The space, as always, makes such a difference to the project – the women were commenting a lot today that they can forget where they are, they can come out of the wings and feel like themselves.*

*It felt like today's workshop for me was one long moment of reflexivity and I was doubly conscious of all that was going on in my head at different moments. The creative stimuli this week definitely felt like the right level of obliquity – weaving a path around that acknowledges what's under the surface but doesn't go into the minefield that's there. Our timings felt better today, which was ironic considering we had less time!*

**INTRODUCTION**

Trauma is becoming more widely recognized within community music scholarship as a prevalent issue, impacting individuals and the social fabric of our communities (Balfour

2018; Burnard et al. 2018; Hesser and Bartleet 2020; Howell 2013, 2018; Knapp and Silva 2019). In this respect, it is not surprising to find a growth of community music projects in contexts where participants are known to have experienced trauma (Laurila and Willingham 2017; Marsh 2019; Palidofsky 2010; de Quadros 2011; Sunderland et al. 2016). The development of trauma-informed frameworks of practice could be significant to this work, but there is little in the literature to support these developments, and not all projects working with trauma survivors recognize a trauma-informed approach.

Organizations and projects employing trauma-informed practice seem to be connected specifically to working with known trauma survivors, for example, in carceral or detention settings (Birch 2020, forthcoming 2022; Palidofsky 2010). When considering the statistics surrounding trauma in the United Kingdom and beyond, however, the reality is that many more people have experienced trauma than may be visible (Covington 2015, 2016). To this end, this article argues that trauma-informed practice needs to be understood as an appropriate pedagogical response to the ubiquity of trauma. Contextually appropriate frameworks of practice should thus be considered on the assumption that there will likely be trauma survivors among the participants of any community music group, regardless of context.

In order to explore these issues, I ask two questions: (1) what does it mean to be trauma-informed? and (2) why is being trauma-informed important to community music practice? Drawing from trauma theory as well as an examination of literature that supports trauma-informed models, these questions are contextualized and unpacked. I wanted to understand if and how trauma-informed practice is currently considered within community music scholarship, and so carried out a literature review focusing on articles, chapters and publications that explore music making with trauma survivors[i]. Explorations of trauma-informed practice are significantly absent from community music

scholarship, thus I intentionally carried out a systematic literature search using the keyword 'trauma,' connecting to articles and publications where trauma is mentioned. The key publications I reviewed were from *The International Journal of Community Music* (Higgins, L. (senior editor) 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021), *The Oxford Handbook of Community Music* (Higgins and Bartleet 2018), additional community music literature (Higgins 2012; Higgins and Willingham 2017) and select chapters and journal articles (Garrido et al. 2015; Hassler and Nicholson 2017; Hesser and Bartleet 2020; Murray and Lamont 2012; Osborne 2009, 2017). Whilst music and trauma are strongly connected within music therapy literature, and I have drawn from a couple of sources to support this article (Ahonen 2007; Ansdell 2014; Austin 2015), my focus is intentionally on community music practice, thereby informing the decision to choose literature for the review exclusively from within community music scholarship.

In analysis of the literature, five emerging themes were identified, suggesting the potential of music making as beneficial for those who have experienced trauma: expression and validation; connection; personal growth; positive social change; and healing. These themes are unpacked and discussed below using the lens of trauma-informed practice and with a view to try and understand how community musicians working with survivors of traumatic experience conceptualize their work and the values they embody in practice. I also discuss the potential risks for participants who have experienced trauma and how these can be understood and considered within the constructs of trauma-informed practice.

It is important to state that I cannot ignore my bias or the particular lens through which I have reviewed the literature. As a community musician of over twenty-years' experience, based in the United Kingdom, I have learned from and developed my practice in varied settings, within the context of interventionist models (Higgins 2012). Most

recently, I have been a regular practitioner with the York St. John University (YSJU) Prison Partnership Project[ii], facilitating singing and songwriting workshops within a maximum-security women's prison. My awareness and understanding of the importance of trauma-informed practice has grown out of my experiences with the women and is therefore shaped within the context of the criminal justice system. However, engaging in this work and connected research has alerted me to the prevalence of trauma, its manifestations and long-lasting impacts which are explored in the following section, as well as detailing the trauma-informed framework we use within the Prison Partnership Project.

## TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

### *Trauma*

The word 'trauma' is taken from the Greek, translated as 'a wound, a hurt; a defeat' (etymonline.com). Trauma theorist, Cathy Caruth, reinforces these concepts by describing trauma as 'a wound that cries out […] that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available' (1996: 4). When you consider these descriptions in an emotional context, the implications of psychic trauma on a person's internal processes and wellbeing are more easily imagined, alongside the potential for the trauma to remain unavailable or hidden. Those who have experienced trauma (in the form of physical, emotional and/or psychological wounds) are often immensely vulnerable, and it is interesting also to note the semantic connection in the late Latin word *vulnerabilis*, meaning 'wounding' (etymonline.com).

