



## Music therapists' job satisfaction, collective self-esteem, and burnout

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### ABSTRACT

General references show that the type of professional identity known as collective self-esteem could be an important factor in professionals' job satisfaction and burnout. However, little attention has been paid to identifying the interactions of these three variables in music therapy. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between music therapists' job satisfaction, collective self-esteem, and burnout. Specifically, this paper emphasizes the role of collective self-esteem as a mediator between music therapists' job satisfaction and burnout. Ninety professional music therapists in Korea participated in this study. The Korean Music Therapists' Job Satisfaction Scale, the Collective Self-Esteem Scale, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory were used to measure music therapists' job satisfaction, collective self-esteem, and burnout, respectively.

The results showed that job satisfaction significantly predicted the emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = -.384$ ,  $p = .000$ ), depersonalization ( $\beta = -.106$ ,  $p = .000$ ), and personal achievement ( $\beta = .165$ ,  $p = .000$ ) subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Furthermore, collective self-esteem was found to have a partial mediating effect between job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. The relationship between job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion is partially explained by how positively music therapists perceive their profession and how they think others view their profession. These findings suggest that promoting music therapists' collective self-esteem may play an important role in preventing the emotional symptoms of burnout, especially when music therapists are not satisfied with their job. The role of music therapist educators in promoting the collective self-esteem of music therapists is discussed.

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The music therapy profession has developed over the last fifty years. Music therapy has been practiced in a wide range of locations (such as the workplace), among various clientele, through diverse models, and at different levels. Music therapists' practices are affected by their individual identities and are based on their personal and training backgrounds. Music therapists' practices might be associated with their perceived professional identity, known as collective self-esteem.

### Collective self-esteem

Collective self-esteem refers to individuals' perception of themselves as members of a social group and to the value and emotional significance of membership in this group (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Luhtanen & Corcker, 1992). Music therapy is considered a social group. Stewart (2000) found that the "ability to communicate through music," "empathy," and the "ability to be spontaneous with music" were the top three personal values shared by music therapists. Stewart indicated that such a coherent value base could be explained because music therapy is a specialized profession,

separated from the larger group of health-care-related professions. Likewise, Hills, Norman, and Forster (2000) supported music therapists' strong professional identification on a multidisciplinary team. Music therapists working in multidisciplinary teams were found to identify with their profession more than with their team. Hills interpreted this finding as being partially due to the specialized nature of their work.

Despite their strong professional identification, many music therapists have difficulty clarifying their roles. Similar to other creative art therapists, music therapists often identify themselves as "outsiders" due to the nature of their work (Stewart, 2000), which may lead to a vague perception of their role in the work environment. Music therapists working in multidisciplinary teams may suffer from a high level of role ambiguity within the team. One of the factors preventing effective teamwork for music therapists is the uncertainty of their responsibilities on the team. The need to perform their activities outside of the field in the work setting (Oppenheim, 1987) as well as their different specializations and training experiences (Gale & Austin, 2003) may also be related to music therapists' vague perceptions of their role. In turn, music therapists' role ambiguity may impact their perception of themselves as members of the profession and may directly or indirectly affect their relationships with clients and co-workers, their competence as professionals, and their attitudes toward their job. Thus, it

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is important to understand music therapists' collective self-esteem to help them establish their own unique role.

## Burnout

A music therapist helps clients improve their health. This one-way relationship requires therapists to prioritize their clients' needs, often ignoring their own health and sacrificing themselves for their clients (O'Halloran & Linton, 2000). Chronic stress can result, eventually leading to burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Initially identified by Freudenberger (1974), burnout refers to physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion due to unrealistic and excessive job demands. Burnout is prevalent among human services professionals who assist people with their psychological, social, and physical needs. Professionals with burnout may have negative physical and psychological symptoms that eventually cause problems in relating to their clients (Choi, Yang, & Lee, 2002; Skovholt, 2001).

The sources of burnout are varied. The literature identifies demographic, psychosocial, and environmental factors as the main sources of burnout. General references and music therapy literature report inconclusive results on the relationship between demographic variables and burnout. While some studies have found that persons who are female (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), unmarried (Maslach, 1982), younger (Fowler, 2006), and higher education (Maslach et al., 2001) experience higher levels of burnout, other studies have reported no significant differences among these variables.

