

Lesley University  
DigitalCommons@Lesley

---

Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses

Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences  
(GSASS)

---

Spring 5-18-2019

# Using D/MT to Elicit Social Change for the Incarcerated: A Literature Review

Courtney Bieda

Lesley University, [cbieda@lesley.edu](mailto:cbieda@lesley.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses)

Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Bieda, Courtney, "Using D/MT to Elicit Social Change for the Incarcerated: A Literature Review" (2019). *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses*. 168.

[https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive\\_theses/168](https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/168)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences (GSASS) at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@lesley.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lesley.edu).

Using D/MT to Elicit Social Change for the Incarcerated: A Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

5/4/2019

Courtney Bieda

Dance/Movement Therapy

Donna Owens

### Abstract

This literature review focuses on dance/movement therapy and other creative arts interventions that will help the incarcerated during and after incarceration. The incarcerated do not receive the help they need to successfully reintegrate into society, leading to increased recidivism rates. This population is often stigmatized as subhuman, and it is important for them to build self-worth and develop appropriate coping skills to better themselves. Creative arts programs display promising results, for they allow the incarcerated a break in their routine and an opportunity for creativity. Studies show that art and music therapy can help the incarcerated with emotional regulation, self-expression, and depression. Dance/movement therapy is effective for this population based on its core principles of kinesthetic empathy, nonverbal communication, and validation. However, evidence for these programs is scarce because not enough research studies display consistent results through mixed methodologies. Arts-based research conveys the best results for this population by encouraging the researchers to collaborate with the incarcerated. The incarcerated want to share their stories to empower themselves and others, and this is most successful when they have an outlet to take control. Future research should concentrate on arts-based research with dance/movement therapy as the primary artistic intervention.

*Keywords:* incarceration, creative arts, dance/movement therapy

## Using D/MT to Elicit Social Change for the Incarcerated: A Literature Review

*I think most people have a general sense that when you're released from prison, life is hard, but, you know, if you work hard and apply self-discipline and stay out of trouble, you can make it. But that's true only for a relative few.*

– Michelle Alexander –

Dance/movement therapy (D/MT) is the use of the body as the therapeutic instrument for creating behavioral and emotional change (Levy, 2005). It emphasizes that the body and mind are inseparable; therefore, the use of movement is a critical tool for identifying, understanding, and modifying behaviors and emotions. As an underserved population, incarcerated people could benefit from the core principles of D/MT, as well as expressive therapies as a whole. Previous studies with the incarcerated show that D/MT increases self-esteem (Batcup, 2013) and self-worth (Milliken, 2002), and improves communication skills and relationships (Batcup, 2013; Seibel, 2008). Milliken (2002) and Mortimer (2017) mention that the therapist's ability to be present with the incarcerated provides a level of comfort that encourages them to be more open and expressive, verbally and nonverbally. Milliken (2002) elaborates on this claim, explaining how surprising it was to observe her group members put aside the dreary, day-to-day prison life and express themselves through play, individually and as a group.

One of the primary concepts of D/MT is kinesthetic empathy, which emphasizes using the body to connect to others (Milliken, 2008). In a therapeutic relationship, kinesthetic empathy enables the client and clinician connect nonverbally, attuning to each other's movement. Nonverbal communication with this population can be very beneficial. It would encourage them to express themselves in an indirect way, giving them control over how much they want to reveal to others. With time and trust, the therapeutic relationship can empower the client to become increasingly more expressive through movement, allowing the client to tell their story in a way that is therapeutic and natural. Milliken (2008) and Batcup (2013) discuss how movement benefits trauma victims, and many incarcerated people are inflicted with trauma. Working through the body allows trauma

victims to settle down and refocus in order to develop supportive relationships and work through the core problems they wish to address (Milliken, 2008; Batcup, 2013). This nonverbal communication also helps clinicians connect to clients who do not speak English or speak English as a second language, and a majority of incarcerated people struggle with language and verbal communication (Bacup, 2013).

The big difference between an incarcerated person and a nonincarcerated person is the incarcerated person got caught making a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes, and everyone deserves a fair chance to redeem their mistakes, but the incarcerated do not usually have that luxury. Milliken (2002) criticizes the United States' treatment of incarcerated people, claiming that the United States would rather send people to prison than take the time to understand and fix the underlying cause for people ending up in prison. In her addiction program, Milliken (2002) observes her group members' willingness to better their lives through any means necessary; however, this is challenging when they are not provided the resources to make these changes in their lives. Seibel (2008) comments on the juxtaposition in the countryside between the extremely wealthy and the poverty that exists in the prison where she runs her groups. Within the same area, there is such disparity in wealth that it leads the impoverished to prison (Seibel, 2008). Milliken (2002) and Muirhead and Fortune (2016) highlight how inexpensive it is to bring arts into prisons; however, funding is often cut in those areas, despite members of these facilities expressing enjoyment in these programs. Buffington, Wolfgang, and Stephen (2017) discuss the importance of understanding one's own privilege and identity when working with the incarcerated. Through this process, of working collaboratively with inmates to learn and create while developing meaningful relationships, the authors discovered their own biases and stereotypes and developed a stronger sense of their place of power in relation to the residents.

By researching these topics, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the incarcerated and how D/MT can help this population. Ever since I was young, I wanted to be involved with helping the incarcerated. My fascination developed through television shows, such as *CSI* and *Criminal Minds*, and documentaries on serial killers, and as I watched, I always wanted to understand why people commit these crimes. This transformed into a desire to legally aid the incarcerated, which later became my current goal of working with the incarcerated through movement. With graduation approaching, I want to make this dream a reality. In today's society, incarcerated people are dehumanized, with many stereotyping them as subhuman-beings that don't deserve a chance out of prison. I see the incarcerated as people who ended up in prison due to unfortunate circumstances of poverty, racial bias, trauma, and so forth. Through my research, I strive to humanize this population, encouraging fellow D/MTs and other members of my field to remain open and curious about the incarcerated.

