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Evaluating the Efficacy of Core Creative Psychotherapies within Therapeutic Communities at HMP Grendon

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Introduction

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service is responsible for the running of the prisons and the rehabilitation services in England and Wales, making sure support is available to deter individuals from offending again.¹

Democratic Therapeutic Communities (TCs) can exist in the prison sector and they provide an open living-learning environment for prisoners and staff with residents living close together. Shuker² describes TCs as 'prisoners (or residents) taking responsibility in the treatment setting' (p. 464); where everyone is in constant therapy and acts as everyone else's therapist. The prison model for TCs has been adapted to incorporate discipline and control so the notion of democracy is controlled so as not to compromise the authority of the prison.³ There are principles which characterise democratic-analytic TCs; Democracy regarding decision-making, Permissiveness, in terms of individual and collective tolerance, Communalism, the emphasis of shared facilities and close relationships, and reality confrontation, encouraging regular expression of how each other's behaviour affects them.⁴

HMP Grendon (Grendon) is a category B male prison accommodating 230 men in England and Wales. The prison consists of a series of TCs where the residents are encouraged to work as a team, address their offending behaviour, and understand their previous life experiences better. There is a strict drug-free and violence-free policy and the residents must be committed to rehabilitation. Of the population at Grendon, 50 per cent report self-harm history, 52 per cent have experienced physical abuse, 32 per cent report history of sexual abuse and 69 per cent report loss of or separation from a primary care giver.⁵ Residents in the prison participate in Group Therapy within their allocated TC three times a week; within this there is a slow, open group process used and recent and current behaviour is discussed which parallels to their offences and childhood.⁶ Due to the emphasis on democracy throughout the prison, every decision which is made must be presented to the community to gain the 'backing' and the support, of all the men. There has been much success in the use of TCs on offending^{7,8,9} and low rates of re-conviction.¹⁰

A proportion of the residents of Grendon also partake in Core Creative Therapies (CCT) which include Art therapy and Psychodrama. These aim to help the

1. HMPPS (2017). Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/668256/HMPPS_Business_Plan_2017_to_2018.pdf
2. Shuker, R., & Sullivan, E. (Eds.). (2010). Grendon and the emergence of forensic therapeutic communities: Developments in research and practice. *John Wiley & Sons*.
3. Scharf, P. (1980). Democracy and justice in a prison therapeutic community. *Therapeutic Communities in Corrections*. Praeger, New York in: Rawlings, B. (1998). Research on Therapeutic Communities in Prisons. A Review of the Literature. *Unpublished document produced for the Prison Department*.
4. Rapoport, A. (1960). Modification of the Howard test for the detection of renal-artery obstruction. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 263(23), 1159-1165.
5. Akerman, G. & Geraghty, KA (2016). An exploration of clients' experiences of group therapy. *Therapeutic Communities: The International Journal of Therapeutic Communities*, 37 (2), 101-108.
6. Shuker, R. (2010). Forensic therapeutic communities: A critique of treatment model and evidence base. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 49(5), 463-477.
7. Bennett, J. & Shuker, R. (2017). The potential of prison-based democratic therapeutic communities. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 13(1), 19-24.
8. Newberry, M. (2010). A synthesis of outcome research at Grendon therapeutic community prison. *Therapeutic communities*, 31(4), 356-371.
9. Newton, M., & Erikson, M. (2007). Reconviction after treatment in a prison-based therapeutic community. *LA Craig, TA Gannon & L. Dixon (2013), What works in offender rehabilitation: An evidence-based approach to assessment and treatment*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
10. Marshall, P. (1997). A Reconviction Study of HMP Grendon Therapeutic Community, *London Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate*, Research Findings, 53.

men who have trouble accessing traumatic memories verbally by being able to access this creatively and perhaps subconsciously.¹¹) Art Therapy is a form of Psychotherapy where art materials are used to express and can address confusing and distressing emotional issues.¹² Psychodrama uses guided dramatic action to help with issues and to explore past, present and future life events whilst allowing to see oneself through different perspectives.¹³