Trauma can be understood as a situation or event that is deeply distressing with the potential for lasting impact (Caruth 1995b, 1996; Herman 1992; van der Kolk 2014). There is distinction in the varied degrees of traumatic experience, for example, a one-off event (Type I) as opposed to prolonged or repeated exposure (Type II or complex

trauma), as well as a recognition of the potentially subjective nature of responses to traumatic events. In the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, it is stated that, 'Psychological distress following exposure to a traumatic or stressful event is quite variable' (2013: 265). Trauma theorist, Judith Herman, suggests that 'there is a spectrum of traumatic disorders, ranging from the effects of a single overwhelming event to the more complicated effects of prolonged and repeated abuse' (1992: 3). Adverse Childhood Experiences, for example, can continue to negatively impact individuals long into adulthood (Burke Harris 2018; Felitti et al. 1998). However, there are common features in how our bodies and in particular, our brain functions, respond to trauma.

Trauma can cause feelings of helplessness, a diminished sense of self and the inability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences (Caruth 1995b, 1996; Covington 2015, 2016; Garrido et al. 2015; Herman 1992; van der Kolk 2014). Trauma affects brain functions, activating the flight or fight response, and causing a number of physical and emotional reactions including hyper-arousal, hyper-sensitivity, intense social withdrawal, dissociation, panic attacks, anxiety and restlessness (van der Kolk 2014). Trauma response is an adaptive response: it is what the body activates in reaction to a traumatic event. As van der Kolk states:

> We have also begun to understand how overwhelming experiences affect our innermost sensations and our relationship to our physical reality - the core of who we are. We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present. (2014: 21)

This concept of an imprint is of particular importance when considering that trauma responses can be present long after the event. For survivors of traumatic experience, the ongoing potential for triggers, flashbacks, and related repercussions, needs to be acknowledged by those with whom they work and interact.

***Overview of trauma-informed practice***

Trauma-informed practice has been developed in response to the known impacts of trauma and encompasses the five values of trauma-informed care: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment (Harris and Fallot 2001; Hess and Bradley 2020; Levenson 2017; Quiros and Berger 2013). If to inform is to 'train or instruct in some specific subject' or 'to educate,' (etymonline.com) then to be trauma informed is to be trained or educated in understanding what trauma is and the implications of its presence for those with whom we work. Trauma-informed practice could therefore be beneficial to community musicians in the following ways by:

- enhancing theoretical and practical understanding;
- increasing understanding of participants, their interactions and manifested behaviours, enabling practitioners to read and understand physical and emotional signals more easily;
- helping develop strategies for effective working (Anderson and Willingham 2020);
- offering clearer boundaries so practitioners can develop positive and constructive relationships with participants;
- avoiding re-traumatization for participants and the potential for vicarious trauma for practitioners.

The first published model of trauma-informed practice focused on development of a

framework that increased understanding of trauma for mental health service providers and enabled an approach that avoided re-traumatization of the survivor (Harris and Fallot 2001). As the authors state, 'trauma-informed services are not designed to treat symptoms or syndromes related to sexual or physical abuse [but to] provide services in a manner that is welcoming and appropriate to the special needs of trauma survivors' (Harris and Fallot 2001: 5). This model of trauma-informed practice does not focus on the treating of trauma symptoms but on enabling positive interaction for trauma survivors (Harris and Fallot 2001; Wilson et al. 2015).

Currently, trauma-informed frameworks in the literature can be found within the fields of psychotherapy and traumatology (Berger and Quiros 2014; Goodman et al. 2016; Wilson et al. 2015), social work and sociology (Knight 2014; Levenson 2017; Paper Dolls Research Group 2019), criminology and criminal justice (Covington 2015, 2016) and, more recently, music education (Hess and Bradley 2020). Within the fields of music therapy and community music therapy, some literature discusses particular approaches for working with trauma survivors but does not detail frameworks of trauma-informed practice (Ahonen 2007; Ansdell 2014; Austin 2015).

To date, I have not been able to find any mention within community music literature of trauma-informed practice. This seems to me to be problematic considering the number of projects across the globe where music making is focused towards known trauma survivors, as examined in the literature review below. It is difficult to know whether trauma-informed practice is being implemented in these instances but not acknowledged in written format, or whether facilitation of these projects does not employ a trauma-informed approach. Given the prevalence of trauma, I propose that both practitioners and scholars within the field need to think deeply about the need for trauma-informed practice to be implemented within all community music settings. This leads me to ask the

question, why is being trauma-informed important to community music practice? In order to begin addressing this, the following section details the framework of trauma-informed practice we use in the weekly singing and songwriting sessions in the YSJU Prison Partnership Project.

