

Spring 2015

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Lukac, Nicole, "Participation in a Group of Formerly Incarcerated Women on Students Self Esteem, Empathy, Self Disclosure and Anxiety". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2015.

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Participation in a Group of Formerly Incarcerated Women on Students' Self Esteem, Empathy, Self Disclosure and Anxiety

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Abstract

Many people anecdotally report positive personal effects as a result of participating in social service projects. Few programs, if any, in the country exist that bring together formerly incarcerated women and college students to engage in multi-arts activities that are designed to be interactive and build relationship, self confidence and self-expression for both the women and the college students involved. The purpose of this study was to examine whether semester-long participation in a group that works to help reintegrate formerly incarcerated women, called New Beginnings, affects levels of empathy, self-disclosure, self-esteem and anxiety. 12 students involved in the program were given established instruments to measure these characteristics before beginning the program, as were 12 control participants. It was hypothesized that students who participate in this group would demonstrate higher empathy, self-esteem, self-disclosure and lower anxiety at the end of the program compared to controls. Results from the study found no significant interactions for empathy, self disclosure, anxiety or self esteem and a main effect for time for State and Trait Anxiety.

Introduction

Approximately 9 million individuals each year are released from prison in the United States (Beck, 2006). A large majority of individuals released from prison face uncertainty regarding their employment, living situation and adjusting to a life outside prison. Inmates re-entering society into society are an extremely unstable group. In a 15 state study, two thirds of the prisoners released in 1994 were arrested during a three-year follow up (Hughes et al. 2002). Many prisoners, once released, have very little opportunities to further their education, participate in rehabilitation groups such as AA or find a stable job to support themselves and their families. To help prisoners succeed in society, re-entry programs have been found to be successful in helping former inmates adjust to life outside of prison. Research has shown that successful rehabilitation programs use a cognitive and behavioral approach, occur in the individual's natural environment, and are multimodal and intensive enough to cause real change. The successful programs encompass rewards for pro-social behavior, targeting high-risk individuals and matching the learning style of the offender (Allen et al. 2005).

In his paper, *The Psychological Impact of Incarceration: Implications for Post-Prison Adjustment*, author Craig Haney discusses the many struggles inmates face both in prison and once they are released. Haney argues that prison makes inmates dependent on institutional structures and contingencies in which their freedom is stripped away and they are dependent on the institution for daily commodities (food and health) and later for overall decision-making. Once prisoners are released they are faced with the uncertainty of how to make daily life decisions and can become overwhelmed and unstable in the less structured world outside of prison walls. In addition, Haney argues that being in prison

creates hypervigilance, interpersonal distrust, emotional over-control, a diminished sense of self worth and posttraumatic stress reactions to the institutional methods of incarceration. In terms of the psychological effects of incarceration, prisoners are also faced with little to no means of expressing and dealing with their emotions from past and present trauma. With limited freedom engage in creative activities or simply discuss their emotions, many prisoners feel isolated, resulting in the many effects of incarceration Haney describes.

To give prisoners the opportunity to process their emotions and constructively develop a firmer emotional/psychological, grounding, there are some programs in various prisons throughout the country that bring the arts to the prison population as a means to help them cope with their incarceration. One successful program is Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA), which was founded in 1996 and currently supports five working art programs in men's and women's correctional facilities in New York. RTA was founded by male inmates in Sing Sing Correctional Facility in the Bronx, who wanted to write and produce plays and needed some professional guidance to do so. It was a play about gangs, violence and HIV/AIDS and explored their emotions of hope and remorse. It was a play that celebrated the good and kind spirit in every individual and this philosophy has become the foundation for the program. RTA strongly believes in the rehabilitative power of art as an effective way to help men and women behind bars. By means of creative expression in theater, dance, voice, writing and visual art, prisoners are able to learn the social and cognitive skills that help them with education, family reconciliation and a successful reentry back into their communities. The Director of the Sing Sing's Special Subjects commented on the success of the program stating that "RTA has changed the attitudes and

goals of our inmates, giving them hope and an understanding of how major undertakings can be accomplished when everyone does their part for the common goal” (Rehabilitation Through the Arts, 2015).

