

**A Grounded Theory Exploration of How a Song's Musical
Characteristics Affect Lyric Interpretation**

by

Michael Colleran

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

In

The Department of Music

State University of New York

New Paltz, NY 12561

May 2020

A GROUNDED THEORY EXPLORATION OF HOW A SONG'S MUSICAL
CHARACTERISTICS AFFECT LYRIC INTERPRETATION

Michael Colleran

State University of New York at New Paltz

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
Master of Science degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this thesis.

Heather Wagner, PhD, MT-BC, Thesis Advisor
Department of Music, SUNY New Paltz

Kathleen Murphy, PhD, MT-BC, Thesis Committee Member
Department of Music, SUNY New Paltz

James Hiller, PhD, MT-BC, Thesis Committee Member
Department of Music, University of Dayton

Approved on _____

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Master of Science degree in

Music Therapy at the

State University of New York at New Paltz

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	5
Research Questions.....	15
Method.....	16
Methodology.....	18
Results.....	23
Major Mode Group.....	24
Minor Mode Group.....	26
Spoken Word Condition.....	28
Discussion.....	30
Limitations and Suggestions.....	35
Conclusion.....	36
References.....	37
Appendix A.....	41
Appendix B.....	42
Appendix C.....	48

A Grounded Theory Exploration of How a Song's Musical Characteristics Affect Lyric Interpretation

Song discussion is a widely-used intervention in music therapy practice. Within a group or individual setting, the therapist and client listen to a song and attempt to make connections to the client's life and presenting problems (Gardstrom & Hiller, 2010, p. 147). It can also be used as a tool to facilitate communication, or to reduce depression and isolation (Wheeler, 2015, p. 117). This study explored the effect of musical characteristics on processing and subsequent analysis and discussion of song lyrics. Clinical applications for this knowledge were explored and expanded upon, in order to gain insights into how song discussion can be better utilized in a clinical setting.

This qualitative study utilized modified grounded theory research in order to better understand the experience of song discussion and the role musical characteristics play in interpretation. At its foundation, grounded theory is an interpretivist research method, which attempts to devise a working theory regarding a certain phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In grounded theory, researchers seek to "learn what occurs in the research settings we join and what our research participant's lives are like" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 3).

Within grounded theory lies the idea of social constructionism, which seeks to "understand the approaches to meaning-making that are used by groups in constructing knowledge" (Hiller, 2016, p. 251). In music therapy practice, group sessions are utilized in a variety of clinical settings to address the needs of each client. A fuller understanding of how meaning is constructed through the clients' interactions with each other and the therapist may yield valuable insights into the therapeutic process. An element of group sessions that cannot be understated is the role of the therapist in the process of constructing meaning. With this in mind, this study employed a reflexive component, in which the researcher reflected on his personal

lived experience planning and conducting the groups, and how their presence and role within the group may have affected the groups' subsequent interpretation.

Literature Review

To fully understand the topic at hand, it is important to first discuss the dynamics at play within the brain when processing music. This section will highlight relevant literature found regarding specific brain response to music as they relate to affective states. The knowledge gleaned from this research will be utilized in composing and recording the musical pieces which will be utilized during the study.

Music and Emotion

At the heart of this study is the examination of the role that music plays in either eliciting or conveying emotional content to the listener. A myriad of factors may contribute to the listener's impression of a song or musical piece. This section will discuss some of the ways musical components impact the brain, as well as the role this knowledge plays within a music therapy context.

Emotional Processing in the Brain

When investigating brain activation in response to music, specific areas of the brain have been shown to be especially susceptible to musical stimuli. The amygdala, or "the heart of emotional processing" (Levitin, 2016, p. 87), plays a key role in the brain's response to music. In a systematic review of literature, Koelsch (2014) found that the amygdala is responsible for modulating and regulating emotional response when listening to music. In this review, literature was synthesized which examined specific musical elements, including the brain's response to different musical elements thought to provoke joy or awe. This analysis showed clusters of changes in activity in various parts of the brain, including the amygdala (p. 171).

Moore (2013) took this research a step further, highlighting in more detail the specific musical elements which elicited an emotional reaction within the amygdala. It was found that the amygdala was activated when listening to musical pieces in a minor key or when containing dissonance, as well as when listening to an unexpected event (p. 205). Interestingly, this analysis also showed that the amygdala was deactivated when listening to pleasant music or musically improvising (p. 207). This highlights and strengthens the scientific consensus that different tones and sounds activate different portions of the brain known for cognitive and affective processing (Hodges & Sebald, 2011, p. 161). Lima and Castro (2011) studied the change in emotional recognition across the life span, and pointed to the reduction in size of the amygdala as a cause for decrease in emotional recognition. The orbitofrontal cortex is activated both when listening to preferred music and when listening to unpleasant music, as well as when listening for specific musical characteristics, such as a single melody or in processing types of chords (Moore, 2013, pp. 230-231).

Emotion and Musical Content

The listener's felt and perceived understanding of the emotional content expressed within music has also been explored. Hunter et al. (2010) manipulated four pieces composed by J.S. Bach to vary in tempo and mode in order to determine whether the listener's perception of the emotion within the piece was correlated with their felt emotion. Researchers were able to conclude that participants felt emotions were a response to their perception of emotional content (p. 53). Songs with consistent emotional cues were rated higher on participant's perception scale than felt emotion scale. It appears as though, while music does have the capability of producing felt emotion, the participants in this study relied more on their subjective idea of whether or not the piece "should" elicit an emotional response. Musical cues provided the evidence which were then used by the listener to interpret the content as it relates to their emotions. This conclusion is

in line with expressive code theory, which posits that emotions are expressed by the performer through manipulating the music to reflect common vocal utterances. The listener, then, comprehends the intention of the music, but does not necessarily feel the intended emotion. Similarly, contour theory contends that music does not inherently express emotion; rather, it's qualities (tempo, dynamics, etc.) are expressive of emotion (Juslin & Timmers, 2010, p. 31). In both theories, the presentation of the music in itself is indicative of a perceived emotion.