***YSJU Prison Partnership framework of trauma-informed practice***

The opening Vignette is taken from my reflections of practice in week three of a ten-week singing and songwriting project for the YSJU Prison Partnership. Although my work as a community musician has enabled me to develop practice in a multiplicity of contexts, I had never before encountered the complexity and challenge of working with participants, all of whom have experienced prior trauma.

Before meeting the women for the first time, I was asked to engage in the publication *Becoming trauma informed: Tool kit for criminal justice professionals* designed by the UK-based charity, One Small Thing. I have since engaged in their training programme and have continued to develop my understanding through ongoing research and reflection on practice. The framework of trauma-informed practice developed by One Small Thing (Covington 2015, 2016) is based on the Harris and Fallot (2001) Five Values of Trauma-Informed Care: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment. This framework has enabled me to reflect deeply on each value, how they are intertwined and how they connect to the intricacies of practice.

*Safety*

In the Vignette above, I mention safety and safe space several times. A participant's safety is of the utmost importance, and in a context where the women have 'deficits in feeling safe' (Porges 2017) due to prior trauma, it is vital. I establish safety in several ways,

considering the physical space and layout of the workshop, development of group structures, alongside positive body language, facial expression and use of vocal prosody (Porges 2017). The room we use for the creative work has been designed with safety in mind and has more comfortable furnishings than other parts of the prison, hence the women's reflections that they can forget where they are and be themselves.

We work in a circle to reinforce the creative equality of the space as well as enabling eye contact easily and avoiding any kind of physical intimidation or hierarchy. Facilitating the session with a welcoming and hospitable approach (Higgins 2008, 2012) is essential to developing safety, and I need to be conscious of the potential for tacit as well as embodied communication in my interactions with the women.

*Trustworthiness*

For those who have experienced trauma, especially within the context of what should be safe, familial relationships, trust becomes very difficult to develop and maintain. Growing trust can be seen in the reflections of the Vignette, when the women share their songwriting with each other. There has to be a level of trust to enable the level of vulnerability required to take risks in this way.

A group process that supports the development of trust is beginning each session with a Focus Game, where the group can connect and communicate with each other safely. The game encourages eye contact, and although this can be difficult for some of the women, there is safety in all working through the same group process together: no one person has to stand out.

*Choice*

Choice is crucial in helping avoid re-triggering or re-traumatizing of individuals. A re-

triggering of trauma (somatic re-experiencing) can occur through each of the body's senses (olfactory, visual, kinaesthetic, auditory) as well as *affective triggering* (triggering of emotions) making the individual feel the way they did when they were traumatized. These trauma triggers are coded into the body's memory, the *imprinting* as described by van der Kolk (2014).

Recognising triggers is not an accurate process and needs to be developed in tandem with getting to know individuals in the group. As demonstrated in the Vignette, I acknowledge that constant reflexivity and deliberate observation of the group are necessary, but there is potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Choice around songs we sing or activities that work towards vocal development, using oblique processes, and opting out when necessary are all important ways in which the women can feel safe and supported within the group.

*Collaboration*

The Vignette describes the building of collaborative work through development of a group contract, Ways of Working. The women identify how they want the group to work together and what values are important, for example, being respectful, committing to attending, not using inappropriate language during the sessions. The contract is re-iterated each week in order to promote group cohesion and develop trust in working together. Collaborative songwriting additionally provides an excellent framework for supporting positive group interaction, building on and reinforcing the shared values of the group.

*Empowerment*

Working towards self-empowerment, recovery and healing for those who have

experienced trauma needs to be an ongoing goal for practitioners to consider. The importance of self-empowerment to recovery is discussed by Herman (1992). She states, 'Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation' (Herman 1992: 133). Herman's assertion gives a clear indication of the importance of collaborative work facilitated within the safety net of trusting group processes.

What is interesting to note is that the five values of trauma-informed care are already inherent in community music practice. Community musicians build safety and trust into their practice (Higgins L. 2008, 2012; Howell 2013, 2018; Mullen and Deane 2018) as well as enabling creative collaboration, choice and empowerment (Marsh 2019; McFerran and Rickson 2014; Palidofsky 2010; de Quadros 2011). If these values are present in the practice, why then is a trauma-informed framework important for community musicians?