11 states that the use of creative therapies is based on the idea that many offenders at Grendon, especially sex offenders, were abused in their childhood either physically, emotionally, or sexually and this plays a significant part in the reason that they offend themselves. Due to the young age that most of the offenders were abused, the men cannot explain or access these memories verbally so creative therapies allow for their traumatising experiences to be retrieved in an alternate way.¹⁴

Psychodrama

Psychodrama, originally created by Dr. J. L. Moreno, is based on behavioural responses and focuses on individuals' beliefs about oneself, others, and the world, reviewing their feelings and consequences. Psychodrama is suitable for individuals that are unable to improvise, take roles, or distinguish between their own point of view and someone else's.¹⁵ The physical setting of scenes provoke emotions, feelings, and memories, and other group members are used as auxiliaries to play significant others demonstrating how experiences in childhood can affect how one behaves in adulthood—expressing suppressed and repressed emotions. This aspect helps to understand prisoners' negative projections on the world.

Internal working models of attachment and the expectations of support and affection from relationships

Many of the men at Grendon suffer from anger issues which contributed to their index offence.

determine whether we see ourselves as worthy to be cared for. These models are dynamic and it is believed that Psychodrama can change these perceptions. It is designed to differentiate the participant's childhood from their offence, the present and the future, and trace the source of their anger. Psychodrama incorporates different exercises including 'chain of offences',¹⁶ where essential moments of the offence are mapped out and analysed by the participants. This helps the participants to recognise the specific parts of the event where they could have acted differently—identifying the reasons for the actions at each point in the chain. This allows the individuals to take responsibility for their actions and solve recurring problems.

However, a recent meta-analysis by¹⁷ found that victim empathy was not as important as originally thought in preventing recidivism and has been described as being more punitive than rehabilitative.¹⁸

Many of the men at Grendon suffer from anger issues which contributed to their index offence.¹⁹ It has been stated that Psychodrama is aimed at individuals who show aggressive behaviour and the therapy helps to control these through role play and to help them behave differently through distancing in fictive scene and roles²⁰ and this has been shown to be successful.²¹

Art therapy

Art therapy allows the person to creatively express themselves and help to show what they are feeling, their fears, and their emotions, in a way that they may have previously found hard to articulate. In art therapy, using childhood experiences the offender can imagine themselves as both the victim and the offender working through thoughts of this and reflecting them on their artwork. It was speculated that individuals with a lack of

11. Jefferies, J. (2005). Psychodrama: Working through action: 'My thank you is for your concern'. *Group analysis*, 38(3), 371-379.
12. British Association Art Therapy (2017) Retrieved from <http://www.baart.org/About-Art-Therapy>
13. British Psychodrama Association (2017) Retrieved from http://www.psychodrama.org.uk/what_is_psychodrama.php
14. Wylie, B. (2007). Self and social function: Art therapy in a therapeutic community prison. *Journal of Brand Management*, 14(4), 324-334.
15. Smeijsters, H., & Cleven, G. (2006). The treatment of aggression using arts therapies in forensic psychiatry: Results of a qualitative inquiry. *The arts in psychotherapy*, 33(1), 37-58.
16. Mulder, J. (1995). The relapse prevention model as a treatment method in a forensic day care clinic. *Journal of Psychotherapy*, 21(2), 71-80.
17. Mann, R. E., Hanson, R. K., & Thornton, D. (2010). Assessing risk for sexual recidivism: Some proposals on the nature of psychologically meaningful risk factors. *Sexual Abuse*, 22(2), 191-217.
18. Barnett, G., & Mann, R. E. (2013). Empathy deficits and sexual offending: A model of obstacles to empathy. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 18, 228-239.
19. Shuker, R. (2010). Forensic therapeutic communities: A critique of treatment model and evidence base. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 49(5), 463-477.
20. Smeijsters, H., & Cleven, G. (2006). The treatment of aggression using arts therapies in forensic psychiatry: Results of a qualitative inquiry. *The arts in psychotherapy*, 33(1), 37-58.
21. Balfour, M. (2003). *The use of drama in the rehabilitation of violent male offenders*.

insight might achieve insight through Art therapy by exploring cognitions, feelings and behaviours, and achieving a less distorted cognition.