Kolchinsky et al. (2017) analyzed over 100,000 popular songs to explore the use of chords in conjunction with lyrics to convey emotion. In particular, the researchers were concerned with valence. This analysis involved pairing played chords with the lyrics which were sung over them. The lyrics were analyzed for their emotional significance; this content was then used to analyze the chord choices and determine if certain chords were more commonly used when conveying different emotions. It was found that major chords were associated with lyrics of higher valence, and minor associated with lower valence. Surprisingly, researchers concluded that seventh chords had a higher valence rating than major chords (p. 8). The context of these chords, conceptualized by the researchers as the era and genre the song was released, may have played a role in these conclusions.

Expression theory, in contrast to expressive and contour theory, argues that the emotional content expressed in music is a direct reflection of the performer's immediate experiences with the intended emotion. In this case, the listener imagines a persona, or "someone who could be feeling that emotion right then" (Hiller, 2015, p. 36). These theories all present valid, but subjective, views on the role of aesthetics in expressing emotion. In short, it is clear that there are a wide range of views about how emotional content is conjured, expressed, and interpreted.

Application to Music Therapy

The ability to regulate emotional response is important not only from a day to day perspective, but from the perspective of a music therapist. Understanding how music can be used as support in achieving emotional regulation is essential to design effective musical experiences for clients. Emotional regulation concerns not only the brain's response to the stimulus, but also the tools used to change or modify the response to reach a regulated state. Van Goethem and Slodoba (2011) investigated the use of music to change affect, and found that the participants most often turned to music when striving to be happy or to relax (p. 214). They reported that the emotion within the music, type of music, and familiarity with the music played a key role in changing the participant's affective state (p. 216).

Pilgrim et al. (2017) attempted to better understand the idea of "musical awe," hereby defined as a positive experience which evokes "physical and affective responses" (p. 443). In determining music's ability to evoke awe, researchers pointed to its positive connotation. Researchers found that upbeat music elicited the greatest amount of awe (p. 447). Conversely, it was also found that music which provokes sadness also predicted awe. This led the researchers to believe that awe is a complex and fluid emotion (Pilgrim et al., 2017). When presented with reflective and complex music, it was found that the experience of awe was directly related to feelings of sadness. This shows the complex inner workings of the brain as it regulates itself. One can experience "awe," while experiencing music that is subjectively deemed as sad.

In everyday life, humans use music as a method to amplify emotional states of all kinds. Choice of music can have a profound effect on the emotional state of the listener. Thoma et al. (2012) found that individuals use music in their everyday lives to actively regulate their emotional states. The authors found limbic and paralimbic regions were activated when listening to music which elicited an intense emotional response (pp. 550-51).

With the assumption that listeners utilize music to regulate emotional states, Thoma et al. (2012) asked participants to respond to a variety of everyday situations, discussing the musical choices they would use in these situations. The researchers set out to explore the listener's process of selecting music in emotionally charged situations, and hoped to develop a better understanding of the individual's cognitive understanding of musical selections and subsequent effect on emotional states. It was found that "music is selected in different emotional situations in a very specific manner... a clear indicator of the attempt of the listener seeking out individually fitting music for the support, control, or change of the current state of experienced emotions" (p. 557). Interestingly, researchers pointed to two specific emotional dimensions, valence, or degree of pleasure, and arousal, or severity of sedation or excitement. It was found that valence and arousal were selected in nearly every situation, regardless of the emotional content of the specific situation. This points to the individual's need to be "brought up" by music. A heightened arousal state is often associated with a happier mood; it therefore makes sense that musical selections in emotionally turbulent situations may be used to help regulate and move from a sad emotional state to a happier one.

Music therapists utilize the various cognitive and emotional brain responses to music to tailor interventions to meet the individual needs of each client. Understanding the role music plays in emotional regulation is an essential part of effective music therapy practice. The next section will discuss music therapy and its relation to the study in question.

Music Therapy

Music therapy is defined as "a reflexive process wherein the therapist helps the client to optimize the client's health, using various facets of music experience and the relationships formed through them as the impetus for change" (Bruscia, 2014a, p. 36). Within the field of music therapy, clinical interventions are often categorized into four methods: improvisational,

compositional, re-creative, and receptive. Improvisational methods involve the client spontaneously creating music through playing or singing. The client may improvise alone, with the therapist, or within a group setting (Bruscia, 2014a, p. 130). Compositional methods of music therapy involve the therapist supporting the client in creating any form of musical product (Bruscia, 2014a). This process may involve a variety of musical experiences, including writing lyrics or composing melodies. Re-creative methods of music therapy involve the client and therapist utilizing pre-composed music. The client in this case may sing, learn, or perform the piece with the support of the therapist (Bruscia, 2014a, p. 131). Finally, receptive music therapy experiences involve the client listening to music and responding in some way (Bruscia, 2014a). The music utilized in receptive experiences may be performed live by the therapist, or recorded. Each of the four outlined methods can serve a variety of clinical goals, and their use should be tailored to the individual needs of the client. This study focused on receptive methods and their utilization in music therapy practice.

Receptive Music Therapy

Bruscia (2014a) states that receptive methods “may be focused on physical, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, or spiritual aspects of the music” (pp. 134-135). Therapeutic goals are varied, and are designed to meet the distinct needs of the client in question. Listening is not seen as a passive experience, as the client is tasked with responding to the music in a variety of ways (Gardstrom & Sorel, 2015). The therapist is tasked with observing the client’s responses when possible, and in guiding the client towards achieving the therapeutic aim of the experience.

Receptive methods of music therapy may be further broken down into method variations including but not limited to music and imagery, music-assisted relaxation, somatic listening, and song discussion. Music imagery experiences involve the client listening to therapist selected music with the intention of conjuring images and themes. The therapist’s role in these

experiences varies greatly, but may involve verbally guiding the client through the experience. Music imagery experiences have been used to increase overall well-being and promote self-awareness within the client (Gardstorm & Sorel, 2017, p. 118). Music-assisted relaxation may be used to elevate mood, relieve anxiety, and promote relaxation within the client (Grocke, 2016). Somatic listening involves the use of vibrations and sound “to directly influence the client’s body and its relationship to other facets of the client” (Bruscia, 2014a, p. 135).

Song discussion uses music as a facilitator for discussion in both individual and group settings. Goals are wide ranging, and may focus on self expression, connection between group members, and psychotherapeutic aims. The song may be performed live by the therapist, or presented as a recording (Bruscia, 2014a, p. 135).