I begin with a review of the data on incarceration and recidivism rates in the United States. I then discuss issues of social justice and stigmatization. I introduce D/MT, and review the literature on how it can be used as an intervention for the incarcerated to prevent recidivism. I then review the challenges with D/MT and other expressive therapy interventions and how they can be strengthened through evidence-based practice. I conclude with an analysis of participatory research with art therapy, and suggest how it can be applied to D/MT.

### **Literature Review**

I have always been interested in incarcerated people, for I wanted to know why and how someone was placed in jail, as well as their intentions towards committing crimes. Over the years, my interest has shifted towards questioning and criticizing society's lack of empathy and support towards the incarcerated. Through this literature review, I hoped to develop a better understanding of the incarcerated and how D/MT can be used to prepare incarcerated people for reintegration.

This topic is important because it highlights the need for social justice and de-stigmatization of the incarcerated. Milliken (2002) criticizes the United States because the solution to terrorism post 9/11 was to place people in jail without developing any interventions for rehabilitation. As a result of a service-learning project, Buffington, Wolfgang, and Stephen (2017) discover their own privilege and biases towards the incarcerated and reflect on their process of collaborating with the residents. Through this project, the researchers watched as their preconceived notions on their residents' emotional and intellectual capabilities were shattered through conversation and relationship development, which revealed biases and stereotypes they were unaware they had (Buffington, Wolfgang, & Stephen, 2017). While D/MT could be a possible rehabilitation intervention, evidence is scarce and seldom follows a clear, scientific method (Meekums, 2010).

### **Incarceration**

The United States houses 25% of the world's incarcerated population, with the number of inmates growing from 2 to 2.3 million between 2000 and 2016 (Duke, 2018; Milliken, 2002). United States prisons operate at 99% capacity, and while 95% of inmates are released from custody, 76.6% of inmates reoffend (Duke, 2018). Because United States prisons operate at 99% capacity, taxpayers are paying large sums of money to house the incarcerated, when this money can be spent developing programs to prevent recidivism (Duke, 2018). The demographics in U. S. prisons are disproportionately black, with the ratio of black men to white men being 10:1. While policies are

placed to protect the country, they are unevenly enforced, with black men being arrested significantly more than white men, not because there is no crime in primarily white communities, but because police officers are not looking in those neighborhoods (Ryder, 2016). Milliken (2002) asks what creative arts therapists have to offer to this population, and the answer begins with addressing the stigma around being incarcerated.

United States prisons have significantly more people of color than white people, which is a result of systemic racism (Ryder, 2016). Systemic racism is defined as a favoring a particular skin color (white) over the rest due to that skin color having power (Irving, 2014). Ryder (2016) discusses this bias and how it impacts young black men in Washington, D.C. In Washington, D.C., roughly 3 out of 4 black men will be sent to prison, and not because they are more likely to commit crimes than white men. Because of systemic racism, police officers look for crimes in primarily black communities, which leads to increased arrests (Ryder, 2016). Systemic racism places high expectations on minority races that make succeeding difficult. In "Life Pieces to Masterpieces," a group created to empower young black men in Washington D.C., the men come together to create art and develop skills to better themselves, despite unfortunate circumstances (Ryder, 2016). In a poem written by group member Ryan Gilbert, he states "I have all these hurdles to jump before I can even walk" (Ryder, 2016, p. 95). This encapsulates the lives that people of color live; they are always a few steps behind because the system is organized keep them behind. While white people are allowed to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes, people of color are subject to lifelong punishment. The system is created so people who are sent to prison are denied social services, housing options, and employment opportunities due to their criminal record (Ryder, 2016). With the majority of incarcerated people being people of color, that places people of color at a disadvantage, making it difficult for them to succeed (Ryder, 2016).



Mass incarceration also widens the economic gap between the rich and the poor. When developing statistics for employment and poverty, the incarcerated are traditionally omitted, which leads to an illusion that the unemployment rate is lower than it actually is (Ryder, 2014). This deceives the public to believe that the economic situation in the United States is fine, if not great, when the reality is there are a significant number of people who are unemployed and living in poverty. Through this deception, the wealthy benefit by creating a larger economic gap. Mass incarceration should be a major concern, for the criminal justice system fails to treat and rehabilitate criminals; it simply houses them. This leads to a lack of trust in the criminal justice system, as well as a growing gap between the rich and the poor, which together can destroy the government (Ryder, 2014). Because of the uneven treatment of people, it is difficult to trust that police officers are placing the right people in prison, which leads to distrust and fear. Those who are placed in the prison system struggle to succeed post-incarceration, whether that is the system that prevents them from succeeding or the time spent in prison was not used to amend their problem due to a lack of resources or intervention techniques.

Recidivism, which is defined as reoffending, is at a high rate, with 76.6% of inmates re-entering the prison system after release (Duke, 2018, p. 45). Because incarcerated people deserve to reintegrate successfully into society, there should be programs that prepare them to do so. One program possibility is an education/vocational training program, which could provide inmates with the skills to attend school or find employment upon reintegration. Duke (2018) conducted a meta-analysis to evaluate who would best benefit from this type of program. While research states that inmates who attended these types of programs had a 43% less chance of recidivating, the studies fail to address this correlation across demographics (p. 45). When developing programs for any population, it is important that the program best serves its target population; therefore, assessing the demographics of those who benefit from these programs will improve results and decrease

recidivism. The results display that black male inmates benefit the most from education programs because they have less formalized education and higher recidivism rates than other demographics.