Another successful program is Arts in Prison, Inc., which offers inmates a chance to experience performing arts including music, writing, singing and yoga. Arts in Prison Inc. strongly believes that exposure to the arts while in prison greatly reduces recidivism rates and helps inmates reconnect with their communities. It is through a non-judgmental atmosphere that volunteers from Art in Prison Inc. are able to positively affect inmates behavior and make a difference in their lives. Founder Elvera Voth organized the first joint performance between volunteers and a group of men from Lansing Correctional Facility in Kansas presented at the prison for the community in 1996. Since then, the goal of Arts in Prison Inc. is to bring volunteers and inmates together and give men and women in prisons the opportunity to express themselves through the arts. (Arts in Prison Inc, 2015)

The Prison Arts Coalition was established in 2008 and serves as a national network for prison arts in the United States. While the program does not offer any direct arts programs to prisons across the country, PAC offers support, information and partnership opportunities within the prison arts sector. PAC puts together publications, artistic work, research, events and job postings for the public offered to anyone interested in bringing the arts to a correctional facility. PAC brings together various experts in the arts and helps build collaboration between fellow artists and prisons in the United States. The organization has identified 42 states with prison art programs and continues to work with local communities to benefit men and women in correctional facilities. (The Prison Arts Coalition, 2015)

While all forms of art are successful at helping inmates express themselves and deal with their incarceration, performance programs in particular have been widely successful in correctional institutions across the country (Shailor, 22) Jonathan Shailor has described theater prison programs as “sanctuaries where the distractions and degradations of the normal prison context are temporarily set aside.” (22) Theater in a prison environment allows inmates to explore their creativity, compassion, self-exploration and risk-taking abilities. The culmination of months of practice and rehearsal with fellow inmates and various facilitators and artist from the community creates a sense of trust, commitment and expression unlike any other.

One notable performance art program in the country that brings together performers and the incarcerated population is the Judy Dworin Performance Project (JDDP) Founded in 1989, Judy Dworin strongly believes in the important role of the arts and how it creates change. Her many programs include a ten-year residency with York Correctional Institution in Niantic, CT, where, along with a collaborative team, she encourages the women at York to express themselves through the arts with writing, dancing and singing and presenting a final performance for the institution and for family and invited outside guests. Other JDPP programs include Bridging Boundaries outreach program for children affected by incarceration in the local area and a program with Trinity College students that works with the Resettlement Program for women who have recently reentered the community from York. (Judy Dworin Performance Project, 2015)

An important component in the JDPP group and some other prison arts programs is the collaboration of volunteers, including students, from academic institutions around the country. When examining the important connection between these arts programs and

student involvement, one must look at the larger picture of participation in community service groups. Moely *et al.* (2002) found that students who participated in these types of groups showed increases over the semester in their plans for future civic action, assessment of their own interpersonal problem-solving and leadership skills and agreement with items emphasizing societal factors that effect individual outcomes (social justice). Student who participated in service groups showed greater satisfaction in their courses, reporting higher levels of learning in the academic and community field than students who had not participated in service groups . Moely et al. used the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire to assess the two students groups involved in the study, one group who did participate in service groups and another group who did not participate.

A larger study by Astin et al. (1998) collected data from 3,450 students (2,287 female and 1,163 male) from 42 institutions and examined the impact of community service participation on undergraduate student development. The researchers found that participation in community service substantially enhanced students' academic performance, life skill development and sense of civic responsibility. Students were first tested in their freshman year and then followed up four years later. Although regression analyses controlled for individual student characteristics at the time of their college entry, the results from the study showed positive benefits from participating in community service in many areas of the student's lives.

Another study by Giles Jr. et al. (1994) examined whether required service learning experience impacted college students' ability to become participating citizens in their community. The study looked at two groups, one that participated in a required semester-long service learning laboratory, and another group that did not. What the researchers

found was that the students who participated in the required laboratory showed a significant increase in their belief that people can make a difference, that they should be involved with community service and particularly in leadership and political influence and in their commitment to perform volunteer services. The students were also found to be less likely to blame social service clients for their misfortunes and more likely to stress a need for equal opportunity.