Songs in Music Therapy

In a therapeutic setting, song choice can provide insight into the client’s functioning, areas of need, and therapeutic goals. Bruscia (2014b) states songs “provide an easy access to our emotional world, and to the thoughts, attitudes, values, and behaviors that emanate from it” (p. 1). Reaction to musical elements, as well as lyrical themes, is unique to the individual and influenced by one’s background, upbringing, and lived experience. By utilizing songs in therapy, the therapist is attempting to gather information about the client’s world, both conscious and unconscious. Songs are used across all methods of music therapy.

Music therapists frequently employ group sessions to accomplish a variety of clinical goals. Understanding the processes and experiences of participants within the group setting is an important component of this study. With this in mind, the next section will focus on group music therapy, the various factors which play a role in their effectiveness, and the methods which are frequently utilized in practice.

Group Music Therapy

Music therapists work within a variety of clinical settings and throughout a wide range of clinical populations. Often, the number of clients on a therapist's caseload makes group work necessary; in other cases, group music therapy sessions are facilitated to address specific clinical goals. This section will discuss the use of groups in music therapy, the clinical aims addressed, and the various facets of the experience which may play a role in addressing these needs.

Insights gleaned from this research informed the planning and implementation of the study.

Music Therapy in Groups

Music therapy literature tends to focus on active music making when studying group interventions. Preyde et al. (2017) evaluated client's perceptions of a group music therapy intervention in the adolescent inpatient psychiatric unit. It was found that combining improvisation, songwriting, lyric analysis, and other musical experiences had a positive influence on their mood and anxiety, as well as on their social interactions with others in the group (p. 59). This study also highlighted the adolescents' comments about "social awkwardness" in regards to being in the group. "Social awkwardness" concerns the participant's impressions of one another, and how they may be perceived while participating in the experience. In crafting group interventions, the music therapist should be aware of this aspect of group therapy sessions. Working through feelings of discomfort is an important part of facilitating meaningful and therapeutic group interactions.

Baker (2013) researched music therapists' impressions of the role group dynamics play on the process of group therapeutic songwriting. Synthesis of these impressions yielded four major factors which impact the therapeutic process: group composition, size, conflict, and cohesion. Participants from different cultural groups "may not share the same 'story' or have the capacity to share different perspectives" (p. 142), which in turn leads to conflict. Trust, comfort

with the group, and perceived safety were pointed to as necessary for effectiveness of treatment. Additionally, the size of the group and the number of highly dominant and/or very passive participants should be considered when planning treatment.

Dos Santos (2018) investigated the role of empathy in group music therapy, utilizing a phenomenological inquiry of teenager's experiences. Utilizing a mix of musical interventions allowed group members to "focus on the actual lived experience of the 'foreign' other" (p. 10). This opportunity translated to a feeling of safety and trust among participants, which in turn allowed for effective treatment.

Group Dynamics

Understanding the role group dynamics play in constructing meaning is essential to music therapy practice. Members of the group may come from vastly different backgrounds, religions, and worldviews; all of these factors play a role not only in their personal reactions to the group but in their interactions within it. Davies et al. (2015) point to the "social unconscious" as having a major impact on group dynamics. The therapist's role within the group is to navigate these differing viewpoints, in order to provide cohesion and free expression of ideas. Yalom (2008) notes the therapist's role within the group is to be both the "technical expert and model-setting participant" (p. 123).

Relational group therapy "emphasizes transaction-by-transaction interpersonal contact, the processes of intersubjective relating, and the reciprocal and mutual influence of each group member on other members' (Erksine, 2013, p. 268). The therapist's role is to provide cohesion, facilitate questioning of members' beliefs, and allow for the construction of shared meaning. It emphasizes each individual's lived experience, and seeks to relate those experiences to others in the group (Erksine, 2013, p. 270). This requires a deep, trusting therapeutic relationship, as well as honesty and authenticity on the part of all members, including the therapist. Erksine (2013)

posed invaluable questions in regards to this model, including the role of the therapist, more effective ways to resolve group conflict, and the appropriateness of other modalities other than talk therapy (p. 273).

Lo Coco et al. (2016) also explored the role of relationships in group therapy. Their study utilized psychotherapy groups created to provide a supportive environment for exploring the issues concerning the participants, facilitate personal growth, and experiment with various techniques employed to foster interaction between members (p. 421). It was found that early bonding among group members led to an improvement in individual's interpersonal problems. However, the context of treatment, in which the individual felt supported in their goals was found to be more important than positive bonding. The researchers concluded that group leaders should strive to facilitate the development of positive bonds and interpersonal work between group members (Lo Coco et al., 2016, p. 426). In addition to the development of relationships, Yalom (2008) pointed to the "sharing of one's inner world *and then the acceptance* by others" (p. 56) as the most important factor in facilitating a cohesive group.

Discussing Songs in Group Music Therapy

Lyric analysis has been the subject of research in settings including detoxification units (Silverman, 2016), psychiatric facilities (Silverman, 2009), and in work with adolescents (Ashrafzadeh, 2010). The purpose for these studies have varied, mostly focusing on objectivist aims, such as reduction withdrawal symptoms (Silverman, 2016). Dvorak (2017) created a framework for group lyric analysis, and its application in music therapy practice. Researchers have polled music therapists to create a list of songs utilized in psychiatric settings, and attempted to define the clinical implications for lyric analysis as a whole (Silverman, 2009). Ashrafzadeh (2010) utilized a qualitative approach to lyric analysis in order to better understand how song lyrics can be used as a tool in the therapeutic process. This study was grounded in

psychology, rather than music therapy. No music therapy specific research could be found on the lived experiences of clients when undergoing a song discussion intervention. This points to a gap in the literature in regards to lyric analysis and more psychotherapeutic aims within the scope of music therapy.