Speech, language, and communication difficulties are more prevalent in the prison population²² than the general population and the majority of prison treatment programs do not take these difficulties into consideration. The ability to show feelings symbolically- like the explosion of a volcano- overcomes the need for verbal expression which can be more difficult.²³ The prevalence of aggression is high in prisons which can cause problems between inmates²⁴ with figures of 16,195 assaults in prisons in England and Wales in 2014.²⁵ A qualitative study by²⁶ found that Art therapy resulted in increased awareness of the participant's own aggression and decreased impulsivity.

Although there are clearly differences in the delivery of Art therapy and Psychodrama, it is important to view them collectively as they are both Core Creative Therapies.

The current study

The rationale for this study was that there has been no previous experiential research undertaken at HMP Grendon directly measuring the added values of Art therapy and Psychodrama to the whole therapeutic process and the prison requested this study was undergone.

The research questions for the study were:

1. *What is the therapeutic progress made by the men in CCTs and how does this help in meeting treatment targets and individual needs and deficits of the men?*
2. *What do the CCTs contribute to men's treatment that other therapies do not?*
3. *Do the CCTs help with progress in the verbal therapies?*
4. *What specific areas of the CCTs helped group members?*
5. *How do the CCTs prepare the men for life outside prison?*

Method

Participants

A sample of eleven male residents from HMP Grendon partook in this research. The men were living in four different Therapeutic Communities and had completed a Core Creative Therapy, either Art therapy or Psychodrama; five of the men had completed Art therapy and six had completed Psychodrama. Each of the men had participated in the CCT for at least one year; the maximum participation time was three and a half years and the minimum was eighteen months. The men were recruited through an advertisement in their wing announced at their community meeting.

Design

The study used qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and was analysed using Thematic Analysis where the common and prevalent themes were identified to determine the effectiveness of the therapies. The basis of the semi-structured interview questions consisted of the Treatment Targets²⁷ identified through previous research at Grendon.²⁸

Results and Discussion

The Thematic Analysis performed on the data identified four overarching themes;

1. Gained Insight.
2. Accessing Subconscious Trauma.
3. Space to be Supported
4. Behavioural Management.

Theme 1: Gained Insight

This theme encompassed how the men felt that through Core Creative Therapies they were now able to reflect inwardly regarding how other people viewed them and why they were reacting in a negative way to situations. Furthermore, the men were able to grasp another point of view, increasing their understanding for other's feelings.

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22. Bryan, K. (2004). Preliminary study of the prevalence of speech and language difficulties in young offenders. *International journal of language & communication disorders*, 39(3), 391-400.
 23. Bennink, J., Gussak, D. E. & Skowran, M. (2003) The role of the art therapist in a Juvenile Justice Setting. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 30 (3), 163-173.
 24. Watt, B. D., & Howells, K. (1999). Skills training for aggression control: Evaluation of an anger management programme for violent offenders. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 4(2), 285-300.
 25. Prison Service Journal (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/PSJ%20221%20September%202015.pdf>
 26. Smeijsters, H., & Cleven, G. (2006). The treatment of aggression using arts therapies in forensic psychiatry: Results of a qualitative inquiry. *The arts in psychotherapy*, 33(1), 37-58.
 27. Treatment Targets identified were; Emotion expression/management, Self-management, Understanding childhood, and Offending behaviour.
 28. Hall (2016). *Psychodrama and art therapy at HMP Grendon: do pre-therapy assessments contain measurable treatment targets?* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Birmingham City University, Birmingham, England.

Self-Awareness

Art Therapy and Psychodrama create an alternative medium to talking for partakers to study themselves and their lives. From the interview data, the men appeared to have acquired knowledge about themselves, how they are perceived by others and how they have treated others.

[Psychodrama helps you to] see yourself through peoples' eyes.