Instituting educational programs is cost-effective, for it reintegrates incarcerated people into the workforce. This means less tax money goes towards housing inmates, and the increase in labor force would stimulate the economy (Duke, 2018). While Duke (2018) addresses the effectiveness of education programs, he encourages future research to investigate other programs that could rehabilitate incarcerated people, such as youth programs. While educational programs may work for some, providing an education does not exclusively meet the needs of the incarcerated. Incarcerated people are often affected by trauma (Batcup, 2013; Milliken, 2008), substance-abuse/addiction (Milliken, 2002; Milliken, 2008, Muirhead & Fortune, 2016), or anxiety and depression (Muirhead & Fortune, 2016). In order to successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate, it is crucial to develop programs that meet the emotional needs of this population, for these issues could be the cause of their sentence or the result of their time in the correctional facility.

### **Creative Arts and Incarceration**

Creative arts programs have been used as an intervention technique in correctional facilities for a long time (Milliken, 2002). Art programs allow inmates breaks from routines to create and express themselves. They enable indirect forms of communication, which can be therapeutic. Arts programs have been used to address emotional regulation (Gussak, 2009; Koch et al., 2015; Qui et al., 2017), self-expression (Cohen & Wilson, 2017, Milliken, 2002, Milliken, 2008), and depression symptoms (Gussak, 2009; Qui et al., 2017). By using arts programs to target these issues, incarcerated people could develop skills to cope with their incarceration, making it easier to reintegrate into society. Focusing on building emotional strength and communication skills can lead to a stronger sense of self, which improves this population's ability to thrive after incarceration.

Previously utilized art programs include art brut therapy (Qui et al., 2017), art therapy (Gussak, 2009), song-writing (Cohen & Wilson, 2017), and stick-fighting (Koch et al., 2015).

Art brut therapy is a form of art therapy that rejects mainstream aesthetics, focusing on more primitive and “child-like” (Qui et al., 2017, p. 1070) art techniques. Because its purpose is to disregard typical art aesthetics, this form of art therapy comes with less self-judgment, encouraging the client to freely express themselves without expectations on the result of the art. Qui et al. (2017) studied art brut therapy in a program for schizophrenic inmates in mainland China. The purpose of the study was to examine if the program improved relationships amongst the inmates, as well as correctional officers, increased emotional regulation, and decreased the number of disciplinary reports. Results displayed an increase in emotional regulation, a decrease in negative schizophrenia symptoms, and improved relationships. Despite these positive results, the researchers note that results may be skewed due to the program being tailored for the specific demographic (Qui et al., 2017). While this program did improve the lives of these inmates, it is difficult to tell if the program would work globally across different types of inmates, not just Chinese schizophrenics. However, Qui et al. (2017) noted several different demographic categories for their study, including age, gender, education level, relationship, crime committed, sentence, type of schizophrenia, and type of medication used to alleviate schizophrenia symptoms. By considering each part of the person’s identity, the researchers have a better understanding of the participants and who the program will best serve.

Gussak (2009) developed an art therapy program using a variety of art mediums, such as drawing, coloring, and sculpting, through individual and group projects, to see if male and female inmates would benefit from art therapy interventions. The researcher developed the study to see if art therapy services displayed improvement in mood, socialization, problem-solving, and locus of control. While results showed an improvement in mood and locus of control, it is possible that

there were other factors that contributed to this. Making a change in routine could contribute to these results, for changing the routine allows the inmates to do something more stimulating than their everyday routine. Another factor considered is the validation received in this program, which lead to a “mastery of self-expression” (Gussak, 2009, p. 10).

The researcher observed increased self-expression due to validation, a part of the therapeutic process (Gussak, 2009). The ability to express oneself is a skill that one needs to better communicate with others, which will help them in and out of the correctional facility. This validation could provide more meaning to their lives. In Qui et al.’s (2017) study, one participant shared how participating in the program made him want to better himself and his life, explaining how the group and facilitators reminded him that he is a “human rather than a freak” (p. 1075). Another participant stated that participating in the program provided an outlet to escape from reality and reconnect with himself. By creating spaces for validation and trust, inmates are reminded that they should be treated like a human-being, which helps them heal and recover from their past so they can build themselves back up for successful reintegration.

These spaces can also be created through song-writing. Cohen and Wilson (2017) conducted a study to examine male inmates’ self-worth, purpose, and social abilities in relation to their participation in a series of song-writing workshops. Through this process, 42 sets of original lyrics were created, centering around struggles and hardships, and the results exhibited a stronger sense of identity amongst the participants. Developing a sense of self enables the participants to better understand what they need to better themselves. While resources are limited to fulfil those needs, identifying what one needs is an important first step towards making major changes. Despite developing self-worth, the lyrics often displayed a longing for human connection. One inmate wrote, “The majority of people in here don’t listen. The stronger emphasis on security than on working with prisoners as people tends to dehumanize those who are incarcerated” (p. 547). When

talking about his lyrics, another inmate explained the significance of an officer saying “hello” (p. 547) to him in a pleasant way. The moment of human exchange helps him continue with his life in prison, for it instills a sense of humanity. Through song-writing, these inmates were able to express how dehumanizing it is to be in the prison and how much they want to be treated like a human-being. Not only could they express their desires, but they were able to act upon them. The researchers state that one of the best parts of the creative process is watching friendships evolve through collaboration and art-making, and they were impressed to see that these relationships could form in a place where people do not often trust each other (Cohen & Wilson, 2017). This is a form of deconstructing dehumanization from within; while it may be difficult to establish these relationships with correctional officers, having trusting relationships with peers is humanizing. Learning to trust other inmates is a primary step in humanizing the prison system from within, and creative arts programs encourage these relationships to form through self-expression and self-growth.