From my experience of the YSJU Prison Partnership Project, what is key is not just the embodiment of these values within the music-making processes, but the understanding of trauma, and how trauma symptoms may manifest among a group of participants. For one of the women, that may be visible as a profound moment of withdrawal, for another, an act of verbal or physical aggression (as in the case of J in the Vignette, who responded angrily to the typo), or an outpouring of deep emotion connected to a particular song that has triggered a trauma response. If I do not understand that what I am observing is a potential symptom of traumatic experience, there is the risk of misunderstanding, misinterpreting and mishandling the situation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND EMERGING THEMES

What follows is a systematic overview of community music literature that details existing projects working with trauma-survivors, and how these are conceptualized in practice. Five emerging themes arising from the reviewed literature are unpacked using the theoretical lens of trauma-informed practice. The emerging themes are: expression and validation; connection; personal growth; positive social change; and healing. The importance of these themes is key to understanding that music making with those who have experienced trauma has the potential to be beneficial, but also highlights the potential risks and therefore the need for trauma-informed practice to support facilitators of this work.

### *Expression (personal and collective) and validation*

Community music making has long been understood as a location for individual and group expression (Sound Sense, 1998). Survivors of trauma can live with a 'narrative of belated experience' (Caruth 1996: 7) that can be hard to articulate given the likelihood of fragmentation from memory of the trauma narrative (van der Kolk 2014). Those who have experienced trauma can be misunderstood, their narratives doubted, their voices silenced (Belenkey et al. 1986). Music-making projects working with participants who have experienced trauma can, therefore, enable an opportunity for both expression and validation.

As an example of this, Palidofsky describes her musical theatre project, *Storycatchers Theatre,* working with incarcerated girls in youth detention in the United States, as a 'public acknowledgement of trauma [and] a gateway to therapy' (2010: 123). In this illustration of practice, it is important to note the emphasis on the acknowledgment of trauma and use of the word therapy. In the Prison Partnership Project, the model of

trauma-informed practice discourages a focus on trauma narrative understanding that the safety of the group could be compromised. As a trauma-informed practitioner, I would caution the use of music-making to engage too closely in stories of traumatic experience. I also acknowledge that I am a community musician, not a trained therapist, and therefore cannot call the work we engage in therapy, despite the potential for positive therapeutic outcomes.

The idea that trauma can be acknowledged through community music-making is also explored within the work of Marsh (2019). She cites a facilitator describing music as a way of 'deeply witnessing the stories and emotions of another' (2019: 304). Facilitation of witness to trauma within community music practice connects to the idea of group validation as a crucial part of trauma recovery (Dieckmann and Davidson 2019; Marsh 2019; Palidofsky 2010), but again, I would suggest this needs to be handled carefully and with sensitivity. As described by Herman, 'trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms' (1992: 214), supporting the notion of group processes as significant for survivors of trauma. It is clear in the example of the Vignette, that the women affirmed one another in the sharing of their songwriting. Even in the example of one woman being critical towards another, the group offered a space where the writer could respond to the criticism, be heard and validated.

Alongside this potential for validation, community music making can offer opportunities for expression, where 'no words are capable of explaining trauma' (Marsh 2019: 304). Thinking back on examples from the Prison Partnership Project, the women have had space within the songwriting to be free in their expression of emotion and we have had glimpses of their stories, albeit often veiled. The words they use do not explain their trauma, rather help them express something of what they have experienced, often using metaphor and imagery rather than a direct narrative.

Engaging in music making can also sanction the individual processing of emotions, as detailed by Kumm (2013), whose article describes the potential for release of personal pain through songwriting and positive expression.. Nicolette, the musician who is the focus of the article, had been silenced by her traumatic experience of sexual abuse as a teenager. Kumm describes how developing her musical skills enabled not only a catharsis in dealing with the ongoing trauma she had experienced but how she states that 'it saved my life' (2013: 208). This radical statement is also indicative of why Nicolette not only wants to write music for her own release of emotion but understands the potential importance of music making in helping others in similar situations.

I observed the need for individual processing of emotion within the Prison Partnership Project, when one of the women requested a song sung at her daughter's funeral. We played and sang the song for her, and she sat with tears streaming down her face. Afterwards she explained that she had not had the opportunity to release the emotion, as surviving incarceration often necessitates wearing emotional masks. The woman thanked us for giving her the opportunity to cry, releasing her 'deeply repressed trauma' (de Quadros 2011: 66) through the song.

***Connection***

As stated previously, Herman (1992) asserts the importance of connection, where, in contrast, 'The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others' (1992: 133). Music brings people together: according to Murray and Lamont, it is 'an inherently social act' (2012: 76). Howell explores this idea further, stating that shared music-making experiences also have the capacity to 'entrain energy and emotions, increase feelings of courage, safety and fellowship, and build a

sense of community' (2018: 49). This connectedness and belonging through music can bring people together through a shared experience of trauma (Crisp 2020), as well as facilitating positive communication and creation of new meaning (Ansdell 2014; Marsh 2019).