While there are programs that bring together the arts and those serving time in prison, and while research has found many benefits for college students participating in community service projects, few if any programs in the country exist that bring together college students and formerly incarcerated individuals in an arts-engaging environment in the community. The creation of New Beginnings at Trinity College is one, and perhaps a singular such outreach bringing together Trinity College students and formerly incarcerated women under one roof on campus to participate in arts engaging activities, creating a safe space to explore self esteem, issues with reentry and build on strengths within the group to develop and share with a larger community. Inspired by Professor of Theater and Dance Judy Dworin's course on Human Rights Through Performance, which examines issues of human rights and incarceration through the lens of incarcerated women at York Correctional Institution (in Connecticut), students have the opportunity to visit the prison several times and work on a small collaborative performance with the women. Former student Jocelyn Schur, along with five other students, began New Beginnings in 2010 as a senior thesis project in Human Rights and as a way to continue the relationships between Trinity college students and women from York now reentered into the community and living at the Resettlement Program in Hartford. What started as a thesis project has

transformed into a community initiative learning component in Professor Dworin's class, Arts and Special Populations that looks specifically at reentry and the various problems surrounding it. Now in its fifth year, New Beginnings continues to flourish with more and more women and Trinity students coming together to participate in the group.

New Beginnings meets for a two-hour weekly meeting in one of the common rooms of one of the dorms on campus to engage in multi-art activities that are designed to foster independent growth, self confidence and self expression for both the women and the students involved. Each semester, a theme is chosen for New Beginnings. The women write pieces based on writing prompts and create art work and movement/dance pieces, finally putting it all together as a culminating collaborative performance for the community. What makes New Beginnings unique is that it hopes to break down the stigma of incarceration and create a safe place for both students and women to share their personal struggles and triumphs. What results after the weekly meetings is a reportedly irreplaceable bond between women and college students, to our knowledge unique in the country, that hopes to erase the stereotype of formerly incarcerated individuals and simply foster strong connection and respect for each other.

The purpose of this study is to examine the students' participation in New Beginnings to see how their self-esteem, self-disclosure, empathy and anxiety changes from before to after participating in the program. Six students from the Arts and Special Populations Course were selected to participate in the study with the hope of demonstrating the powerful effects of the New Beginnings group from the students' perspective. The hypothesis for this study is that students who participate in New

Beginnings will have higher self-esteem, high self-disclosure, higher empathy and lower anxiety than students in the control group.

Methods

Participants consisted of 12 undergraduate students from Trinity College. 75% (9) of the participants were female. 58% of the participants self-identified as Caucasian, 16% as African American and the two remaining identified as Trinidadian and Other. The average age of the participants was 20 years old. 50% of the participants identified as Psychology majors, 33% were Human Rights Majors and the other participants identified as History and International Studies.

Six of the students were part of the experimental group recruited from Human Rights Studies 348 Arts and Special Populations. The class consisted of two sophomores, two juniors and two seniors. As part of the community learning segment of the course, the students were required to participate in the group New Beginnings. The remaining six students were designated as the control group, recruited as volunteers from two different Trinity Psychology Courses. Two seniors were recruited from the course Psychotherapy and four students (two sophomores and two juniors) were recruited from the course Child Development.

Participants were given a series of four surveys at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of the semester. For the experimental group, the surveys were administered before the New Beginnings sessions and for the control group, the surveys were simply administered before the beginning of the semester and at the end. The four surveys consisted of: The Sidney Jourard Self Disclosure Scale (Jourard, 1958), The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980), the State Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults

(Spielberger, 1983) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Included in the questionnaire was a demographic survey and post-New Beginnings questions for the experimental group that consisted of the following questions: "Describe your overall experience?" "Has New Beginnings changed your view on incarcerated women? If so in what way?" "What did you benefit the most from New Beginnings?" "Did New Beginnings have a positive impact on your life? If yes, why?" "Do you believe that New Beginnings has had a positive impact in the lives of the women from the Resettlement Program? Please explain." "How important do you think it is to have a group like New Beginnings? Please explain."

Results

A repeated measures ANOVA test was conducted for State and Trait Anxiety, Self-disclosure, Self-esteem, Empathy-Perspective Taking Scale, Empathy-Fantasy Scale, Empathic-Concern Scale and Empathy-Personal Distress Scale.

For State Anxiety, the mean for New Beginnings was $M=40.00$, ($SE=4.46$) and the mean for Control, $M=39.58$, ($SE=4.46$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant interaction, $F(1, 10) = .57$, ns , $MS_W = 61.14$, $\eta^2 = .05$. (See Figure 1) However, there was a significant main effect for time, $F(1, 10) = 6.95$, $p = .025$, $MS_W = 61.14$, $\eta^2 = .41$. with Time 1 (Pre) having a higher mean, $M=***$ ($SD=***$) than Time 2 (Post) with $M=***$ ($SD=***$) There was no main effect for group, $F(1,10) = .004$, ns , $MS_W = 238.14$, $\eta^2 < .001$. (See Figure 1)