For relationships to develop, there must be ample amount of time and effort placed in the relationship. Cohen and Wilson’s (2017) study was conducted over 35 weeks, which gave participants plenty of time to develop relationships. Koch et al. (2014), however, conducted a study for emotion regulation that lasted five days. In this study, the researchers used stick-fighting as the intervention technique to assess emotional regulation. Stick-fighting is defined as a movement/drama therapy technique that involves role playing as victims and perpetrators. Through this intervention, the participants were able to understand the perspectives of both the victim and the perpetrator, developing a sense of empathy for each character (Koch et al., 2014). Being able to understand another perspective creates an awareness of the situation at hand. However, it is important to consider the history of participants when role-playing with “*weapons*” because a majority of inmates have a history of trauma, with 70-90% of female inmates presenting with posttraumatic

stress disorder (PTSD) (Milliken, 2008, p. 10). A traumatized person playing the role as a victim in a fight with sticks could trigger a reaction that could hinder the group and individual experience. The results of this study should be reviewed with caution. While body awareness and social competencies increased, the measures were not standardized. It is also important to note that there was no change in anger or aggression observed in this study. However, this lack of change could be the result of a short program, for it was a five-day program and that is not enough time to alleviate anger and aggression (Koch et al., 2014). With more time, it is possible that this intervention technique could have been more effective. Time is necessary to develop a relationship that allows participants to trust each other and the facilitator(s), and one of the greatest parts about art is the relationships which come from it. Without relationships, therapeutic work is challenging.

### **D/MT and Incarceration**

D/MT is an expressive therapy that utilizes the body as the primary instrument to process therapeutic work (Levy, 2005). The use of the body allows the incarcerated to process and express without using any outside materials, which is ideal for this population because bringing in outside materials can be a safety concern (Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013). As a creative arts program, D/MT provides the incarcerated another opportunity to break from the daily routine and engage in communication and expression within themselves and their community. D/MT programs have been used to help individuals cope with trauma (Batcup, 2013; Milliken, 2008), improve communication and relationships (Batcup, 2013; Milliken, 2008; Mortimer, 2017; Seibel, 2008), and encourage self-expression (Milliken, 2002; Milliken, 2008). By addressing these areas through D/MT, incarcerated people are encouraged to work through their past trauma and develop a healthy sense of self, as well as stronger relational skills, which could prevent recidivism. Developing the ability to self-reflect enables this population to process their behaviors and emotions in a healthy way, and establish stronger social skills which will help them reintegrate into society. D/MT, and

dance programs, allow the incarcerated to process their past, live in the present, and prepare for their future through the body.

Trauma is a common theme within correctional facilities, for a majority of the incarcerated are victims of abuse (Batcup, 2013). Because trauma originates in the body, D/MT is a promising intervention to explore trauma on a nonverbal, body-based level (Batcup, 2013; Milliken, 2008). Batcup (2013) reviews the literature of D/MT in medium secure units and implies that D/MT could be a useful intervention technique for this population. D/MT techniques allow clients to create a comfortable distance from the previous trauma, enabling the client to process and express the trauma easier (Batcup, 2013). Because traumatic experiences can be challenging to verbally express, it is important to work through the body because that is where the trauma is held (van der Kolk, 2014). By allowing the body to communicate the trauma, the clients can begin to address feelings associated with their trauma and how they can cope with these feelings. With trauma as a prevalent theme for the incarcerated, using D/MT to explore their trauma could help them better understand the trauma and the feelings associated with it. Once they understand how the trauma impacts them, they can start to develop coping skills, leading to emotional regulation. It is also important to note that D/MT is particularly useful for clients that speak English as a second language, which makes it even more challenging to verbally communicate feelings associated to trauma (Batcup, 2013). Utilizing D/MT as a nonverbal form of communication allows people of all different backgrounds to share and process these stories in a way that is understood by everyone. This freedom of expression for the incarcerated can empower them to process their trauma in a comfortable space.

Milliken (2008) developed a D/MT group for a jail's addiction program to address the cycle of addiction, violence, and shame through kinesthetic empathy. Kinesthetic empathy enables the clients to communicate and relate to one another nonverbally (Milliken, 2008). Due to the nonverbal nature of kinesthetic empathy, the clients can choose what they want to share with others.

This could work well with the incarcerated because it provides them with a sense of control, which they may have lost once they became incarcerated. By utilizing a nonverbal form of empathy, the participants are encouraged process their experiences at their own pace, without directly disclosing information for others. With the incarcerated, this could be particularly powerful because it provides a space to process and understand why they are incarcerated, offering an opportunity for growth and closure. For those who do want to express themselves to the larger group, kinesthetic empathy encourages participants to witness one another, encouraging safety and validation (Milliken, 2008). The ability to be seen and validated by others can build one's self-worth and self-esteem, which can help the incarcerated reintegrate into society. By knowing one's own worth, tackling a society that stereotypes the incarcerated could make the transition out of incarceration more successful.