As Herman explains, 'Trauma isolates; the group recreates a sense of belonging' (1992: 214). Community music making projects working with trauma survivors can reduce isolation and facilitate belonging. In the Vignette, the women we worked with on the Prison Partnership Project reinforced this concept when they spoke of being able to be themselves in that weekly workshop space. In parallel with the five values of trauma-informed care (Harris and Fallot 2001), trust and safety are critical factors in developing strong connections within a community music group, helping to overcome isolation and mistrust (Ansdell 2014; Burnard et al. 2018; Silverman and Elliot 2018). Howell (2013) describes the ongoing development of trust though the welcome and hospitality of the facilitator, where experienced communal trauma has eroded trust. A safe and trusting group environment can also offer participants a sense of solidarity (Burnard et al. 2018) and unity (van der Merwe et al. 2019), collective focus (Marsh 2019) and the opportunity for meaningful encounters (Mastnak 2016). Silverman and Elliott describe music as a 'socially binding' (2018: 375) activity that can be used as a distraction from traumatic events. Additionally, Turino (2008) describes the development of group cohesion through 'social synchrony' entailing feelings of 'social comfort, belonging and identity' (cited in Marsh 2019: 306). This theme of comfort from being in the group is identified by other authors as being important for participants who have experienced trauma (Burnard et al. 2018).

Development of empathy through group interaction is viewed as vital in building strong connections, both relationally and creatively (Mastnak 2016). Burnard et al.

describe the potential through music making to build participants capacity 'for transcendence, openness, empathy, mutuality and generosity' (2018: 231) as well as creating empathy and connection with the listener. The example from the Vignette where one of the women was able to react positively to another's criticism illustrates this building of connection through an open and generous response. This woman had been on the pilot singing and songwriting project as well as several of the Prison Partnership theatre projects, so was comfortable enough in the processes as well as confident in how her ideas would be received, to be generous towards the woman who had singled out her work for critique.

The development of such positive social skills and interaction for participants where, as Herman states, 'Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community' (1992: 214), enable us to further understand why engaging in community music making could be a positive step forwards for someone who has experienced trauma. The skill in facilitation through trauma-informed practice is understanding how and why forming connections may be difficult for participants, and what we can do to support positive interaction within the context of making music together.

***Personal growth***

If music can be understood as a 'force for change' (Ansdell 2014: 28) this can help us to acknowledge the potential for positive personal growth and development for participants. Personal growth can be connected to the development of new skills. A sense of accomplishment in participation and performance (Palidofsky 2010) is key, alongside self-empowerment, necessary for recovery from trauma (Herman 1992). De Quadros states that music-making projects can facilitate self-empowerment 'because every act of

expression is an act of authorship and self-affirmation' (2011: 67). The songwriting component of the Prison Partnership Project is, in my view, crucial in the self-empowerment of individual women. I am not sure that singing alone would have the same kind of impact, although I would need to engage in further research to understand this more fully.

Participatory creative processes can also aid in imagining 'a pathway out of dysfunction, chaos and incarceration' (Palidofsky 2010: 122). This imagining connected to the concept of 'future possible selves' (Henley and Cohen 2018: 156-158) can also help us understand music making as a powerful way of presenting alternatives (Balfour 2018; de Quadros 2011). The reconciling of past, present and future selves (Dieckmann and Davidson 2019; Mullen and Deane 2018) can be explored within the safety net of creative collaboration. The women we work with have explored these ideas in creative songwriting where they might reflect on a past relationship, but also recognise how they are moving forwards, or write about previous hurt and trauma, only to remind themselves to stay strong and have courage. As stated by de Quadros, 'Music appeals to imaginative faculties and helps individuals re-appropriate their own bodies and emotions, where conditions of abuse and prostitution have led to deep-seated alienations' (2011: 68). Imagination, released through music making, can be a powerful tool for survivors of traumatic experience (van der Kolk 2014).

Laurila and Willingham (2017) describe a community music drum circle project with Indigenous women in Canada, where there is space for reflection on past, present and future. This spacious weekly encounter enables the participants to build self-confidence. One of the women acknowledges a personal discovery of self-confidence in the statement, 'being in the drum circle, it helps me to be able to remind myself that I'm still strong' (Laurila and Willingham 2017: 149).

The caution from a trauma-informed perspective, is how material is handled safely within the group, and whether it is always appropriate for participants to share their creative outpouring. I remember an instance when one of the women wrote a significantly dark piece of text about her previous abusive relationship. The tension for me as a practitioner was having to decide if this was going to trigger other women in the group, while acknowledging the need not to dampen individual expression. Trauma-informed practice can support facilitators in making these sorts of careful decisions, weighing up the values against each other and thinking critically about how to respond.