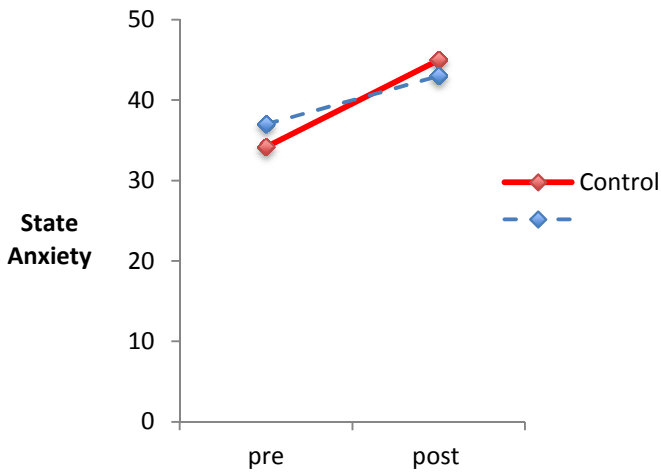


Figure 1

For Trait Anxiety, the mean for New Beginnings was $M=38.83$, ($SE=2.98$) and the mean for Control, $M=38.25$, ($SE=2.98$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant interaction, $F(1, 10) = .251$, *ns*, $MS_W = 8.14$, $\eta^2 = .024$. (See Figure 2). There was also no main effect for group, $F(1, 10) = .019$, *ns*, $MS_W = 106.44$, $\eta^2 = .002$. However there was a main effect for time, $F(1, 10) = .4004$, $p = 0.51$, $MS_W = 4.92$, $\eta^2 = .330$. with Time 1 (Pre) having a higher mean, $M=37.25$ ($SD=6.98$) than Time 2 (Post) with $M=39.83$ ($SD=7.47$) (The $p = 0.51$, suggest a non-significant trend or strong trend).

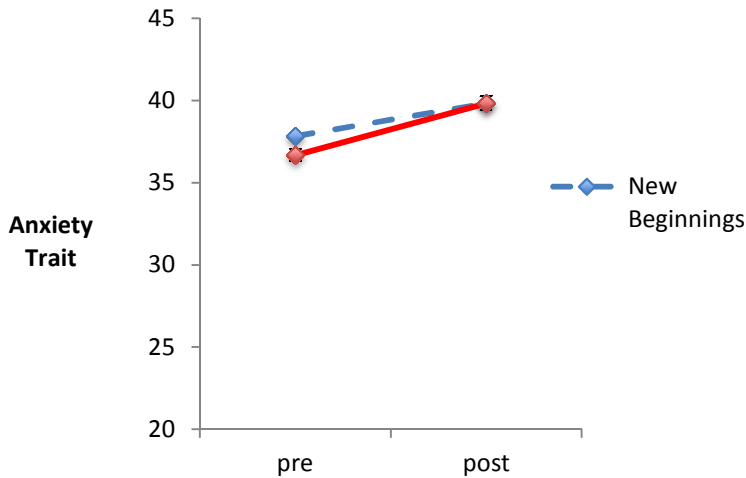


Figure 2

For Self-disclosure, the mean for New Beginnings was $M=311.23$, ($SE=53.00$) and the mean for Control, $M=336.5$, ($SE=53.00$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant interaction, $F(1, 10) = .75$ ns, $MS_W = 6107.21$, $\eta^2 = .07$. (See Figure 3). There was no significant main effect for time, $F(1, 10) = 3.88$ ns, $MS_W = 6107.21$, $\eta^2 = .23$. There was also no significant main effect for group, $F(1, 10) = .11$ ns, $MS_W = 33687.08$, $\eta^2 = .011$.