Collaboration can also improve one's self-worth, for it provides the person with an opportunity to contribute their own thoughts and ideas, while connecting with other members of the correctional facility, fostering social skills. Mortimer's (2017) study integrates interviews with three teaching artists in correctional facilities in New Zealand to explore the benefits and challenges of working with the incarcerated. Through this study, Mortimer (2017) found that one of the largest challenges for this population was effective communication. One teaching artist remarked on the social dynamic of the prison, explaining that each person played their own specific role in the prison environment, creating a hierarchy amongst the group. While challenging, the teaching artist stated that once she encouraged collaboration with her participants, such as allowing them to pick the music, the social hierarchy began to dissolve (Mortimer, 2017). By inviting the group to enter her space, the teaching artist and participants worked together to create a collaborative space, encouraging others to join. This established a connection between the teaching artist and the participants. Allowing the participants to, for example, choose the music creates a new dynamic.



Once the participants start to take control of the group, the dynamic is no longer one teacher to a group of participants; it is a collaborative process, where everyone has a chance to lead. Because the incarcerated lack personal control once incarcerated, they become depressed, anxious, and stressed (Mortimer, 2017). By providing an opportunity to control part of the group, the participants begin to feel significant, which can diminish their depression, anxiety, and stress.

D/MT challenges participants and facilitators to be present with themselves and others, prohibiting outside thoughts from intruding in the space. While difficult, the ability to be present enables the facilitator to be authentic and responsive, which is needed for the incarcerated (Milliken, 2002; Mortimer, 2017). Milliken's (2002) study recounts a D/MT group that she ran in an addictions' program in a jail shortly after 9/11. She did not know what to expect, for she had never been inside a prison and was unaware of what she was allowed to do with the participants. When her group first began, she noticed her presence drifting because she was overcome with anxiety. However, as she listened to the participants' introductions, she realized just how much they wanted to be present and make changes for themselves. The only thing she needed to do was remain present and optimistic about their goals and aspirations (Milliken, 2002). By being present with participants, facilitators are able to channel all of their energy into their group, neglecting any exterior problems for the time being. This allows the facilitator to relax, which in turn, encourages the participants to relax and focus solely on the group and what they want to achieve. A dilemma for the incarcerated is the ability to be present, due to past trauma (Batcup, 2013; Milliken, 2008) or social dynamics (Mortimer, 2017), for it is difficult for them to trust. But, if the facilitator is present, it is more likely that incarcerated people will participate because they are being seen and witnessed by the facilitator, establishing connection and trust.

The incarcerated are isolated from the outside world; therefore, genuine human connection is scarce (Mortimer, 2017). Without human connection, it is difficult to form healthy relationships

and develop social skills. While Mortimer's (2017) study emphasizes the challenges in creating human connections with the inmates, due to security and boundary policies, one teaching artist found that her presence alone was invaluable. Often, the inmates would talk to her about concerns they had, such as upcoming court cases, and it helped her develop a relationship with her participants. While she knew she wasn't in the prison to counsel, she noticed that genuine human interaction showed the inmates that she cared enough to listen to them, which led to stronger relationships (Mortimer, 2017). As a teaching artist, she was able to fulfill a need for her participants that they are lacking due to the prison environment. By being present, the inmates are being witnessed by someone they may perceive as superior, which boosts their self-esteem and strengthens their relationship skills. Facilitators, counselors, and teachers are all role models; therefore, it is important for people in these roles to exude the characteristics and behaviors they want to see in their participants, clients, and students. When they model what they expect, they are more likely to see it reciprocated. The teaching artist also explained the importance of self-disclosure. Despite being told not to reveal anything about herself, she found it more helpful to share information, when appropriate, with her participants because it is authentic (Mortimer, 2017). This level of authenticity encourages participants to be themselves, which inspires them to freely express themselves. When an authority figure is authentic, they become relatable; therefore, forming a relationship is easier. When working with the incarcerated, authenticity is important because it shows humanity, fostering genuine human connection between facilitator and participant.

For genuine human connections to foster, it is important to create a safe and trusting environment. In Seibel's (2008) work in a women's prison, she reflects on the space she created to encourage the women to participate and trust her and the group. The women entered the space with a desire to reduce stress, and Seibel responded to their needs, establishing a nurturing environment which inspired the women to share their stories. There was a rug in the room where

this group was held, and the soft touch of a rug was something that the women seldom felt in the prison environment. Often, the women would just lay on the rug, comforted by its softness (Seibel, 2008). By establishing a space that exuded comfort, including the soft touch of the rug, the women became more comfortable with trusting the group, allowing them to share their stories. Providing a space to openly talk about their lives encourages expression, for the women could process out loud, with feedback and validation from others. For the incarcerated, they often feel as if they are sub-human, with little to no genuine human interaction. Creating a space for authentic interactions can change this population's outlook on life, building self-esteem and optimism. Seibel (2008) remarks that at the end of each session, the women were noticeably different, with an influx of appreciation, communication, and relaxation, improving their interpersonal skills. Continued use of D/MT could suggest a consistent growth in self-worth and interpersonal skills, which will aid this populations in successfully reintegrating into society.

### **Lack of Evidence**

While there are several studies suggesting that D/MT and other creative arts interventions could be beneficial for the incarcerated, there is not enough evidence to support these claims. When reviewing the literature, authors have discovered that research is inconsistent and poorly assessed, lacking scientific evidence (Meekums, 2010; Meekums & Daniel, 2011; Muirhead & Fortune, 2016). Without sufficient evidence to support these interventions, it is challenging to implement creative arts in correctional facilities because it is unclear how much the incarcerated will benefit from these programs. It takes a considerable amount of time and money to bring programs into a correctional facility, and without proper evidence, it is unlikely that creative arts programs will be incorporated into correctional facilities. Therefore, it is important to understand the vulnerabilities of the current research to improve future research through evidence-based practice. With sufficient evidence,

D/MT and other creative arts interventions will become more credible, encouraging correctional facilities to incorporate these programs into their schedules.