Psychotherapeutic Aims

Music as psychotherapy, as defined by Bruscia (1998), describes the therapeutic issue as being “accessed, worked through, and resolved through creating or listening to music, with no need for or use of verbal discourse” (p. 19). The relationship between the therapist and the individuals and group as a whole plays a distinct role in how the therapist both understands and attempts to help the client. Hinman Arthur (2018) contends that the role of the therapist pursuing psychotherapeutic aims must be grounded in humanism; emphasizing the role of individual’s agency, selfhood, and relationality (p. 162). The therapist’s goal within this framework is to foster self-actualization within the client. Clinical work within this lens is “far more concerned about the *who* than the *what* of client needs” (Abrams, 2015, p. 151). Taking a holistic view of the person in therapy allows for natural growth and development to occur.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to discover how musical qualities affect lyric and song interpretation within a group setting. When developing the research questions, the researcher attempted to take a holistic look at the topic at hand. This included a variety of factors which may influence interpretation, and the role of group dynamics as they relate to subsequent interpretation.

How do individual and group lyric interpretations differ in relation with musical characteristics?

Do distinct musical characteristics elicit a distinct response within groups?

How do interpretations differ when the lyrics are read without a musical component?

Method

Many factors were considered when devising the method for this study. The therapist's role was to facilitate the conversation and, at times, to direct it in a way that was intended to elicit meaningful dialogue. For this reason, the researcher's personal connection to the study was a necessary component which must be articulated. This connection to the subject matter did not only guide the group discussion, but also played a role in the subsequent analysis. This section will address the researcher's thought processes in crafting the study, in order to provide context for the subsequent choice of methodology.

Epoche

I have always been interested in the phenomenon of how musical presentation affects lyric interpretation. In clinical practice, the song "You Are My Sunshine" is widely used. It is one of the most popular sing-alongs for a variety of clinical populations. However, through a subjective look at the lyrics, it is obvious that, when utilized as a sing-along, for example, the groups interpretation of the lyrical content of the song is drastically changed. A song about heartbreak and loss can be re-interpreted as a song simply depicting the love between two people. It appears that this re-interpretation relies heavily on the musical presentation of the song. Tempo and melodic characteristics appear to play a distinct role in this re-interpretation. This realization formed the foundation for this thesis proposal. As a researcher, I believe it is important to have a fuller understanding of the way music can impact the interpretation of lyrical themes. How does the experience of listening to a song impact our overall interpretation of the message found within it? If the lyrics were simply read, how would the interpretations differ? These are the questions I explored in this study. Understanding the personal biases of the researcher is an important component of phenomenological research. Making the personal

opinions of the researcher known at the onset of the study will, it is hoped, lead to more profound insight into the phenomenon in question.

My interest in music has always been directly tied to how lyrics and musical characteristics in tandem can convey meaning. From a young age, I listened to a variety of rock music. I learned to play guitar by looking up chord charts and tabs, and found that chord progressions and melodies were employed to create vastly different musical experiences. As I began to strengthen my skills on the instrument, I realized I was drawn to songwriters and bands that relied heavily on their lyrical content to convey meaning. As I continued to learn these songs, I would often go on the internet to find performances. Many times, I would find acoustic versions of these songs; I realized that, when stripped of the musical elements portrayed on the record, the song's meaning could change. Suddenly, the lyrics became the forefront of the piece, rather than the instrumentation. Eventually, I began seeking out these alternative versions. I revered the songwriters that could convey different emotions and meanings utilizing the same lyrics with different instrumentation.

Determining the correct methodology utilized to complete this study involves understanding the author's relation to the topic, as well as the most effective method for addressing the questions at hand. As the research involved both individual and group interpretation of subjective subject matter, a psychotherapeutic lens was used when crafting the research questions and running the groups. In regards to the overarching question of the role of emotion in music, I believe emotion can be felt, as well as perceived, by the listener when listening to an emotionally evocative piece. To which degree these emotions are inferred or elicited, however, I am unsure.

Analysis of the research questions were inherently subjective and influenced by my perceptions; the chosen methodology reflected this awareness. The subsequent section will

expand upon these ideas and outline the thought processes behind utilizing modified grounded theory to carry out the study.

Methodology

Modified constructivist grounded theory fit well within the parameters of the proposed study. The research questions sought to gather information about the phenomenon in question, with the express intent of formulating a hypothesis using the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 35). The goal was not only to analyze how musical qualities affect the group's interpretation, but also to explore how the process of group interpretation unfolds in a clinical setting. As music therapists are often tasked with facilitating group sessions, a deeper understanding into the processes surrounding interactions of group members is necessary to further the practice. This study set out to study how and why participants construct meanings and actions (Charmaz, 2014) within a small group setting.

In crafting this study, it is important to account for biases on the part of the researcher. As the leader of the discussion group, guidance questions were written to allow for organic, meaningful dialogue between group members. Music therapy in a group setting inherently relies on the input, guidance, and expertise of the therapist. Charmaz (2014) stated that grounded theory researchers "can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles while we gather data" (p. 25). In this case, the researcher's guidance can help to clarify, deepen, and develop the group's interpretation of the lyrics in question.

In an attempt to reduce the potential bias of researcher-created lyrics, the lyrics for this study were composed by Donald Welch, a Creative Writing Teacher who received his Bachelor of Arts in Writing, Literature, and Publishing from Emerson College. The musical compositions, however, were composed by the researcher. The songs were recorded with the researcher playing guitar, and Samantha Hassold, a music therapy graduate student at the University of Miami,

providing vocals. Employing Samantha to sing the songs was another attempt at mitigating bias; had the song been sung by the researcher, the participants in the group may have been less honest about their interpretations or thoughts due to the performer being in the room. The researcher maintained an open dialogue with the thesis advisor during the formation, implementation, and analysis of this study.

Participants

Participants were students from the State University of New York at New Paltz and were recruited via email (see Appendix A). Sourcing from the student population was both a choice of convenience for a student researcher who did not otherwise have access to participants. Additionally, the focus of the study did not specify a particular population. It attempted to understand, in a general sense, how groups process and interpret songs. Utilizing typical college students was in line with the study's research questions, methodology, and process.

Students who identified themselves as a musician (e.g., play a musical instrument or are majoring in music) were excluded from the study. Those with advanced musical knowledge may consciously or unconsciously associate certain musical elements with emotions; excluding these individuals was an attempt at mitigating bias. Sourcing participants from untrained musical backgrounds allowed for more organic discussion, with less likelihood of any preconceived notions about the music in question.