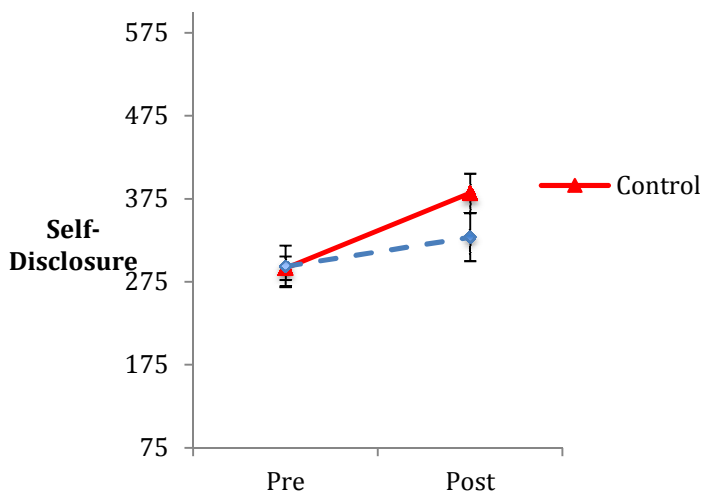


Figure 3

For Self-Esteem, the mean for New Beginnings was $M=32.83$, ($SE=1.86$) and the mean for Control, $M=31.83$ ($SE=1.86$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant interaction, $F(1, 10) = 1.74$, *ns*, $MS_W = 9.57$, $\eta^2 = .15$. (See Figure 4) There was no significant main effect for time, $F(1, 10) = 0.28$, *ns*, $MS_W = 9.57$, $\eta^2 = .03$. There was also no significant main effect for group, $F(1, 10) = .145$, *ns*, $MS_W = 41.43$, $\eta^2 = .014$.

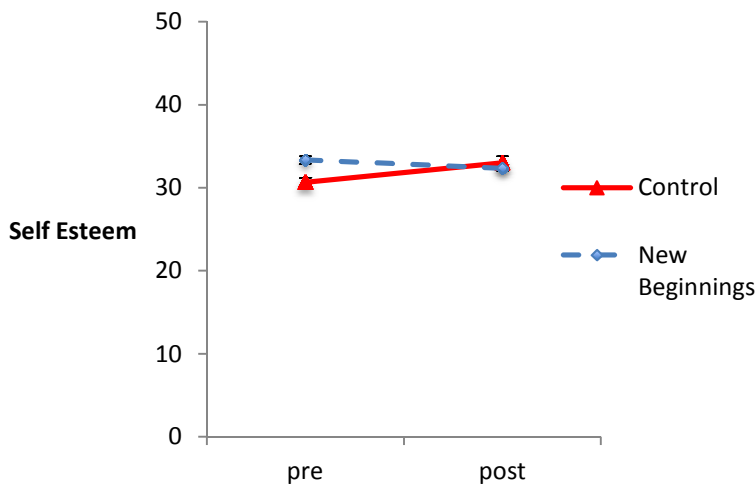


Figure 4

For Empathy-Fantasy Scale, the mean for New Beginnings was $M=18.17$, ($SE=2.66$) and the mean for Control, $M=14.60$ ($SE=2.66$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant interaction, $F(1, 10) = 0.3$, *ns*, $MS_W = 13.11$, $\eta^2 = .003$. (See Figure 5) There was no main effect for time, $F(1, 10) = 0.39$, *ns*, $MS_W = 13.11$, $\eta^2 = .037$. (There was also no main effect for group, There was no main effect for group, $F(1, 10) = .906$, *ns*, $MS_W = 85.01$, $\eta^2 = .083$).

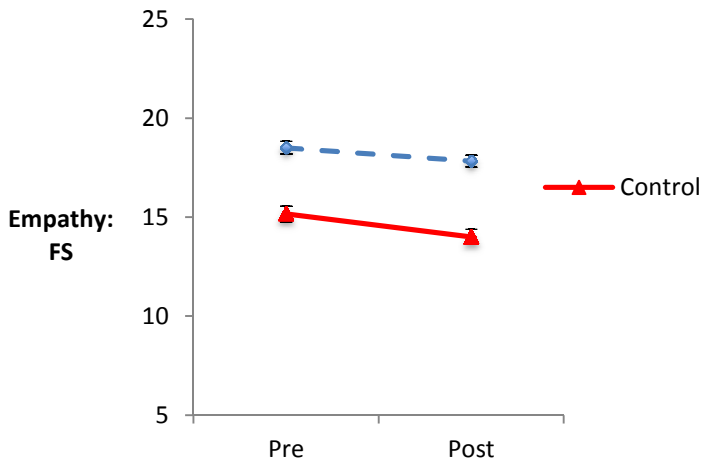


Figure 5

For Empathy-Personal Distress scale, the mean for New Beginnings was $M=11.50$, ($SE=2.14$) and the mean for Control, $M=10.33$ ($SE=2.14$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant interaction, $F(1, 10) = 0.00$, *ns*, $MS_W = 6.63$, $\eta^2 < .001$. (See Figure 6). There was no main effect for time, $F(1, 10) = 2.67$, *ns*, $MS_W = 6.63$, $\eta^2 = .045$. There was no main effect for group, $F(1, 10) = .149$, *ns*, $MS_W = 54.87$, $\eta^2 = .015$.