One of the primary concerns with the research is inconsistent information. In Muirhead and Fortune's (2016) review of yoga used in prisons, they note that the studies they analyzed suffer from several common research problems, such as small sample sizes, lack of randomization, and insufficient control groups. Muirhead & Fortune (2016) also discuss the challenges in using yoga as an intervention due to the variability of how yoga is practiced. There are several different forms of yoga, where the focus may be on breathing techniques, postures, meditation, etc. Due to this variability, it is difficult to say how helpful yoga is for this population because each form of yoga could impact the incarcerated in a different way (Muirhead & Fortune, 2016). The same can be said for D/MT, for there is not one singular approach to D/MT. There are several pioneers of D/MT, including Marian Chace, Mary Whitehouse, and Trudi Schoop, who all developed different approaches to D/MT (Levy, 2005). This variety can make quantifying and qualifying D/MT research challenging. However, it is important to consider the core concepts of D/MT, because even through different methods of D/MT, the major aspects of D/MT are still the same. D/MT is a body-based intervention that emphasizes the importance of the therapeutic relationship and kinesthetic empathy (Levy, 2005). With this concept present in all D/MT interventions, the consistency across studies is less of a concern. However, this must be clearly conveyed in the research to remain credible because without clarity, the evidence behind the practice is insufficient. Explicit definitions of D/MT in research will improve its credibility, encouraging correctional facilities to integrate these programs into their schedules.

Another challenge amongst the literature was finding studies that exhibited scientific evidence. Meekums and Daniel (2011) evaluated a large variety of articles related to using the arts with the incarcerated to see if the arts are a successful therapeutic tool. Unfortunately, they had to

reject several well-written, relevant articles because they lacked scientific evidence. While they demonstrated artistry and passion for their work, these articles are subject to bias, which interferes with its scientific credibility. Because of the lack of scientific evidence, no conclusions could be made (Meekums & Daniel, 2011). This emphasizes a vulnerability in expressive therapies, for it is a field that is still new and, therefore, needs strong scientific evidence to validate the field. Without validation, the field will not grow, neglecting expressive therapies as a useful tool for therapeutic growth. Meekums and Daniel (2011) also emphasize the concern with the variances in quantitative and qualitative research, for they present their information in different ways. Quantitative research focuses more on measurements of variables, with qualitative research describes gradual changes based on the perspective of the researcher. The authors encourage mixed methodologies, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve stronger results (Meekums & Daniel, 2011). The combination of different methods allows researchers to evaluate their results in several different ways, yielding better results. It enables researchers to view their results from different research perspectives. While the quantitative results can display a significant change in behavior, for example, the qualitative results will tell researchers how the behavioral changes were made. Mixed methodologies in research result in stronger scientific evidence, which is necessary for D/MT and expressive therapies to survive, as a field.

Meekums (2010) echoes this need for mixed methodologies, claiming that dance/movement therapists (DMTs) shy away from quantitative research methods. She states that the area of quantitative research is mysterious, which can be intimidating; however, this simply means that more DMTs need to teach and acquire the skills for appropriate research to engage in conversations with scientists (Meekums, 2010). The use of science in research is important, for it validates the field of expressive therapies. While conducting research, such as using the scientific method and creating variables, may not align with the romanticism of the arts, quantitative research is needed to

demonstrate the effectiveness of expressive therapies across a broad spectrum of populations. DMTs, in particular, already exhibit many of the qualities of a researcher. To conduct solid research, one must work skillfully and respectfully, articulate and question patterns, utilize supervision, and engage in the creative process, which are all skills of a DMT (Meekums, 2010). If DMTs want to improve the future of D/MT, they must allow themselves to enter the unknown of scientific research by using their skills to conduct quantitative research. DMTs should approach this the same way they would approach a client, for whenever a therapist of any kind encounters a new client, they are entering another person's world, which is filled with mysteries, questions, and unknowns. By utilizing their skills in D/MT, DMTs can strengthen the field of expressive therapies through scientific research by combining scientific methods with artistic research.

### **Arts-Based Research**

Arts-based research is a form of research emphasizes on participatory research, eliminating the barrier between researchers and participants (Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013). This form of research allows the researchers to engage with the participants in a more organic way, which could yield more accurate results. It also increases the researchers' self-awareness of the role they play in the research (Buffington, Wolfgang, & Stephen, 2017). By engaging in the research, researchers have an opportunity to view their project from a different perspective, while understanding how they, as a research and participant, influence the process. This can also pose as a challenge because participating in one's own research could inadvertently create a divide between the researcher and the participants. Buffington, Wolfgang, and Stephen (2017) highlight the importance to "apply this knowledge and resist the 'savior' mentality" (p. 45), for researchers must allow the participants to utilize their voices without interjecting. If a researcher tries dictate the art by neglecting the ideas of the participants, it can quickly destroy the therapeutic relationship, which may lead to invalid research. Arts-based research, if done effectively, could be an excellent research option for the

incarcerated because it encourages researchers to better understand the population while providing the incarcerated with an opportunity to control and express through creativity. This form of research is empowering and inclusive, focusing on building trusting relationships, and incarcerated people could benefit from these qualities.