It seemed that, particularly in Psychodrama, the men were able to witness aspects of their life through a different perspective where they could see their own behaviour. This feature of the therapy seemed to cause the men to evaluate their behaviours due to the aversive feelings they felt towards the actions they had observed.

[Psychodrama was the] closest thing to a video recording of events.

The concept of triggers is a stimulant that can offset maladaptive behaviours in this offending context which can take the form negative feelings usually revolving around childhood and adolescence. Triggers were a common theme, especially in Psychodrama, that the men found that they were now able to recognise what causes them to act in an anti-social way, possibly leading to their offense. This is an important skill as the men were not previously aware of these and were now able to avoid situations in the future where they might offend again.

...recognise that when I feel humiliated, belittled or alienated that I'm higher risk of offending because those are the trigger states from when I was a teenager.

In an alternate way, the men found they had achieved self-awareness through realising that they deserve better than the criminal life and that they had become a better and stronger person since completing the CCT.

Understanding feelings

This sub-theme referred to the men feeling that they had connected to their emotions and were better able to better understand, and to order their thoughts

and feelings, which was not previously the case. The men demonstrated that they were aware that if they understood their feelings by understanding why they were feeling how they were, they could control their reactions. This understanding dated back further than the CCT sessions, and through to their lives before prison allowing them to make sense of their past feelings. 'Self-understanding' was identified to be one of the key therapeutic factors which highlighting its importance in the therapeutic progress.²⁹

You have more control on how you react to things if you realise what it is that is affecting you.

Gained Perspective

Many of the men discussed how they previously showed no respect for others' feelings and that, after completing a CCT, the men felt that they had more consideration for others' feelings than before. Through Psychodrama especially, the men were able to play the role of their victims, realising the fear they inflicted in them, which helped the men created some victim empathy. Despite recent research finding weak links between victim empathy and recidivism rates, the men found it comforting and enlightening to be able to take responsibility for their victims, aiding their therapeutic progress.

...able to personalise my victim...adopting his position helped me connect a lot more and realise he didn't deserve it.

Through practising taking other's perspective and an increase in victim empathy, the CCT's helped the men to achieve the skills to examine situations from another person's point of view.

Made me realise what my son must've thought when he saw.

Theme 2: Access Subconscious Trauma

This theme addresses how the CCT's were able to provide an alternate avenue for the men to access their memories and trauma in a way they had previously not been able to, subsequently dealing with the trauma.

29. Vlastelica, M., Urli, I., & Pavlovi, S. (2001). The assessment of the analytic group treatment efficiency according to Yalom's classification. *Collegium antropologicum*, 25(1), 227-237.

Accessing Deep Memories

This subtheme refers to how the CCT's allowed the men to access memories and parts of themselves that they had not previously been able to access through verbal therapies, or had been averse to. It was also explained how the men were transported back to memories to be able to explore and discuss these avenues. It was discussed how the men could make sense of the situations that they had experienced either with their offence or childhood which brought them some resolution.

...access things in my head I hadn't before.

...some buried memories I had recovered.

Dealing with Trauma

The men described the different ways that the CCTs helped them to deal with their unresolved traumas. This included the freedom to be able to talk about problems that they did not even realise had occurred in childhood and grieve for losses that they never did before prison. The CCTs allowed the men to offload their problems to the group which helped them relieve feelings of guilt that they had held for so many years.

Psychodrama has been found to help resolve painful emotional experiences.³⁰ Many of the men mentioned how the therapies allowed them to distinguish their abuser from other people and this then allowed them to control their reactions and how they treated other people. This element of CCTs is important due to the link between trauma and offending.³¹

'It allowed me to grieve for myself'

Specifically, in art therapy, the power of the image was highlighted regarding how there was no escape from what the men had created. This aspect was different to small groups as there was no way to divert away from their problems and this seemed to help them to directly deal with their problems- even if they did not want to. This gave the men the

The CCTs allowed the men to offload their problems to the group which helped them relieve feelings of guilt that they had held for so many years.

opportunity to accept themselves due to being able to sit with the image in front of them.