Another predicting factor of burnout is an individual's psychosocial characteristics. That is, individuals respond differently to the same stressors based upon their psychosocial constructs. For example, Vega (2010) found that higher levels of anxiety significantly predicted greater symptoms of burnout on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) subscale of emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, higher levels of the dominance personality factor were found to predict greater symptoms of burnout on the MBI subscale of personal achievement.

Environmental characteristics include variables related to work. Since Oppenheim (1987) reported that low salary, lack of respect from administrators, and the requirement to perform activities outside of their field were the main sources of burnout among music therapists, many studies have examined the environmental factors of burnout. Hills et al. (2000) investigated the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction among music therapists in relation to multidisciplinary team membership. Their results showed that therapists in multidisciplinary teams had higher levels of burnout on the MBI subscale of personal achievement and similar levels of burnout on the MBI subscales of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization as those who were not members of the team. In a survey of music therapists in the Midwestern United States, Fowler (2006) found that a sense of control at work, feeling valued at work, and being comfortable with work policies were significantly positively correlated with the MBI subscale of personal achievement.

## Job satisfaction

Low job satisfaction appears to be one of the leading factors of burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Lee et al., 2007; Yu, Lee, & Lee, 2007). Job satisfaction is defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Grunberg, 1979, p. 9). In addition to the design of the job and personal traits, other factors that contribute to job satisfaction include pay, promotion, job security, supervision, work group characteristics, participation, and the organizational structure and climate (Rainey, 1997).

Job satisfaction among music therapists was first investigated extensively by Braswell, Decuir, and Jacobs (1989), whose comprehensive survey of 1313 professional music therapists determined that salary, age, degree, setting, years of practice, and job location were the significant variables affecting job satisfaction. Since the study by Braswell et al. (1989), other studies have found that the level of education (Cohen & Behrens, 2002), the progress of clients and of the clinical work (Hills et al., 2000), and perceived support from peers and supervisors (Stewart, 2000; Sutton, 2002) were important factors affecting job satisfaction.

## Relationship between job satisfaction, collective self-esteem, and burnout

The relationship between job satisfaction, collective self-esteem, and burnout has been examined recently among educators and mental health professionals. The literature shows that burnt out or dissatisfied professionals may have negative attitudes toward their profession (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Dixon Rayle, 2006; Zang & Leung, 2002). Yu (2008) conceptualized collective self-esteem as a mediator between job satisfaction and burnout and suggested that collective self-esteem represents the generative mechanism through the influence of the independent variable (job satisfaction) on the dependent variable (burnout) (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Yu's previous study (2007) found that collective self-esteem mediated American counselors' job dissatisfaction and client relationships, one of the subscales of counselor burnout. Yu (2008) further investigated the mediating effect of collective self-esteem for Korean counselors. The results confirmed that collective self-esteem mediated the relationships between job satisfaction and three subscales of counselor burnout (i.e., devaluing clients, negative work environment, and incompetence), suggesting that the positive influence of counselors' job satisfaction on burnout operates through their sense of collective self-esteem.

Although general references have shown that the type of professional identity known as collective self-esteem could be an important mechanism for professionals' job satisfaction and preventing burnout, little attention has been paid to identifying the interaction of these three variables in music therapy. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationship between job satisfaction, collective self-esteem, and burnout among music therapists. Specifically, this study was designed based on Yu's (2008) model and examines the mediating effect of music therapists' collective self-esteem on job satisfaction and burnout. In light of these research purposes, the following research questions were identified for this investigation:

1. What is the prevalence of burnout among music therapists?
2. Are demographic variables predictive of music therapists' perceived burnout?
3. Is music therapists' job satisfaction predictive of their perceived burnout?
4. Does music therapists' collective self-esteem mediate the relationship between their job satisfaction and burnout?

## Methods

### Participants

Ninety Korean professional music therapists were the participants in this study. The majority of participants (82.2%) had a master's degree, 3.3% had a doctoral degree, and 14.4% were currently enrolled in a doctoral program. Work experience ranged from 0.2 to 10 years of experience ( $M=3.795$ ,  $SD=2.930$ ), the total annual income ranged from \$600 to \$42,000 ( $M=17,198$ ,

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