One of the strengths of arts-based research is its ability to build and strengthen communities. Kapitan, Litell, and Torres's (2011) research centered around using art therapy to aid a destroyed community in Nicaragua. Through their arts-based research model, they sought to work with members of the community to strengthen them through art therapy and encourage these members to pass their expertise onto other members of the community, eliciting a domino effect. The research utilized a series of three-day long retreats, with each day focusing on a different component of leadership. The first day emphasized the importance of self-reflection and self-care, the second day focused on developing community practices, and the third day allowed dialogue amongst the members to process the current state of the community. Through various art activities, the participants uncovered the trauma of the community and developed skills to help rebuild their community (Kapitan, Litell, & Torres, 2011). In correctional facilities, building a community could be an important survival technique. Developing relationships based on commonalities through art reminds the incarcerated that they are still part of a community and capable of making meaningful relationships, despite being cut off from the outside world. This boosts self-esteem and morale, inspiring the incarcerated to better themselves while incarcerated. Strengthening the community is also an integral component towards reintegration, for those who re-enter into society can use the skills developed from arts-based research to inspire others to follow a better path. By establishing skills in leadership and community through art, the incarcerated can help other members of the community build these skills, empowering them to reintegrate into society with confidence while discouraging recidivism.

Walsh, Rutherford, and Crough's (2013) work with Aboriginal women echoes the idea of empowerment through arts-based research by collaborating with women suffering from poverty, homelessness, and incarceration to promote social justice. The researchers provided materials for creative writing, photovoice, and digital storytelling as means for the women to share their stories about incarceration and homelessness. For currently incarcerated women, common themes were isolation, alienation, drug and alcohol addictions, and history of violence, while themes amongst those in the community were resource gaps, system failures, lack of safe space, inadequate income, family, and friends (Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013). These common themes provide the foundation for community growth amongst these women. The women who participated in arts-based research within the community had the opportunity to present their projects in conferences, providing others with a snapshot of their lives as previously incarcerated women. Through storytelling, the women felt stronger and more empowered, with dreams of leaving prison and encouraging others not to follow their paths (Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013). By developing goals to achieve in and out of prison, arts-based research empowers the incarcerated, reminding them that they have a purpose. Storytelling enables the incarcerated to not only inspire others to avoid incarceration but also remind the world that they are human-beings. As a stigmatized population, many believe that incarcerated people are filled with ill-intentions. As evidenced by the common themes of currently and previously incarcerated women, such as isolation, resource gaps, and lack of safe space, one can infer that they are inflicted with common challenges. These women are people who are struggling to survive, not evil beings with intent to inflict pain on others, as the stigma currently stands. Through art and story-telling, arts-based research can empower the incarceration to share their stories and remind society that, despite being incarcerated, they are also human.



Arts-based research does not solely focus on the population being studied. Because the researcher is participating in the project, the results display how the research impacts the researcher, as well. In Buffington, Wolfgang, and Stephen's (2017) service-learning project, they discover their own stereotypes and privilege while engaging in the research. The researchers developed three different service-learning approaches for a combined class at a local jail. Enrolled in this class were residents of the jail and graduate students, who were taking the class for continuing education credits or university credit, respectfully. Each approach elicited different, but important results. The first approach was a collaborative process amongst the graduate students, who designed the curriculum with the residents' interests in mind. The second approach resembled a traditional classroom, where a professor designed and taught the course while the residents and graduate students learned together. The third approach was led by the residents, where they developed workshops and lead discussions on topics they wanted to present to the graduate students (Buffington, Wolfgang, & Stephen, 2017).

The first approach made the residents feel uncomfortable due to the expectations of the graduate students (Buffington, Wolfgang, & Stephen, 2017). The graduate students made assumptions about the residents' education levels, which created an immediate divide between groups. Through this approach, the graduate students realized their privilege of receiving a high-quality education. By recognizing their privilege, the researchers can see the advantage that they have over the residents. Some of the major themes amongst the women in Walsh, Rutherford, and Crough's (2013) study were resource gaps, system failures, and inadequate income, which all convey the message that they lack the adequate resources to succeed in society. This realization validates the incarcerated by breaking the stereotype that they are subhuman, which could empower people of privilege to work towards dismantling the stigma. The second approach was a collaborative process where the graduate students and residents worked in teams to create a narrative based off the

prompt “My World Was...” (Buffington, Wolfgang, & Stephen, 2017, p. 47). While this approach encouraged the two groups to combine their skills, the ideas did not come from the participants, which makes the process less collaborative and more like a typical classroom, defeating the purpose of the research. The final approach was entirely led by the residents, where they led discussions, movie showings, and art activities centered around their needs and interests. This approach was the most successful due to the awareness of the residents, for the research was for the residents, not the researchers (Buffington, Wolfgang, & Stephen, 2017). By allowing the residents to facilitate the service-learning, the graduate students could fully engage with the residents and listen to their needs and concerns.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop a stronger sense of the incarcerated and how they could benefit from D/MT programs in and out of prison. Studies show that the incarcerated are often inflicted trauma (Batcup, 2013; Milliken, 2008), substance-abuse/addiction (Milliken, 2002; Milliken, 2008, Muirhead & Fortune, 2016), anxiety and depression (Muirhead & Fortune, 2016), and they express common themes in their artwork, such as isolation, system failure, and inadequate income (Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013). Mass incarceration is a prevalent problem in today's society. Recidivism rates are high, which is likely a result of little to no programs that encourage and empower the incarcerated to better their lives in and out of prison. D/MT, as a nonverbal, kinesthetic form of self-expression, is a promising intervention for the incarcerated because it enables them to share their stories through their bodies, increasing their self-worth (Batcup, 2013; Milliken, 2008; Mortimer, 2017). Additionally, arts-based research, due to its collaborative nature allows researchers to participate alongside the incarcerated, disintegrating the barrier and encouraging the incarcerated to bring their own thoughts and ideas into the research (Buffington, Wolfgang, & Stephen, 2017).

