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Saying Something About Autism: An Evaluation of the Personhood Consciousness Model of Music Therapy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this capstone project will be to describe, understand, and explore future possibilities for the role that music therapy plays in disability with respect to autism in particular. The context for analysis will first be set by a study of autism in a more general sociocultural context, looking at the history and implications of its social construction and examining the possibility for a continuing paradigm shift and changing ideology and language for the future of autism. This discussion will necessitate a comparison of existing schools of thought including the medical, social, and neuro-diversity models and the forms of therapy or treatment associated with them. The paper will then discuss the implications and consequences of the existing systems and examine the potential of music therapy to play a more prominent role as a resource for families affected by autism. Integrating concepts from the social, medical, and neuro-diversity models, music therapy presents itself not only as an opportunity for healing and pain management but also as an outlet for self-expression and communication. In aiming to shift relationship dynamics and recognize the personhood of individuals before their autism, music therapy is designed to support choice, autonomy, and self-advocacy, elements which are currently missing from many treatment models. Overall, music therapy promotes health and well-being in a holistic way that might not necessarily be physiological or medical. In taking a step away from a model of disability which stigmatizes difference and towards one that embraces and supports it, music therapy is a valuable and progressive resource that advocates for the deconstruction of disability and reframing of autism in society.