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Meaning-making processes in music therapy clinical improvisation: An arts-informed qualitative research synthesis

Anthony Meadows^{a*} and Katherine Wimpenny^b

^aGraduate Music Therapy Program, Shenandoah Conservatory, USA ^bSenior Research Fellow, Disruptive Media Learning Lab, Coventry University, UK

Background: Although clinical improvisation continues to be an important focus of music therapy research and practice, little attention has been given to integrating qualitative research in this area.

Objective: To profile, synthesize and present qualitative research authored by music therapists focused on clinical improvisation.

Methods: Qualitative research synthesis (QRS) uses qualitative methods to analyse, synthesize and interpret the results from a select group of qualitative studies, further enhanced by an arts-related re-presentation of the synthesis (Ai-QRS).

Discussion: When viewed as a whole, the synthesis revealed three dimensions that were central to the ways music therapists and clients engaged in improvisational practices: professional artistry, the performative act, and meaning making. Each element is explored and exemplified through the selected papers, and discussed within a larger theoretical framework.

Conclusions: Therapists use complex frameworks through which they attempt to make meaning from improvisational experiences. Implications for theory and practice are discussed, along with reflections on data re-presentation and interpretation, explored through the lens of arts-informed inquiry.

Keywords: qualitative research synthesis, arts-informed research, improvisation, theory development

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*Corresponding author. Email: ameadows2@su.edu