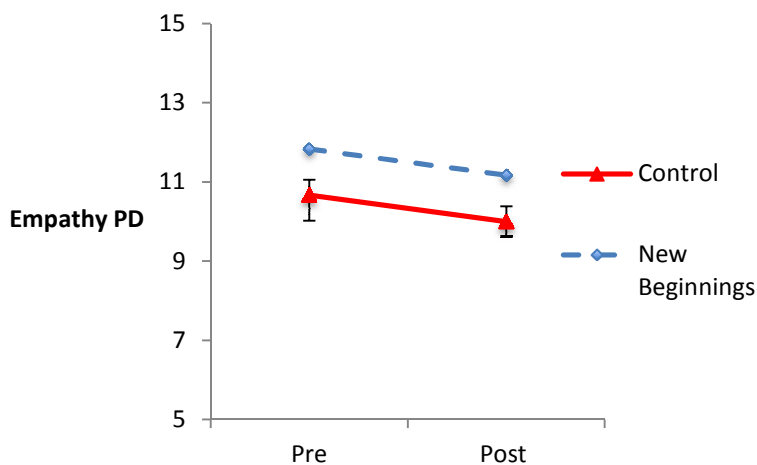


Figure 6

For Empathy-Perspective Taking scale, the mean for New Beginnings was $M=19.17$, ($SE=1.20$) and the mean for Control, $M=19.08$ ($SE=1.20$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant interaction, $F(1, 10) = 0.6$, *ns*, $MS_W = 5.88$, $\eta^2 = .006$. (See Figure 7).

There was no main effect for time, $F(1, 10) = 0.57, ns, MS_W = 5.88, \eta^2 = .054$. There was no main effect for group, $F(1, 10) = .002, ns, MS_W = 17.41, \eta^2 < .001$.

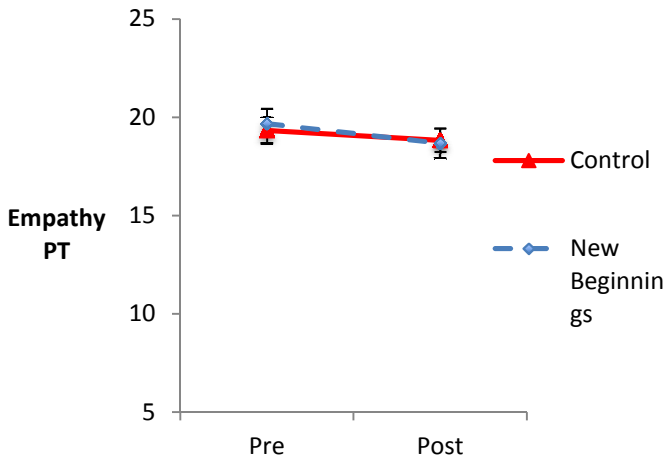


Figure 7

For Empathy-Concern scale the mean for New Beginnings was $M=23.33, (SE=0.84)$ and the mean for Control, $M=23.33 (SE=0.84.)$ There was no significant interaction, $F(1, 10) = 1.18, ns, MS_W = 9.1, \eta^2 R^2 = .105$. (See Figure 8) Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no main effect for time, $F(1, 10) = .30 ns, MS_W = 9.1, \eta^2 = .029$. There was no main effect for group, $F(1, 10) = .486, ns, MS_W = 8.57, \eta^2 = .046$.

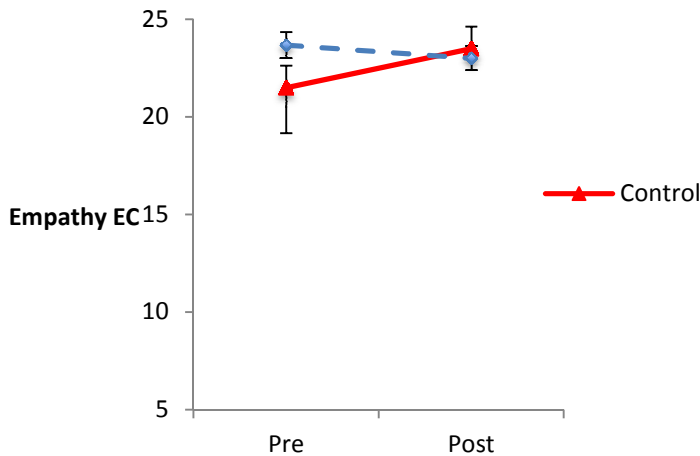


Figure 8

For the post New Beginnings questions administered after New Beginnings ended, several similar responses and themes were found. For the overall experience in New

Beginnings, all participants recorded a positive one with some citing the group as life changing and others commenting how the relationship with the women was mutual where students and women helped and supported each other through their struggles. Another common theme amongst the responses was how it exposed the students to a population relatively unknown to them and many found the experience to be very unique.