Research Conditions and Methodology

Three conditions were created. The first, or "Major Mode" condition, contained musical elements that have been noted in the literature to conjure feelings of happiness. This includes a faster tempo and utilization of a major key (Hunter et al., 2010). The "Minor Mode" condition was written in the relative minor of the major condition, to establish a sense of control in terms of tone. It also featured a slower tempo than the previous condition, and a descending melody.

The third condition, or “Spoken Word” condition, did not contain any musical elements. The lyrics were simply read aloud to the participants.

In order to maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a number. These numbers were inputted into a spreadsheet and then randomized. Groups were evenly divided into the three conditions in the order in which they were randomized on the list.

Each research group met one time. The group was audio recorded and later de-personalized and transcribed. Following this transcription, the data was coded and analyzed (further details can be found in the Results and Analysis sections).

All participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B) prior to participation in the study. This form outlined the research questions, purpose of the study, method for data collection, analysis, and other pertinent information. The study was implemented according to the following process:

1. Sent email to SUNY New Paltz students outlining study and requesting participants (see Appendix A).
2. Reviewed potential participants in term of the exclusion criteria
3. Sent follow up email with date, time, and location of study.
4. Confirmed participants for study
5. Randomized participants into research groups.
6. Conducted Major Mode Group, Minor Mode Group, Spoken Word Group
7. Transcribed each group using audio recordings.
8. Coded based on data gathered
9. Analyzed codes and looked for connections, insights, and discrepancies.

Data Gathering

Data was gathered through semi-structured group interviews based on the participant's subjective experiences of the song. Sample interview questions can be found in Appendix C. The goal of the study was to allow the group to formulate their interpretations with as little input from the researcher as possible. Utilizing a semi-structured interview method allowed for the free exchange of ideas and interpretations, with added flexibility on the part of the researcher to use precomposed interview questions if necessary. Semi-structured group processing also allowed for the researcher to clarify points, or focus more time on specific topics deemed relevant to the study as a whole (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Each group was audio recorded. Following completion of each group, the researcher listened to the recording and a word for word transcript was written. This transcription was de-personalized to protect the anonymity of the participants. Throughout the process of transcribing, the researcher began pre-coding the data by highlighting significant quotes, words, and ideas for later use (Saldaña, 2013).

Considerations

The process of carrying out the study and its subsequent interpretation was reflexive in nature. When conducting the study, the researcher allowed the group's discussion to flow naturally, and asked follow up questions which were pertinent to the chosen topic. The participant's willingness to dialogue within the group setting affected the researcher's role in guiding in the conversation. This, subsequently, affected the analysis of the data. The data analysis process will be expanded up and explained below.

Data Analysis

The process of pre-coding was the first step in analyzing the gathered data. The researcher coded in an attempt to search "for the right word or two that best describe

conceptually what the researcher believes is the meaning of the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 217). A list of these codes was created. Coding was a reflexive process, and the researcher continually wrote analytical memos. These memos served as documentation of the researcher’s process and subjective thoughts on emerging data and themes (Saldaña, 2013, p. 32). These memos also highlighted suggestions and thought processes of the thesis advisor.

As the analysis unfolded, comparative analysis of similarities and differences between specific conditions were explored (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Themes and concepts were developed in response to this analysis. The researcher utilized a color coded coding method, in which significant comments, details, and ideas were taken verbatim out of the transcription, placed into a spreadsheet, and further coded into categories or themes. Specific care was taken to understand the context in which these themes begin to emerge. The researcher attempted to link emerging themes to the context in which they were created, through a reflexive process of writing memos, and re-analyzing codes and data.

Following the analysis, the researcher attempted to develop implications for the practice of music therapy based on the insights that emerged from the data. The following section will detail the results of the study and the five content areas which emerged from the discussion.

Results

This section will present the salient points of discussion found within each of the groups.

Table 1, seen below, shows a breakdown of the initial respondents to the study and participant attendance per group.

Table 1

Participant Data

Responses to Recruitment Email	n = 17
Confirmed for Study	n = 7
Participated in Study	n = 5
Major Mode Condition	n = 2
Minor Mode Condition	n = 2
Spoken Word Condition	n = 1

Note: Two participants dropped out prior to the study: one the night before, and one on the day of the group meeting. This left a small sample size, and a condition which consisted of one person (the Spoken Word condition). The study took place on December 7th, 2019, in SUNY New Paltz's College Hall.

Table 2 gives a brief description of the content areas found within each discussion. These areas will be more fully defined and expanded upon in the subsequent sections.

Table 2

Discussion Content Areas

Content Area	Relevance
The Narrator	Interpretation of the narrator, or singer
Lyric Interpretation: The Promise	Interpretation of the "purpose" of the piece
Emotional Interpretation	Interpretation of emotional content
The Role of the Music	Interpretation of the role music played in analysis
Participant's Point of View	Interpretation of point of view as catalyst for analysis

Major Mode Group

This group consisted of two individuals in different stages of their academic careers; one was a first semester freshman, and the other was a graduate student. Their conversation was robust, free-flowing, and reflected the differences in their worldview and life stages. This section will discuss significant themes and topics of discussion which occurred during their session. For clarity's sake, the songwriter or singer will be referred to as "the narrator."

The Narrator

Discussion immediately focused on the narrator's intention behind the lyrics. Participant A stated they believed this song was about "coming of age" and "finding [their]self." The idea of "going off to college" was referenced four times during the discussion, by both participants.

Participant B, while agreeing with A's assessment, stated their initial impression "was that it was a song about dying." The narrator's journey, in their view, appeared to be "out of their control;" the chorus lyrics *I'll get back to you* were interpreted as metaphorical rather than literal. To bolster their interpretation, Participant B cited the line *can't keep my feet on the ground* as an illusion to "rising up." The theme of death was the most discussed topic during the discussion, with five direct references being spoken.

By the end of the discussion, both participants were able to see the value in each individual interpretation.

Lyric Interpretation: The Promise

Participants discussed the narrator "searching for something" and the role the narrator's sense of identity played in crafting the lyrics. Much like the previous theme, the narrator's journey was at the forefront of the discussion; however, participants cited the vague lyrics as being open to interpretation, which could be a result of the narrator's feelings of uncertainty.