Theme 3: Space to be Supported

This theme referred to the element of safety which occurred in the CCTs; the men felt they could show vulnerabilities and express themselves in ways they had not previously done. Specific aspects of the group were highlighted such as the therapists and group members.

Safe to be Vulnerable

A common theme outlined by the men was the increased sense of security they felt whilst in the CCT group, especially compared to Small Group. The 'deconstruction of the mask' was mentioned by many of the men and how they felt they were able for the first time in their lives to be vulnerable, liberating themselves of their 'macho' persona. The men were able to break down and cry in front of others, which subsequently improved their involvement in Small Group. Additionally, the men felt that CCTs were a perfect place for shy people who struggle to speak as the safety of the therapy allowed them to be able to voice their opinions and feelings. There has been a link found between

emotional openness and risk of offending in men,³² which demonstrates the importance of openness within the therapeutic progress. It seemed that due to the men feeling safer to be vulnerable, they could disclose information and aspects of their lives that they would not discuss with other people.

The space and time that the men felt they had within the CCTs was expressed to be of importance to the men and how they were processing their feelings and their past. The men explained how there were no interruptions within the CCTs, when it was your turn, it was your chance either on stage or presenting or drawing to explore events in your life, or your feelings.

You have the time to think...not having a lot of questions being thrown around the room.

30. McVea, C. S., Gow, K., & Lowe, R. (2011). Corrective interpersonal experience in psychodrama group therapy: A comprehensive process analysis of significant therapeutic events. *Psychotherapy Research*, 21(4), 416-429.

31. Macinnes, M., Macpherson, G., Austin, J., & Schwannauer, M. (2016). Examining the effect of childhood trauma on psychological distress, risk of violence and engagement, in forensic mental health. *Psychiatry research*, 246, 314-320.

32. Underhill, J., Wakeling, H. C., Mann, R. E., & Webster, S. D. (2008). Male sexual offenders' emotional openness with men and women. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 35(9), 1156-1173.

Self-Expression

The expressive nature of the CCTs seemed to allow the men to talk about their problems more than they had ever done before. The medium of creating an image in Art therapy bypassed the verbal explanations of the men's feelings (that they found difficult to say out loud). The unique use of the image allows the men to work on their treatment targets more than the small Group because they are inspired by the images to further explore their feelings and past experiences.

The actual picture was bringing more out of me than if I was just sat there talking about it.

The comparison to reverting to being a child was prominent in Art therapy and the benefits of being free and able to express their feelings and experiences were discussed. Many of the men explained how they did not get the chance to be a child and how Art therapy allowed them to experience that, completing some of their childhood which seemed to aid their therapeutic progress.

Group Dynamics

The importance of the CCT group was emphasised throughout the interviews. Much praise towards the therapists, especially their honesty, was expressed and how this contributed to the men's progress. Staff involvement and engagement have been endorsed as the fundamental objective of any treatment program which supports the evidence from the interviews.³³

Jo just tells you straight...you don't hear what you wanna hear... in the small groups the facilitator sits back a lot more they don't get involved.

Susie, she's just so good at what she does and you don't even realise what direction, you go somewhere else which helped me, not direct questions.

The importance of the interactions of members of the group was emphasised by the men. The sharing of

their experiences and connections they made, were said to have benefited them and their therapeutic progress by helping one another to reach conclusions. Universality, understanding that 'one is not alone' and that others experience the same problems, was one of the highest ranking therapeutic factors,³⁴ (demonstrating its importance to the therapeutic process).

...problem shared, problem halved.

Theme 4: Behavioural Management

This theme refers to how both CCTs allowed the men to control their behaviour and how they reacted to certain situations; this was helped by understanding the consequences of the men's behaviour.

Control Reactions/Emotions

A common issue for the men arriving at Grendon is their lack of ability to control their emotions and thus, anger, which can result in negative behaviour and a possible contribution to their crime. For many of the men this is a Treatment Target and the interviews discussed the perceived improvements in the control of their reactions and emotions by acquiring relevant skills. A link has been found

among offenders between the levels of aggression exerted, and the ability to control emotions which demonstrates the importance of this skill.³⁵

I don't fly off the handles as often as I used to. Don't get me wrong I still get angry and that but I can deal with it in an appropriate way now.