Regarding the question on how New Beginnings changed their views on incarcerated women, about half of the participants answered that their experience in the group did not change because they neither had one, nor was it a positive or negative one. The other half of the participants agreed that it did change their views on incarceration because they realized that the women in New Beginnings are regular human beings who make mistakes just like everyone else.

For the question on how the students benefitted most from New Beginnings, a common theme in their responses was the personal stories and conversations with the women. Other responses included the performance component of the group while others felt strongly about feeling comfortable enough to share their own personal struggles and life stories.

All participants in the New Beginnings group agreed that their experience in New Beginnings positively impacted their lives. Common themes addressing how they included: the ability to express oneself, scheduled time to engage in positive activities and a better knowledge of the incarcerated population and the stigmas surrounding them.

With regards to the question if New Beginnings positively impacted the lives of the women, there was a unanimous agreement that it did. Common themes for that question were giving the women an opportunity to express themselves without fear of judgment;

acknowledging how much their time in New Beginnings helped them improve their mood; and how many of the women returned semester after semester.

For the last question on how important groups like New Beginnings are, common themes in the responses were being able to help the women in a non-judgment environment; learning more about incarceration; and teaching students that everyone makes mistakes and not everyone is a bad person who goes to prison.

Discussion

The results from the study did not support the hypothesis that students who participate in New Beginnings will have higher self-esteem, self disclosure, empathy and lower anxiety than students in the control group. There are several explanations for these findings.

While looking at both State and Trait anxiety the results showed a main effect for time with post-New Beginnings having a higher mean than pre-New Beginnings. A possible explanation for this finding is the time period of when the study was administered. The post-study period was during the week of December 7th-10th 2014. This is the time period when the majority of Trinity College students had final exams. The nature of the study, being one that measured anxiety, could have contributed to testing the participants during a stressful time in their life. In addition to administering the test during final exam week, many students are anxious to finish off the semester and start the holiday, a possible explanation for their increase anxiety.

While looking at empathy, the results showed no significant interaction, showed no significance for pre and post testing and no significance between the control group and the students participating in New Beginnings. A number of reasons can help explain these

findings. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) is a 28 question questionnaire on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from “does not describe me well” to “describes me very well”. The questions are separated into four empathy categories, which are Fantasy, Personal Distress, Perspective Taking and Empathetic Concern. Each category has 7 questions. Although no significance was found, the averages for New Beginnings students in each of these categories Fantasy $M=18.17$ ($SE=2.66$), Personal Distress $M=11.50$ ($SE=2.14$), Perspective Taking $M=18.17$ ($SE=2.66$), Empathetic Concern $M= 23.33$ ($SE=0.84$) were all very high. The averages suggest that students who participated in New Beginnings have high levels of empathy. Similarly, the students in the control group had very similar scores with Fantasy $M=14.60$ ($SE=2.66$), Personal Distress $M=10.33$ ($SE=2.14$), Perspective Taking $M=19.08$ ($SE=2.66$), Empathetic Concern $M= 23.33$ ($SE=0.84$). A possible explanation why the averages for both groups were very similar, although non-significant, could be that the Control group was recruited from the Psychology department at Trinity College and one could argue that an interest in psychology and mental health requires some sense of empathy. Another factor could be that the control group used in the study were not randomly assigned and were instead recruited from a single department, which could have affected the results. The New Beginnings group were also not randomly assigned and instead were students who simply wanted to take the course as a component to the New Beginnings Program.

While looking at self-esteem, the results showed no significant interaction, no significance for pre and post testing and no significant between the control group and the students participating in New Beginnings. A possible explanation for the insignificant results could be the age of the formerly incarcerated women in the New Beginnings group.

The age of the women range from 25-40 years old. When thinking of how a group interacts, self esteem can be affected when both the mentors in the group and the women in the group are of similar ages or older. Self-esteem is affected because an individual may not feel as confident in their abilities when they are working with older individuals when the students who participated in New Beginnings are placed in a position of leadership or as an example to the women.