Participants stated the narrator may feel “overwhelmed” by their situation and where the narrator’s journey may lead.

The chorus lyrics, which repeat the words *I’ll get back to you* multiple times, were seen as a “promise” which may or may not be kept. This repetition was seen as procrastination on the part of the narrator. Additionally, one participant stated the strumming of the guitar after the chorus signified the passage of time; this was the first direct musical reference discussed during this group.

Emotional Interpretation

The overall emotional content of the song was both directly and indirectly discussed. The uncertainty and open ended nature of the lyrics led participants to call it “sad.” The “pace” of the song was directly cited, with one participant stating the tempo led them to believe the song was written as “a departure.” Overall, words and phrases with subjectively negative connotations were stated more often than overtly positive ones.

When presented with a lyric sheet, one participant stated they saw “more hope” in the lyrics than simply listening without the written component. They stated their first listen, without a lyric sheet, brought up more of an emotional, sad response than the subsequent listen, in which they were able to follow along.

The Role of the Music

During the discussion, the conversation organically shifted to the music itself, and whether or not a different musical presentation would have changed their interpretations. Participants discussed a “rock version” of the song, and how the lyrics in that context could be interpreted as “unsettling,” “intense,” and “annoyed.” Again, the repetition of the chorus was cited as evidence of the change in tone when hypothetically presented in a different musical context. The acoustic guitar seemed to soften the impact of the written words, allowing for a

different interpretation to emerge. Participants stated the acoustic guitar lent a sense of intimacy to the song, and the “tapering off” of the music at the end of the piece fostered a deeper sense of uncertainty.

Participants’ Points of View

Both participants discussed how their perspectives shaped their interpretation. Participant A, in particular, seemed to personally relate to many of the lyrics, stating “sometimes life just gets so fast... I feel like I’m projecting myself onto this song.” Participant B, a graduate student, stated they were interpreting the song “looking backwards,” while Participant A, a freshman, was “looking forward.” This statement appears to be in line with the participant’s drastically differing interpretations of the song.

Minor Mode Group

This group consisted of two individuals of a similar age and demographics. The conversation was a stark contrast to the Major Mode group; participants seemed to be more withholding with their interpretations. Significant themes and discussion topics will be outlined below. For the sake of clarity, the songwriter or singer will be referred to as “the narrator.”

The Narrator

Participant C stated they interpreted the song as being about “growing up and time passing.” The narrator, in their view, was “too much in her own world” and needed to take time to reflect. Participant D focused more on the future, discussing the “responsibilities” the narrator may now be wrestling with, citing the lyric *the world ain’t small at all* as evidence of the narrator’s widening worldview.

When discussing the recipient of the song, participants stated the narrator may be growing out of a relationship. As the discussion progressed, their interpretations changed from the song being about “family and friends” to later being about a romantic relationship. One

participant stated the narrator may be getting “emotionally... distant” due to her other responsibilities.

Lyric Interpretation: The Promise

Participants cited specific lyrics which led them to believe the narrator was uncertain about their future, with one stating the narrator needed to “rethink everything.” The repetition of the chorus was brought up as indicative of “a promise;” both participants stated that the narrator will try to keep their promise, but were uncertain of whether or not that will actually occur.

Emotional Interpretation

Participants used the word “sad” five times in reference to this song. Overall, phrases and words with a subjectively negative connotation were brought up more often than those with positive connotations. Participants appeared to frame the passage of time as causing distance between the narrator and the recipient of the song. This distance has caused a strained relationship between the two parties; a strain the narrator acknowledges and wants to work through. This sentiment is reflected in the repetition of *I’ll get back to you*.

Role of the Music

The simplicity of the song’s arrangement, most notably the acoustic guitar, was referenced multiple times during the session. Participant C stated it was “a very simple song but it had a lot of meaning,” before segueing into their interpretation of the lyrics. This may show the role the sparse instrumentation had in bringing the lyrical content to the forefront. This inference is bolstered by a comment made by Participant D, in which they stated acoustic guitar was “all it needs” to get the lyric content across.

The topic of presenting these lyrics within a different musical context was also discussed. When the topic of a “dance” version was posited, one participant thought the song would be more about empowerment, stating, “It’s not as sad... it’s like, things need to get done.”

Participant's Point of View

Both participants related to specific, but different, aspects of the song. Participant C cited the lyrics *life can go anywhere, so many roads to take* in relation to applying to colleges and feeling “stuck.” Participant D discussed losing touch with friends as they progressed through life. For both participants, the theme of change appeared to be at the forefront of their minds when shaping their interpretation of the song.

Interestingly, when asked directly whether their interpretation had changed as a result of having the discussion, neither felt they had been influenced by the other. This is notable as it is clear through analysis and coding of the transcripts that participants at times agreed with, and built upon the other's interpretation.

Spoken Word Condition

A potential participant for this group backed out of the study at the last minute. This resulted in one participant and a truncated discussion. Themes from the interview will be discussed below.

The Narrator

The participant framed the narrator as someone worried about “growing distant” from a significant person in their life. They described a struggle, exacerbated by time apart from the recipient of the song. The narrator, in this participant's view, is trying to “reconnect with the past,” whether that be a specific person or time period. The participant also discussed the narrator's journey; in their interpretation, the narrator is changing, but wishes to return to an earlier time.

Emotional Interpretation

The participant used subjectively negative terms more often than positive ones when describing the narrator's thought processes and intention. The participant felt the narrator felt guilt about their circumstances, and classified the lyrics as "sad."

Role of the Music

As this was the spoken word condition of the study, the participant was asked to imagine what the music would sound like, in their opinion. The participant stated it would be "soft.. kind of like a lullaby." The idea of these lyrics being presented within the context of a rock song was brought up; the participant stated a "happy kind of beat" might shift their interpretation of the lyrics overall.

When asked about the repetition of the lyrics in the chorus, the participant cited the preceding lines, *this world is spinning fast, but if you give me a chance, I'll get back to you* as "beautiful," and stated the repetition fit the composition as a whole.