Consequential Thinking

The concept of consequential thinking refers to the ability to assess choices and anticipate how other people will react in each different scenario. Through completing the CCTs, the men seemed to demonstrate an understanding of how their actions had affected their lives and others around them. The men described how the therapies helped examine each event of their

A common issue
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33. Sheldon, K., & Tennant, A. (2011). Considerations for working with personality-disordered patients. *The British Journal of Forensic Practice*, 13(1), 44-53. ISSN: 1463-6646.

34. Vlastelica, M., Urli, I., & Pavlovi, S. (2001). The assessment of the analytic group treatment efficiency according to Yalom's classification. *Collegium antropologicum*, 25(1), 227-237.

35. Robertson, T., Daffern, M., & Bucks, RS (2014). Maladaptive emotion regulation and aggression in adult offenders. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 20 (10), 933-954.

life in such scrutiny that the ripple effect of their actions was made clear to them by re-enacting parts of the men's lives and practising possible future scenarios. For example; parole board meetings or challenging situations outside of prison. It has been found that teaching 'consequential thinking' can reduce impulsivity, which is a risk factor for many of the men at Grendon.³⁶

...that led onto me realising the consequences for the bigger picture and the implications for my family...even the value of the houses on the street because there was a murder there.

It seemed that through the newfound 'consequential thinking', the men were able to view their lives in a different way- realising they were in control of what happens to them. Through acknowledging the work that the men had achieved participating in the CCT, they were able to see that there is more to life than being in prison and that, they felt, was enough to stop them from reoffending.

...what's the point of getting out if I'm gonna go back there.

Limitations

The research period did not permit recidivism rates to be explored. Furthermore, the retrospective nature of the study may have changed the way the men recalled their experiences. Nevertheless it allowed the experiences of the Core Creative Therapies to be reflected and allowed a long-term view to be captured, especially as each of the men had completed the therapies at different times, some were longer ago than others. It is clear that there is uncertainty regarding whether or not it was solely the Core Creative Therapies alone that were responsible for the benefits of the men? However, the interview questions were focused towards the added benefit of the CCTs to the men's progress at Grendon, which may have reduced the overlap between CCTs and small Group therapy.

Another limitation is that the men might have felt biased to respond positively towards the CCTs explaining the positive results. However, the researcher made it clear that their answers would not affect their reports (or anything to do with them and the prison), and encouraged them to answer as honestly as possible. It should be noted that some of the men raised criticisms of the therapies as well

Implications/Future Research

Despite the presented limitations, this research demonstrated promising outcomes of each CCT and was the first to conduct an experiential study on the effectiveness of CCTs at Grendon. The current study extended previous research regarding Art therapy and Psychodrama and the specific benefits and outcomes of completing these therapies. The implications for this should be increased support for the positive outcomes of participating in CCTs and this will aid funding decisions at Grendon concerning therapies.

For future research, log books have been designed for the CCTs to be distributed to the men in each session, in order to gain insight to the specific day to day features of the therapy that they are enjoying or disliking. This is to ensure that the accounts are not retrospective (in order to gain a more accurate description and reflection of the therapy). The research can be continued using a longitudinal method to incorporate recidivism rates by following the men from the start of their CCT journey to when they leave prison. This will provide a comprehensive idea of the effects of CCTs on individuals and their progress through prison.

Conclusion

With all things considered, the Core Creative Therapies clearly provide added value to the therapeutic progress made by the men in HMP Grendon. These benefits are reflected through the themes of the data which can all be contributing factors to reduce the individual's risk of reoffending by increases in openness, and control of the men's actions. It is clear from the interview data how much the residents at Grendon value, and enjoy, the CCTs and wish for the continuous of them.

36. Ross, RR, & Fabiano, EA (1985). *Time to think: A cognitive model of delinquency prevention and offender rehabilitation*. Institution of Social Sciences & Arts Incorporated.