

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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Acting Out, A Short Term Improv Theater Intervention

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Adolescents who commit sexual offenses are vulnerable, acting in accordance with a variety of environmental and internal factors which contribute to sexual offending patterns (Barbaree & Marshall, 2008). These may include sexual abuse, mental illness, aggression, etc. leaving many symptoms to be treated while they are in the care of the corrections system (Finkelhor & Omrod, 2000). Since one of the main goals of the juvenile correction system is to promote the recovery of the developing youth and prevent any future offending, it is important to determine which treatments are most effective for this population of youth. Theatre has been used as a treatment and education platform for individuals to manage anger, receive sexual education, lower anxiety in a variety of settings (Ballan & Freyer, 2017; Corbett et al. 2017; Lieberman et al. 2012). However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to the use of theatre as an effective intervention for adolescents in correctional settings, many of whom are affected by obstacles which theatre exercises have been found to improve upon. Adolescents adjudicated for illegal sexual behavior (AISB) often display significant social deficits, peer rejection, and low social competence, especially when compared to adolescents who have been adjudicated for other, non-sex crimes (Seto & Lalumiere, 2010). As such, treatment providers working with these populations are encouraged to deliver evidence-based services designed to develop and maintain prosocial relationships with age-appropriate friends (ATSA Practice Guidelines, 2017). Yet, little research has been done to test a theatre intervention's social effects on this population.

The current study implemented a short-term, 4-week improv theatre class with a group of adolescents in residential treatment at a juvenile correctional facility. The current sample includes adolescents adjudicated for sex crimes, as well as those adjudicated for other serious delinquent behavior of a non-sexual nature. The purpose of the current study was to determine whether or not a short-term group improv theatre class would improve social skills as measured pre- and post-intervention. Students met once a week for four weeks and were taught by an undergraduate intern the basic skills of improv theatre. Basic skills such as psychoeducation didactic training and peer role-playing techniques were used in the theatre class. Researchers constructed a control group which had four meetings with two undergraduate instructors in which participants learned to play cards. This tested if there was an effect from simply meeting regularly and socializing in a group which might be different than the social skills gained from the theatre group. Data collection is still ongoing. The focus of this poster will be on the experiences of participants as recorded by a qualitative post-intervention survey. Treatment implications and future

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research directions will be discussed. Feasibility of implementing these services in a juvenile correctional setting will be discussed.

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