Participant's Point of View

The participant did not disclose their personal connection, if any, to the lyrical content of the song. This was probably a byproduct of this being an individual experience as opposed to a group. As the researcher attempted to remain neutral to the discussion, the participant did not have another person to bounce their ideas off of. This question and answer format seems to have led to a more straightforward discussion of the text in itself, rather than the more unstructured discussions of the previous groups.

Discussion

As outlined in the previous section, the process of individually analyzing each group brought forth a distinct set of content areas for further discussion. This section will attempt to address each content area and explore the similarities and differences between each condition's interpretation of the piece. Subjective inferences will be made regarding the "why" of differences of opinion found when comparing the groups (see Table 3). Each area will be elaborated on in further detail.

Table 3

Discussion Content Areas

Content Area	Relevance
The Narrator	Interpretation of the narrator, or singer
Lyric Interpretation: The Promise	Interpretation of the "purpose" of the piece
Emotional Interpretation	Interpretation of emotional content
The Role of the Music	Interpretation of the role music played in analysis
Participant's Point of View	Interpretation of point of view as catalyst for analysis

The Narrator

Each group devoted a good deal of time to discussing the narrator's intention in writing this song. For the most part, each group's interpretation of the narrator was in line with one another. The idea of the narrator's growth and change was explored in both the Major Mode and Minor Mode groups. The Major Mode group was split between two unique and differing interpretations: "coming of age" and death. They discussed their differing views on the narrator's uncertainty about the future, framing their thought processes through objectively different stories. It is important to note while their initial reactions were vastly different, both members of this group saw each other's interpretation as valid. The Minor Mode group had a similar interpretation to the Major Mode, discussing the idea of "growing up and time passing" as the

central idea portrayed in the piece. Both groups highlighted the changes the narrator was going through as out of the narrator's control. The Major Mode group used this as evidence of the idea of death, while the Minor Mode group discussed the growing responsibilities that were leaving the narrator "too much in her own world."

The individual in the Spoken Word Condition had a more subjectively negative interpretation; they stated the narrator was "growing distant" from a significant other. This sentiment did come up in both the Major Mode and Minor Mode group, but it was not at the forefront of their interpretations. The Major Mode group, for example, discussed the narrator's "procrastination" in regards to reconnecting with the recipient of the song. The "guilt" the Spoken Word condition believed the narrator was expressing about the strained relationship was not expressed by either the Major Mode or Minor Mode groups. This is interesting, as the Major Mode group stated the narrator needed to "figure things out," and the Minor Mode stated the narrator needed to "rethink everything." So, while the Major Mode and Minor Mode group interpreted the narrator of the song in roughly the same way as the Spoken Word condition, their interpretations were devoid of the emotional impact on the narrator that was expressed by the Spoken Word condition. To the Major Mode and Minor Mode group, the narrator's intent was, in some ways, more neutral. This subtle difference may be a result of the presentation of the song; without a musical component, the Spoken Word condition may have focused more fully on the words and intentions written on the page. The Major Mode and Minor Mode groups were tasked with not only discussing the words, but also the music to craft their interpretations of the narrator.

Lyric Interpretation: The Promise

The intention of the narrator, most notably the "uncertainty" expressed within the lyrics, was further explored within the groups. In particular, the Major Mode and Minor Mode group

discussed the chorus lyrics “*I’ll get back to you*” as “a promise” the narrator was making to the recipient of the song. The Major Mode group described the “promise” as something the narrator wishes to keep, but is unsure if it will be kept.

One member of the Minor Mode group had a slightly different initial interpretation, stating more definitively that the narrator will “come back to” the recipient of the song. However, later in the discussion, when asked directly about whether or not they believed the narrator would keep their promise, both members of the Minor Mode group shifted their response to a more uncertain one. This is notable, as it appears over the course of the discussion at least one of the participant’s interpretations had shifted from definitive to uncertain. This change shows that group members can be unconsciously influenced by one another’s interpretations within a group setting.

While the Spoken Word condition did not explicitly use the word “promise,” they discussed the narrator’s desire to “go back” to an earlier time, in which the narrator and recipient were together. When asked about the chorus repetition, the individual stated it “goes with the composition” and cited *this world is spinning fast, but if you give me a chance, I’ll get back to you* as particularly meaningful. This stanza is, from a subjective point of view, very closely related to the idea of the promise made between the narrator and the recipient.

Overall, it appears as though all three conditions interpreted the essence of the song in a similar way. This is further evidenced by each condition’s interpretation of the recipient of the song. The Major Mode and Minor Mode groups were in agreement that, while the recipient is open to interpretation, they believed the narrator was speaking to a friend or a family member, rather than a romantic partner. The Spoken Word condition stated interpreted the song “more as a romantic thing, but it could be a friend.” All three conditions made a point to note the ambiguity of the lyrics, and how both interpretations of the recipient could be possible.

Emotional Interpretation

The emotional content of the song was interpreted very similarly across groups. All three used the word “sad” when categorizing the emotional content of the song. The majority of all three conditions’ sentiments and comments were subjectively negative. This is interesting to note, as the other prevalent ideas discussed, including growing up, coming of age, finding yourself, etc., are not inherently negative. It appeared as though the chorus repetition of *I’ll get back to you* played a significant role in the group’s interpretation. The emotional salience of the rest of the piece, regardless of musical composition, seemed to take a backseat to the “procrastination,” “passage of time,” or “guilt” perceived in other areas.

The Role of the Music

The music itself was cited by both the Major Mode and Minor Mode group as adding to the emotional content of the piece. The Major Mode group, as discussed earlier, noted the strumming of the guitar following the chorus as signifying the passage of time. Additionally, the “tapering off” of the music at the end created a sense of uncertainty. The Minor Mode group stated the acoustic guitar was “all it [the song] needs” to get the lyric content across. Both groups stated the music fit well with the lyrics. This is notable, as these groups had similar overall interpretations of the song as a whole, with some slight differences. This may imply that the musical elements and chord structure within the song did not play an overly significant role in facilitating the groups interpretations.

This conclusion, however, is in contrast with other portions of the conversation, in which the groups discussed reimagining the song in a different musical context. The Major Mode group stated that a rock version of the song would lead them to interpret the chorus as “unsettling” and “intense,” while the narrator in their view would be expressing annoyance at the recipient of the song. Additionally, the Minor Mode group stated these lyrics presented as a dance song would be

more about the narrator's empowerment. The Spoken Word condition echoed this idea, stating a "happy kind of beat" might have changed their interpretations. While these imagined versions of the song are speculative, it is interesting to note that each distinct group discussed a different musical genre, and came to different interpretations of the lyrics based on those hypothetical scenarios.