The results for self-disclosure also showed no significant interaction, no significance for pre and post testing and no significance between the control and the New Beginnings group. A possible explanation for these results is the gender makeup of the New Beginnings group. Of the six students who participated in New Beginnings, only two of them were male. And only one of the six students was male in the control group. Because the New Beginnings group works with formerly incarcerated women, one could argue that gender plays a role in how much one is willing to self-disclose with members of the same or opposite sex. Studies show that women are more likely to disclose than men (Dindia, 1992) and because the study consisted of nine females and only three males, this could have affected how much a person is willing to disclose. Of the 12 participants, 5 of them were female in the control group compares to 4 in the New Beginnings group which may help explain the insignificant results between the groups.

Speaking in more general terms, other factors that could have affected the results of the study is testing conditions. Participants were not all tested in the same environment. With the exemption of three participants, all participants were tested in the lobby of the library at Trinity College. The conditions of the testing area were not ideal as other people were around affecting the noise level. The traffic of people in the testing area could have

affected the attention span of the participants and could have distracted them from the study. The remaining three participants were tested in another part of the college due to time conflicts, making the testing environment of the participants unequal. Another factor that could have affected the results was the time frame of when the tests were administered. The first part of the test was administered in the beginning of October and the second part was administered during the last week in December. One could argue that not enough time passed between the testing periods to allow for significant difference.

Another possible factor that could have affected the results in the study was the sample size. Twelve is a small sample size; however because participation in a New Beginnings was pre-determined and already existent before the study, there was little control of the sample size, making it hard to determine whether it affected the study. It can be agreed however, that a larger sample size and more participants in the New Beginnings program could have positively affected the results.

Although none of the results from the questionnaires proved to be significant, something noteworthy about the study were the responses to the questions administered to the students who participated in New Beginnings after the group ended. The responses were all very positive about New Beginnings and how their involvement in the group made a difference in their lives and the lives of the women. While there was significance with regards to self-disclosure, almost all of the students agreed that the experience helped them express themselves and share personal stories not shared with anyone previously. In addition, all the students agreed that participation in New Beginnings benefited their lives and the lives of the women and had positive lasting effects. While the sample size was

small, the fact that all of the responses from the participants in New Beginnings were positive highlights how the group benefits from the students involvement.

Suggestions for future research should include diversifying the population of participants in terms of gender and major. Testing all participants in a noise-free environment and at the same time could improve results for the study. Another suggestion could be to increase the time between the two testing periods to help find significant results. Additional suggestions for research include increasing the sample size of the participants in New Beginnings by examining students who have previously participated in the group and studying their effects over time. Other ideas for future research on the subject include examining college participation in other groups involving the incarcerated populations as well as examining the effect of prison art programs on the overall well being of the incarcerated individuals. It also may be interesting to examine a different program that works with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated men instead of women.

While this study found no significant interactions and thus was not able to prove the hypotheses that participation in New Beginnings increases self-esteem, self disclosure, empathy and decrease anxiety, past research by Astin et al. (1998) showed the positive effects of student participation in community-service groups and similarities can be made with the New Beginnings groups. In addition the many successful art/performance groups by organizations such as the Prison Art Coalition, Prison Art Inc. and the Judy Dworin Performance Project have proven to have a powerful impact on the lives of the incarcerated individuals. Despite the findings of the study, one cannot argue that uniqueness of the New Beginnings Program and how it brings together two populations that would otherwise have no interaction because programs like New Beginnings are non-existent, making the

program at Trinity College very unique. In the five years since the creation of the New Beginnings group, many of the formerly incarcerated women have returned semester after semester to continue in the program in addition to students who decide to continue volunteering with New Beginnings even after the required class component is over. Excluding the class time given to prepare for the New Beginnings sessions, the program is a three-hour, and sometimes longer, time commitment. A proof of the success of the program and the impact it has on the students' lives is the commitment to reserve those extra hours to volunteer with the program. In addition, many students continue with New Beginnings even after studying abroad. It would appear that even when there is a time and space gap, many students still return to the program afterward.. In conclusion, qualitative results of the study show give strong indications of its success and more research can be done to further examine its benefits to not only the students involved but the formerly incarcerated women too.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Lee and Professor Dworin for all their support and guidance and a special thanks to Professor Chapman who helped me with my results section. I would also like to thank Rob Walsh for his help.

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