***Positive social change***

Van der Merwe et al. (2019) assert that 'the transformative value and benefits of musical participation enhance a community's emotional, mental, physical and social well-being' (2019: 251). The authors go on to state that it is possible for music to have an 'enormous impact on the quality of life' (van der Merwe et al. 2019: 251), given its sociocultural role. They also detail the musical benefits 'for the wellness of a community [in providing] relief from suffering' (van der Merwe et al. 2019: 252). This is echoed by Laurila and Willingham who state that 'While members come to the drum circle to sing, its communal nature creates a space that enables them to meet some of their spiritual, emotional, mental and physical needs' (2017: 152). This potential for individual needs to be met can enable a positive shift in narrative of the whole community. It also connects to the importance of shared experience and common goals, a concept supported by trauma theorists (Herman 1992).

Both Wölfl (2016) and Howell (2018) acknowledge the positive psychosocial benefits of group music participation for those who have experienced trauma. Music making has also been identified as a way of overcoming trauma through collective experience as it

can help develop empathy (Burnard et al. 2018; Hassler and Nicholson 2017; Marsh 2019). Silverman and Elliot assert that music can ''re-memory' the community [...] to positively shift their community's identity [...] and to reframe their autobiographical selves' (2018: 379). This is echoed in what Marsh refers to as 'performing resilience' (2019: 306). Following this thread, in her descriptions of music making within post-war conflict zones, Howell (2018) also addresses the positive potential of music making in a community's recovery.

There is perhaps a caution to be made in overstating music making alone as beneficial to a community's recovery. The value is clear from the above examples, but I would suggest these also take place alongside working closely with other organisations and individuals who can support the community on a multitude of levels. Trauma-informed practice could also be implemented in these wider contexts of communal recovery. Within the Prison Partnership Project, we work alongside prison staff across a range of services, who have had opportunity to engage in One Small Thing's trauma-informed training so there is consistency in the understanding and application of the five values.

***Healing***

Bartleet states that 'Music can heal the body, mind and spirit from trauma' (2019: 318). Burnard et al. further this idea by describing that in making music together, there is an increase in 'people's ability to connect and heal' (2018: 234). This link betewen music and healing from trauma is also explored by Hassler and Nicholson (2017) where facilitated group processes are central to the notion. If music making enables participants to let go of trauma through participation (Laurila and Willingham 2017), it is possible to envision how community music can not only provide relief from suffering, but can become a 'potent source of hope, emancipation and health' (de Quadros 2011: 66).

Mastnak states that 'Music can trigger preventative, curative and rehabilitation processes' (2016: 50) opening up the possibility of music making as a cure, an action that can 'restore to health or a sound state' (etymonline.com). Interesting to note is the meaning of cure as a noun, 'one responsible for the care (of souls)' (etymonline.com), given the responsibility of community musicians to an ethics of care (Noddings 2013) for their participants. The facilitator's role cannot, therefore, be underestimated as vital in enabling healing and restoration to take place within the music-making processes.

The therapeutic benefits of music making for those who have experienced trauma are explored by several authors (Ansdell 2014; Burnard et al. 2018; Howell 2013, 2018; van der Merwe 2019). Howell (2018) for example describes how therapeutic music interventions may be employed to heal trauma in post-war conflict zones, as well as discussing the music workshop as a space in which the symptoms of trauma can be relieved. The potential for music making to be used to heal from traumatic experience is also explored by Dunphy, where she states that 'arts participation can develop creative imagination and empathic capacities and heal social and personal traumas through the sharing of stories' (2018: 312). This connects into the idea that songwriting and storytelling through song, involve the imagination and enable participants to re-write a narrative of healing (Kumm, 2013). Cultural traditions are also seen as significant in healing for those who have experienced trauma (Burnard et al. 2018; Hassler and Nicholson 2017; Laurila and Willingham, 2017). Projects such as Music Action International, where participants are survivors of war, torture and forced migration, facilitates songwriting that enables individuals to connect into their musical and cultural traditions supporting a strong sense of cultural democracy within the group (Burnard et al. 2018). This connects to the notion that music making can be a way of generating self-healing (de Quadros 2011) as well as helping others find healing (Kumm 2013).

Again, there does need to be care taken not to over-emphasize the role of any and all music making in the healing of trauma. Attention also needs to be paid to exactly how participating in musical activity can support trauma recovery. For example, singing positively interacts with our nervous system (Osborne 2009, 2017; Porges 2017; van der Kolk 2014) and is becoming understood as a significant mode of musical expression related to healing from trauma. The breath control needed to sing supports a decrease in heart rate, reduction in blood pressure and stress hormones, thereby enabling the body and mind to relax and release. The women we work with on the Prison Partnership Project have spoken of practicing the group breathing exercises during the week, and how they have noticed a reduction in anxiety and promotion of wellbeing as a result. As a trauma-informed practitioner, understanding the body's response to trauma has enabled me to focus music-making activities accordingly and develop strategies to support positive interaction for the women's physiology, with the potential for increasing the opportunity for improved physical, mental and emotional recovery.