With these contrasts in mind, it could be argued that the instrumentation of these two pieces (simply an acoustic guitar and a vocalist) may not have created a distinct enough contrast from a musical standpoint. The listener only had two musical elements to draw their interpretation from: the acoustic guitar and the vocalist. Adding richer instrumentation may have yielded a more diverse set of interpretations across the groups.

Participant's Point of View

Group members' individual points of view were discussed to varying degrees. The Spoken Word individual did not disclose their personal point of view; this is probably a reflection of being the only member in the group. Both the Major Mode and the Minor Mode groups acknowledged the roles their personal experiences had in crafting their interpretations.

All of the participants were students at SUNY New Paltz; a stage in life in which is full of change, growth, and the related issues which make up the college experience. With this in mind, regardless of musical presentation, most participants could find portions of the piece with which they personally related. For some, this meant feeling overwhelmed; for others, it meant losing touch with loved ones.

The extent to which participants were willing to disclose information about themselves played a role in both their outward interpretations of the song, and in the discussion as a whole. Certain groups were more willing to discuss their thoughts than others; this shaped the basis for their interpretations and the subsequent analysis. This is not unexpected; the participants had

never met before and it is understandable they may be less inclined to divulge personal details. Additionally, the presence of the researcher and the audio recording equipment may have added to the stress of the situation for some participants.

Limitations and Suggestions

Utilizing self-proclaimed “non-musicians” as participants had both advantages and drawbacks to the research process. On one hand, it gave the researcher an unbiased view of how a “typical” client may respond within a group session. However, it was clear when conducting the research that participants were less willing to engage with questions about the music itself. Comments on the music were often short, or redirected back to the lyrics. This suggests that those who are not musicians may shape their song interpretations by looking at lyrics first and foremost. This assertion is anecdotal, however, Hansom-Abromeit (2015) notes that lyrics are “the most concrete form of emotional expression within a given piece of music” (p. 37). With this in mind, non-musicians may feel uncomfortable talking about musical characteristics, and prefer to discuss the elements of the song they can better express. These insights are valuable; however, the resistance to discuss the music in detail was inherently a hindrance on addressing the research questions.

Conducting this study had its fair share of setbacks, the most notable being a very small data set. Overall, it appeared the differences in interpretation across groups were minimal. However, some information gleaned from the process warrants further investigation. For example, adding more instrumentation to the songs in order to further draw out the musical emotion within them may yield more meaningful results. Additionally, allowing more time for a more sizable group of participants to partake in the study would have allowed for more diverse, rich discussion to occur.

Conclusion

Conducting this study brought up some valuable questions which warrant further exploration. However, the data highlights a few key points which may be beneficial to music therapists as they craft similar music experiences with clients. Most notably, the lived experience of group members play a key role in their interpretations during song discussion. When presented with lyrics without a clear meaning, the participants in this study chose to frame their interpretations within the lens of their own lives. Some participants and groups felt more comfortable discussing these personal details with strangers; others less so. This points to the importance of familiarity and comfort between participants in a group and with the researcher or therapist. The music therapist should work to develop and nurture this familiarity, in order to find shared experiences within group members.

The role of the therapist's musical presentation as a factor impacting interpretation was less clear. Through analysis, it appears that sparse instrumentation, despite changes in mode, tempo, and dynamics, led to similar interpretations among groups. When creating musical experiences, it may be more beneficial to add more musical elements in order to invoke a specific emotional response (Hansom-Abromeit, 2015, p. 37).

For some groups, utilizing an acoustic guitar in a live setting may be counterproductive to therapeutic aims. This is clear when analyzing the hypothetical genres each group discussed. Utilizing preferred genres may lead to a more meaningful discussion between group members.

The role musical characteristics play in group song discussion experiences is an under-researched area in the music therapy field. Completing this study further showed how a deeper understanding of how music effects group participants and subsequent interpretation would be invaluable for music therapists working in a variety of clinical settings and contexts.

References

- Abrams, B. (2015). *Humanistic approaches*. In B.L.Wheeler (2015), *Music therapy handbook* (pp. 148-160). The Guilford Press.
- Baker, F. (2013). Music therapists' perceptions of the impact of group factors on the therapeutic songwriting process. *Music Therapy Perspectives, 31*(2), 137-143. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/mtp/article/31/2/137/2856843>
- Baker, F., Silverman, M., & MacDonald, R. (2016) Reliability and validity of the meaningfulness of songwriting scale (MSS) with adults on acute psychiatric and detoxification units. *Journal of Music Therapy, 53*(1), 55-74.
- Bruscia, K. (1998). *The dynamics of music psychotherapy*. Barcelona Publishers.
- Bruscia, K.E. (2014a). *Defining music therapy* (3rd ed.). Barcelona Publishers.
- Bruscia, K. E. (2014b). *Case examples of the use of songs in psychotherapy*. Barcelona Publishers.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage Publications.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. SAGE Publications.
- Dos Santos, A. (2018). Empathy and aggression in group music therapy with teenagers: A descriptive phenomenological study. *Music Therapy Perspectives, 37*(1), 14-27. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/mtp/advance-article/doi/10.1093/mtp/miy024/5222753>.
- Dvorak, A. (2016). A conceptual framework for group processing of lyric analysis interventions in music therapy mental health practice. *Music Therapy Perspectives, 35*(2), 190-198. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/miw018>.

- Erskine, R. G. (2013). Relational group process: Developments in a transactional analysis model of group psychotherapy. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 43(4), 262–275. <https://doi-org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/10.1177/0362153713515179>
- Fiore, J. (2018). A pilot study exploring the use of an online pre-composed receptive music experience for students coping with stress and anxiety. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 55(4), 383-407. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/jmt/article/55/4/383/5136440?searchresult=1>.
- Gardstrom, S., & Hiller, J. (2010). Song discussion as music psychotherapy. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 28(2), 147–156. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/28.2.147>
- