

Psychologically Speaking



Creating a New Normal—A World Without Racial Trauma

Back when I chose Music Therapy as the theme for our second newsletter, I did not know that COVID-19 was coming. More importantly, I did not know that the resulting stay-at-home mandate in response to COVID-19 would create the context and opportunity for the world to hear loud and clear that “Black Lives Matter” in ways that could not or would not be heard before. The recent murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd—each unarmed Black citizens killed by current or former law enforcement—require me to scrap my original letter, go in a different direction and talk about racial trauma.

On March 7, 1977, NBC aired an episode of *Little House on the Prairie* entitled “The Wisdom of Solomon.” *Little House on the Prairie* was a Western drama about a white family living on a farm in Walnut Grove, MN, in the 1870s and 1880s. This episode is one of the rare episodes in which the plot focuses on a young black male character, Solomon, played by Todd Bridges. A pivotal scene takes place in a classroom during which the teacher poses a challenge to the class to think of something about themselves that they dislike. She follows up, specifically, with Solomon who is sitting on the front row in the classroom. He is the only black student in the classroom. “Solomon” the teacher calls. “Yes, ma’am” he answers. “Can you think of something you dislike?” she asks. “Being a n****r,” he, respectfully answers. There are gasps and dropped jaws. His response is upsetting. He later explains, “I didn’t mean nothing bad. The teacher asked a question and I just answered it... If’n I was white, my pa would still be alive. Being a n****r killed my pa.”

The dialogue in that episode helps illustrate the implicit and powerful impact that an internalized and devalued racial identity can have on how a child thinks. Solomon’s words do not merely reflect a recognition of racial injustice. His words are personal. His understanding that being black can get you killed is an unflinching assertion that “being a n****r” means his own life is constantly in danger. What is more troubling about this depiction is that the actor, Todd Bridges, does not crumble into a pool of tears as he speaks these words. Nor does he erupt in a violent outburst of hypermasculinity. His portrayal of the character is very “matter of fact.” It is filled with conviction, but it is not heavy with emotion. This was a fictional TV character, but his acting demonstrated a very important potential symptom of trauma—showing little or no emotion. Like with most black children, adolescents and adults, there are often no obvious red flags signaling the debilitating anxiety about the dangers of being black that may dwell “below the surface.” As a faculty member, I personally know students who experience trauma symptoms and, yet, do not behave in ways that are obvious clues to trauma. What I see makes me wonder whether these threats to one’s sense of self and physical well-being is so consistent as to feel like normal. Let’s not allow racial trauma to be normalized. —David Dupree

The Music Issue

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Below are links to a recent New York Times article entitled, “When Music is the Best Medicine”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/26/well/live/music-therapy-cancer.html?module=inline>

a podcast in which Philadelphia-based psychiatrist and a Philadelphia-based therapist discuss their use of hip-hop music in their work

<https://philadelphianeighborhoods.com/2019/05/10/podcast-a-north-philadelphia-based-therapist-uses-hip-hop-therapy-to-treat-trauma/>

and a link to a website dedicated to the work of Dr. Edgar H. Tyson who is credited with founding hip-hop therapy as a practice.

<https://www.hiphotherapy.com/>

In the fall semester, I asked CCP Psychology majors respond to the following question: “Do you see music therapy as a potentially effective therapeutic approach for Community College of Philadelphia students? If so, why so? If not, why not?”

“Do you see music therapy as a potentially effective therapeutic approach for Community College of Philadelphia students?”

Opinion: Music Therapy offers an opportunity to provide therapy in more culturally-specific ways – Benjamin Nixon. CCP Psychology Major

Students at the Community College of Philadelphia face many challenges. One in four have experienced food insecurity within the last 30 days. One in ten struggle with housing insecurity at some point during the semester. Students are balancing jobs, raising families, and remaining dedicated to their studies. While doing so, they must contend with the longitudinal effects of systemic disenfranchisement, unfettered globalization, and other external stressors that reduce their quality of life. Amidst these obstacles, there is a small chance students will have access to low-cost and high-quality mental health services. If such access exists, there are cultural stigmas associated with receiving therapy (Owen, Thomas, & Rodolfa, 2013). Music therapy can be used to alleviate the psychological and emotional strain that CCP students experience while navigating their daily lives. What’s more, usage of music therapy would serve to remove therapy stigma within the college.

People of color, urban youth, and ethnic minorities are unlikely to form therapeutic alliances with therapists when therapists lack the same cultural, ethnic, or racial identity of therapy recipients. Studies show that these groups benefit from a type of music therapy – hip hop therapy – when it is presented by therapists of similar personal identity (Añez, Paris, Bedregal, Davidson, & Grilo, 2005). After attending hip hop therapy sessions, recipients reported increased feelings of self-esteem, new-found interest in the power of social movements, and felt that they were better able to detect, classify, and combat of the effects of systemic disenfranchisement. Additionally, students who received hip hop therapy felt personally empowered to challenge racially intolerant power structures while recognizing of the value of empathy for other races and genders (Kobin & Tyson, 2006). Community College of Philadelphia students and faculty would benefit from access to this method of therapy because it would increase understanding of how mental health crises are linked to systemic racism and inequitable economic development, both of which affect the daily lives of students, staff, faculty, and their families.



Opinion: Music Therapy is not effective if it is just playing music and having a conversation that is not truly connected to the lyrics of the song –A reflection by Joshua Jean. CGP Psychology

My personal experience receiving music therapy in a clinical setting was a mixed bag. The group setting ensured that, regardless of song choice, some subset of patients would declare the song 'hokey' & 20 minutes would be wasted convincing them to engage with the material. Even songs with near universal acclaim can sour from this recontextualization.

Recontextualization: Placing or viewing an artistic work (e.g., a song) in a new or unfamiliar context, especially in order to suggest a different interpretation.

Across five separate institutions in four different states, every one (which I've heard) has looked and sounded much the same: "Today, I have something special! I think you guys are gonna feel differently about this one! Some of you may have heard it before. This time make sure you stay quiet & really *listen*, and let everyone else have a chance to hear!"

He presses play on a 10-year old iPod attached to a CD boombox. We hear the opening piano of Tupac Shakur's 'Changes' as the therapist scans the room excitedly, smiling broadly at whomever makes eye contact. The song ends and an awkward conversation commences. The conversation most likely centered around the question: "What sort of changes might improve your life?" The late Mr. Shakur rolls slowly in his grave as people bring up their personal problems, while the systemic changes (which undergird the overwhelming majority of aforementioned personal problems) his song calls for remain unmentioned.

I hope this amalgamation of anecdotes illustrates how cringe inducing music therapy can be!

Opinion: Music Therapy can be used to help students suffering from PTSD, HIV/AIDS and Depression— Benjamin Nixon. CCP Psychology Major

Music therapy can be used to reduce stress and form pro-social coping mechanisms in students who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from combat exposure. In a series of music therapy sessions, combat veterans reported feeling an increased sense of togetherness and self-identified as being more able to confront traumatic memories in an unthreatening way after being allowed to utilize percussion instruments before, during, and after traditional therapy sessions (Bensimon, Amir, & Wolf, 2008). Recent studies have shown that refugees with PTSD benefit from exposure to guided imagery and music when they are provided access to these images and music outside of weekly therapy sessions (Beck, et al., 2018). Music therapy reduces feelings of helplessness in people living with HIV/AIDS. Patients report a greater sense of self-expression and a better sense of self-awareness when given access to musical performance outlets

(Lee, 2016). Music therapy can increase the likelihood that depressed individuals will engage in more social interactions and healthier eating habits (Aalbers, et al., 2017).

Music therapy would demonstrably improve the mental well-being of students seeking healthy outlets to express themselves. Music therapy would create space for conversations about alternative methods of mental health treatment, systemic injustice, recidivism, and social justice. The normalization of mental health conversations within the college would be an effective method of encouraging therapeutic alliances between students and therapists. It is never too late to normalize conversations about therapy and mental health, but the longer we wait, the less we serve our college community.



A celebration of life

One of our own, Psychology major **Jorel Thomas**, passed away after having contracted the coronavirus. Jorel was completing the final courses he needed to earn his associates degree in Psychology.



If you were going to try music therapy, what song would you want to play?

Sade Hines, CCP Psychology Major

I already do that. And I listen to, all the time, Mob Ties by Drake. It's actually really motivating. It relates to my situation all the time. Like...get your stuff done. People are haters. You can't trust nobody. That's how I feel. I don't trust a lot of people and its gotten me a lot of places. I go to sleep to it. I wake up to it. It gets me going.

Excerpt from Mob Ties by Drake

"Please don't let them fool ya, I don't care how they look (nah)
Heard all of the talkin', now it's quiet, now it's shush (shh)
Twenty-nine is comin', they on edge when I cook (cook)
Lead the league in scorin', man,

but look at my assists (shh)
Yes I be with Future but I like to reminisce (yeah)
I do not forget a thing, I'm patient, it's a gift (yeah)
Try to tell 'em they ain't got to do it, they insist (they insist)"



"Distrust signals that something is not as it appears, there's misleading information around and we should be especially sensitive to information that deviates from the normal," Posten says. "Trust comes with a lot of benefits, so I wouldn't want to suggest that people should be distrustful. But there might be some benefit." *Ann-Christin Posten, University of Cologne*

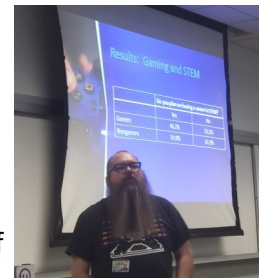
Video Gaming & Society: A Conference Hosted by Dr. Rick Frei and the Descriptive Research Methods Students

On Wednesday, November 20, 2019, The Video Gaming & Society Conference, a student run event was held. Led by Dr. Rick Frei of the Psychology Program, the conference aimed to facilitate community discussion through education. Presentations included:

- **Video Game Controversies: A Look Back at History** (Tony Rowe, Drexel University, Entrepreneurial Game Studio)—*Presentation summary:* It seems like the video game industry is surrounded by controversy. The World Health Organization has designated “gaming disorder” as a mental health condition. The President has accused video games of “shaping young peoples’ thoughts.” Loot boxes are exposing young children to gambling. But, have things always been this way? With this presentation, the audience took a look back at some of the industry’s biggest early controversies and compared them to those of other games and media;

- **City at Play: The Skyscraper Games Trilogy** (Dr. Frank J. Lee, Director, Drexel University’s Entrepreneurial Game Studio)—*Presentation summary:* In 2013, Dr. Lee publicly showcased a large-scale interactive installation in Philadelphia, reprogramming the LED lights of the Cira Centre, a 29-story skyscraper, to create an interactive game of Pong. The following year, I recreated a multi-player Tetris on the Cira Centre as part of the 30th year anniversary celebration of Tetris. In 2019, he presented new games designed and coded by middle school students from Philadelphia for the Cira Centre as part of a STEAM outreach to get girls and other underrepresented students interested in programming. In his talk, he discussed how they and other projects form the basis of his vision for a new type of game and interaction that mixes real world with digital to create city-scale mixed-reality games. He also briefly talked about the Entrepreneurial Game Studio (EGS), a unique university-based startup incubator at Drexel helping and mentoring student to start their own independent game studios;

- **Gaming and Academic Performance: A Survey** (Dr. Rick Frei’s Descriptive Research Class Project, Community College of Philadelphia)—*Presentation summary:* Research on the relationship between gaming and academic performance is mixed, with some studies finding a strong negative correlation between gaming and grade, while others have found little to no relationships. Others theorize that gaming may actually be associated with improved academic performance by enhancing attention span. The students of PSY 110 presented a summary of the major research and the results from a large scale survey on gaming and academic performance [Top photo: Rick Frei, Bottom photo: Kara LaFleur]



- **Cultural Combos: An Ethnographic Narrative of the Competitive Fighting Game Community** (Jumaani Haskins, Cultural Anthropologist, Arcadia University)—*Presentation summary:* An ethnographic research project based on semi-structured interviews within the competitive fighting game community. This research found that the fighting game community to be more racially diverse than other gaming competitive gaming communities and contains a rich history of cultural practices involving ritual performance, social norms, and standard procedures regardless of international region; and

- **A Panel Discussion: Games Beyond Games** (Shawn Pierre, Philly Game Mechanics)—*Presentation summary:* Even though games have existed for many years, the level of influence has never been higher than they are now. Games permeate through science, theater, philosophy, politics, and more. A panel of local game developers discussed how games interact with the local community and beyond, and where they see games leading us in the future.

Throwback Timelines

This year, our planned Brain Awareness event had to be cancelled for COVID-19. So, in honor of the event, we are remembering last's year very successful event. Curated by **Ilze Nix** (Psychology), the event included a Panel Discussion on the Psychology of Pleasure that included an introduction to brain concepts relevant to our experience of pleasure by neuroscientist, **Melvin Bates** (Children's Hospital of Philadelphia), and insightful comments by our esteemed panelists, **Alex Bove** (English), **Heidi Braunschweig** (Psychology), **Calion Lockridge** (Psychology), and **David Prejsnar** (Religious Studies). The event was capped off with a keynote address on Brain Science and the Biology of Belief by **Andrew Newberg** (Thomas Jefferson University).



L to R: Ilze Nix, Melvin Bates, David Prejsnar, Calion Lockridge



Andrew Newberg



L to R: Heidi Braunschweig, Alex Bove

Our 2020 CCP Psychology Graduates Roll Call!

Deana Abuali

Trina Andrews

Victoria Barbella

Sanya Barnette

Danielle Bennish

Samara Berrios

Aliyah Bey

Tamia Brown

Gregory Coates

Tammi Coleman

Aisha Currie

Tyrone Davenport

Eleize Demoraes

Desiree Dillon

Amirah Dunlap

Nathaniel Dunson

Gabriel Escobosa

Sydney Evans

Whitney Evans

Juan German

Semira Harris

Shemeka Hayes

Sade Hines

Joshua Holm

An-Liang Huang

Nicole Hunt

Jennyfer Ibarra

Brehanna Jordan

Elesepat Kozman

Heather Larsen

Patricia Leach

Mecca Maples

Barbara Miller

Collette Miller

Andrew Mondelus

Briana Moore

Benjamin Nixon

Lorraine Perez

Ackree Peterson

Felicia Rzepczynski

Sydney Shiu

Devon Sistrunk

Jazmarie Vega

Ana Vinaixa-Morera

Taylor Weisman

Dear CCP Psychology Graduates,

We are so sorry we were not able to congratulate you in person. But, we are no less excited about this major accomplishment in your lives. Our hope is that the foundation laid by your CCP Psychology education serves as a launch pad for new financial opportunities, new dreams, personal transformation, better relationships...I also want to say to all of you something I've only had the opportunity to say to some of you face-to-face. I believe the next great psychologist can emerge from the ranks of CCP Psychology and—for better or for worse (smile), I teach in ways that reflect those high expectations. In turn, I ask that you open up yourself to the possibility that you are one who has been called to attack some of our society's greatest problems. I need you to believe that there is something great that you and only you can do and that your name and work could be in a textbook one day. Finally, I need you to go forward and act as if you believe it. Congratulations and I wish you all the best in this next phase of your life.

—Davido Dupree, CCP Psychology