Several creative arts programs, including D/MT, have shown promising results in improving self-esteem, emotional-regulation, and confidence with this population (Batcup, 2013; Gussak, 2009; Koch et al., 2015; Milliken, 2008; Mortimer, 2017, Qui et al., 2017). Unfortunately, the research is inconsistent, often neglecting to consider mixed methodologies of research as opposed to qualitative, narrative research. Arts-based research provides the researcher(s) with an opportunity to engage in their research along-side the participants, which allows the researcher(s) to view their project from a new perspective and engage with the participants directly. When working with the incarcerated, developing a relationship through arts-based research could yield the best results

because it creates a safe and trusting environment for the incarcerated to participate in the research and vocalize their needs.

Based on these findings, I propose that the best approach towards successful reintegration for the incarcerated is a D/MT based intervention that requires the facilitator to collaborate and participate in the process.

## References

- Batcup, D. C. (2013). A discussion of the dance movement psychotherapy literature relative to prisons and medium secure units. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, 8(1), 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432979.2012.693895>
- Buffington, M., Wolfgang, C., & Stephen, T. A. (2017). Service-learning, the arts, and incarceration. *Journal of Prison Education & Reentry*, 4(2), 45-52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15845/jper.v4i2.1208>
- Cohen, M. L. & Wilson, C. M. (2017). Inside the fences: Pedagogical practices and purposes of songwriting in an adult male U.S. state prison. *International Journal of Music Education*, 35(4), 541-553. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0255761416689841>
- Duke, B. (2018). A meta-analysis comparing educational attainment prior to incarceration and recidivism rates in relation to correctional education. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 69(1), 44-59. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26508040>
- Gussak, D. (2009). The effects of art therapy on male and female inmates: Advancing the research base. *The Arts of Psychotherapy*, 36(1), 5-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2008.10.002>
- Irving, D. (2014). Headwinds and Tailwinds. In *Waking Up White*. (pp. 54-60). Adelaide, South Australia: Elephant Room Press.
- Kapitan, L., Litell, M., & Torres, A. (2011). Creative art therapy in a community's participatory research and social transformation. *Art Therapy*, 28(2), 64-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2011.578238>
- Koch, S. C., Ostermann, T., Steinhage, A., Kende, P., Haller, K., & Chyle, F. (2015). Breaking barriers: Evaluating an arts-based emotional regulation training in prison. *The Arts of Psychotherapy*, 42(1), 41-49. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2014.10.008>
- Levy, F. J. (2005). *Dance movement therapy: A healing art*. Reston, VA: The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.

- Meekums, B. (2010). Moving towards evidence for dance movement therapy: Robin hood in dialogue with the king. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 37(1), 35-41.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2009.10.001>
- Meekums, B. & Daniel, J. (2010). Arts with offenders: A literature synthesis. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 38(1), 229-238. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2011.06.003>
- Milliken, R. (2002). Dance/movement therapy as a creative arts therapy approach in prison to the treatment of violence. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 29(4), 203-206.  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0197-4556\(02\)00151-X](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0197-4556(02)00151-X)
- Milliken, R. (2008). Intervening in the cycle of addiction, violence, and shame: A dance/movement therapy group approach in a jail addictions program. *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*, 3(1-2), 5-22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15560350802157346>
- Mortimer, K. (2017). Dancing within unfamiliarity: An exploration of teaching dance in prison environments. *Teaching Artist Journal*, 15(3-4), 124-134.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15411796.2017.1386052>
- Muirhead, J. & Fortune, C. (2016). Yoga in prisons: A review of the literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 28, 57-63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2016.03.013>
- Qiu, H., Ye, Z., Liang, M., Huang, Y., Liu, W., & Lu, Z. (2016). Effect of an art brut therapy program called go beyond the schizophrenia (GBTS) on prison inmates with schizophrenia in mainland China – A randomized, longitudinal, and controlled trial. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 24(5) 1069-1078. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/cpp.2069>
- Ryder, P. M. (2016). From reciprocity to interdependence: Mass incarceration and service-learning. *Community Literacy Journal*, 11(1), 94-105. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/clj.2016.0022>
- Seibel, J. (2008). Behind the gates: Dance/movement therapy in a women's prison. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 30, 106-109. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10465-008-9059-6>

van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York: Penguin Books.

Walsh, C. A., Rutherford, G., & Crough, M. (2013). Arts-based research: Creating social change for incarcerated women. *Creative Approaches to Research*, 6(1), 119-139. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Peter\\_Horton6/publication/301752802\\_'Only\\_beautiful\\_women\\_need\\_apply\\_Human\\_rights\\_and\\_gender\\_in\\_Brazilian\\_football'/links/5727ed7108aee491cb414ec3/Only-beautiful-women-need-apply-Human-rights-and-gender-in-Brazilian-football.pdf#page=119](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Peter_Horton6/publication/301752802_'Only_beautiful_women_need_apply_Human_rights_and_gender_in_Brazilian_football'/links/5727ed7108aee491cb414ec3/Only-beautiful-women-need-apply-Human-rights-and-gender-in-Brazilian-football.pdf#page=119)

***THESIS APPROVAL FORM***

**Lesley University  
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences  
Expressive Therapies Division  
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Dance/Movement Therapy, MA**

**Student's Name: Courtney Bieda**

**Type of Project: Thesis**

**Title: Using D/MT to Elicit Social Change for the Incarcerated: A Literature Review**

**Date of Graduation: May 18, 2019**

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

**Thesis Advisor: Donna C. Owens, PhD**