**DISCUSSION**

Whilst it is clear from the five emerging themes that community music making has the potential to be beneficial for those who have experienced trauma, it is less clear if and how trauma-informed practice is utilized within the facilitation approaches. In the examples of projects cited above, the concept of trauma-informed practice is never mentioned, although examples of facilitation detail both the specifics of practice and the underpinning values of community musicians working with trauma survivors.

It is clear that there is some understanding of trauma and its impacts, (Burnard et al. 2018; Howell 2013, 2018; Mastnak 2016; Osborne 2009; Silverman and Elliot 2018; Wölfl 2016) which is an important starting point for development of trauma-informed practice.

It is noteworthy, however, that there is little mention in the literature of the way in which trauma interacts with the nervous system and why community music making could play an important part in trauma recovery. Is this perhaps because trauma and its impacts, until more recently, have been overlooked? Or is it, in part, because trauma can remain hidden, and is therefore more easily acknowledged in contexts known to include trauma survivors?

A few sources detail the physiological changes that can occur through participatory music making (Howell 2018; Osborne 2009, 2017; Porges 2017; van der Kolk 2014), but this does seem to be a relatively under-researched area. As detailed in the thematic discussions above, the benefits mainly focus on soft outcomes, for example self-directed positive growth (Covington 2016; Dieckmann and Davidson 2019; Hess and Bradley 2020). It is interesting to note that musical outcomes are not explored in nearly as much detail. There is a concern in some of the literature around claims of the positive impacts of the arts on soft outcomes (Balfour 2018; Garrido 2015). Greater clarity around which ingredients are essential for these soft outcomes, musical or otherwise, is needed.

Community music projects working with known trauma survivors are contextually located and as shown in the literature, grouped into the following categories: carceral settings (Anderson and Willingham 2020; Lamela and Rodrigues 2016; Palidovsky 2010); working with ex-military (Balfour 2018); post-war conflict zones (Howell 2013, 2018; Burnard et al. 2018); homeless shelters (Knapp and Silva 2019); working with refugees (Ansdell 2014; Burnard et al. 2018; Higgins L. 2012; Howell 2018; Marsh 2019; Sunderland et al. 2016); familial and communal violence (Higgins L. and Willingham 2017; Laurilla and Willingham 2017); communal trauma in the form of natural disasters and global pandemic (Crisp 2020; Higgins T. 2020; McFerran and Rickson 2014); working with sex workers (de Quadros 2011); and working with children in challenging

circumstances (Mullen and Deane 2018).

One potential problem of the above categories is that a reader may only connect the notion of trauma within the field into particular contextual locations. Whilst facilitation approaches within these contexts are explored and specific values for practitioners detailed (for example empathy, respect, welcome, hospitality, trust, safety and inclusion), if the notion of trauma is not connected more widely, community musicians run the risk of ignoring the potential for its prevalence within any setting, or the responsibility in adapting practice to respond appropriately.

Mullen & Deane (2018) discuss a community musician's instinctive working as being vital to the practice, but I would argue that deeper reflection, consideration, and responsiveness is needed, and that trauma-informed practice offers this opportunity. A level of criticality also seems to be missing in the literature. For example, is it clear whether participants are physically, mentally and emotionally capable of experiencing the potential benefits of music making? Could community music projects do more harm than good for survivors of traumatic experience? What other considerations of practice need to be addressed? For example, do projects working with survivors of traumatic experience need to be developed as long-term, sustainable music-making endeavours? Could short-term community music projects be detrimental where group trust and connection cannot be fully established? As Herman asserts, 'A group that might well be suited to a person at one stage of recovery might be ineffective or even harmful to the same person at another stage' (1992: 217). These are considerations that can be made within the safety net of trauma-informed practice.

Through my practice and research, it is becoming apparent to me that trauma-informed practice could be an essential framework for community musicians, in consideration of trauma-statistics and the likelihood of working with trauma survivors

in whatever context; schools, youth groups, community centres, care homes, etc. However, further critical questions need to be asked, alongside considerations connected to the potential challenges and pitfalls of the training and implementation of trauma-informed practice. My understanding of trauma-informed practice is as a values-based framework. These values are considered and embodied in practice in a very particular way within the YSJU Prison Partnership Project. They have been developed by an organization working specifically alongside professionals within the criminal justice system, and while I believe that community music practitioners could broadly benefit from my example of practice, I also believe that the YSJU Prison Partnership model of trauma-informed practice cannot be lifted out into any context (for example, it is specifically designed for working with women).

It is my assertion that the Five Values of Trauma-Informed Care could provide a framework within which individual organisations and practitioners could devise and develop their own specific model. Contextually-located projects working with known trauma survivors (for example Musicians Without Borders or the YSJU Prison Partnership Project) have a model of trauma-informed practice that is distinctive. It may not be appropriate for a community musician to adopt one of these discretely designed models, but they could use the five values as a framework to develop their own specific iteration of trauma-informed practice. In this way, the fluidity and organic nature of community music making can be retained connected to unique participant demographic, and contextual location of a project.

Considerations of training are potentially complicated. For example, should all community music practitioners receive basic training in trauma-informed practice? If they do, is there a risk of losing the centrality of the music and devaluing the artists' contribution? Particular settings may need greater specialist training for practitioners.

Some of the projects explored in the literature review deal directly with trauma and trauma narrative but I would argue in specific cases that the facilitators have accessed additional training to support these explorations. For example, Palidovsky (2010) has trained in trauma therapy in order to appropriately facilitate her project with incarcerated girls. Community music projects using trauma-informed approaches, such as the YSJU Prison Partnership, have music making as the goal, even though the facilitators have a clear understanding of trauma and a trauma-informed model of practice to work within. The distinctions of practice here are important, and also the strategies.

Musical processes can be facilitated by community musicians that enable therapeutic benefit, but there needs to be a level of caution when attributing healing value to these processes. A key observation Balfour makes is that these creative projects inhabit spaces 'outside, or at the fringes of traditional therapeutic settings' (2018: 561). This again has significance for community music projects which often take place in spaces that are not designed for therapy (not to be confused with community music therapy which often operates within these fringe settings (Ansdell 2014)). There is vulnerability and risk involved in music making which needs to be considered carefully as to what might be beneficial for some participants but not for others. In choosing to become trauma informed, I have a deeper understanding of why this might be so and can respond accordingly.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

In addressing the questions of 'what is trauma-informed practice?' and 'why is it important for community musicians?', I have drawn on my personal experiences of working within a trauma-informed framework on the YSJU Prison Partnership Project.

The Five Values of Trauma-Informed Care (Harris and Fallot 2001) focus on enabling positive interaction rather than treating trauma symptoms. These values could enable community musicians working in any context to develop their practice where they acknowledge an understanding of trauma, whether hidden or not, and are therefore better equipped to deal with and be responsive to its potential impacts. In acknowledging trauma, practitioners will also understand more of the ubiquity of traumatic experience and consider more deeply the need for trauma-informed practice within any community music setting.

Through the thematic explorations above, it is apparent that participatory music making can be of benefit to those who have experienced trauma, covering five broad areas: expression and validation; connection; personal growth; positive social change; and healing. However, implementation of trauma-informed practice becomes more applicable for community musicians when you consider the potential risk factors involved without appropriate knowledge, understanding and training.

The journey towards becoming trauma-informed is a journey to be considered deeply and reflected on by practitioners with honesty and reflexivity (Etherington 2004). It is also a journey best travelled in the company of others, with accountability and mentoring, regular training and supervision, as well as interaction and collaboration with other organizational and professional structures to support the work. A critical examination of whether a practitioner is suitable for a particular context may seem contrary to the hospitable nature of community music but is a crucial question alongside what constitutes suitability. Practitioners who are attracted to a specific area of practice will need to understand their responsibility to adapt and develop appropriately for the context. As a values-driven framework, trauma-informed practice enables flexibility in the potential for adaptation and responsiveness across any context, where details of

practice can be decided on a project-by-project basis.

As a final caution, I have observed from student volunteers on the YSJU Prison Partnership Project, that it is often the case that a personal awareness or experience of traumatic circumstance can lead practitioners to want to engage in supporting others who have experienced similar circumstances. I would argue that there is a need to be both aware - and wary - of this tendency, understanding that while an empathy of shared experience can be positively beneficial to the practice, it can be detrimental if the practitioner has not appropriately dealt with their own emotional difficulties, or indeed their own trauma narratives, speaking to the potential difficulties of the wounded healer (Frank 1995). The students' stories of trauma, victimization and abuse have alerted me to the value of trauma-informed practice within the broader scope of my teaching as well as on the YSJU Prison Partnership Project. I want to be a community musician, teacher and mentor who is able to read the room effectively, developing my reflective and reflexive practice, in order to facilitate an environment of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual safety for my groups. I want to be able to see, not just at surface level, but really try to observe and understand on a deeper level what might be happening. I want to listen to the hidden voices and attend to them.

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[i] It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this article. I have chosen specific platforms for the literature review therefore any findings are based on these publications alone and are not indicative of an exhaustive search of the field.

[ii] The York St. John University Prison Partnership Project was set up in 2013 by Rachel Conlon, theatre practitioner, drama therapist and Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre at YSJU. Originally a theatre program operating in two local women's prisons, it was designed as a 'transformative learning experience which emphasizes creative collaboration and addresses issues of social concern (Conlon 2020: 174). Emerging Voices, the singing and songwriting project has been established in response to a request from the women for a singing group. For more information, please refer to https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/working-with-the-community/prison-partnership-project/.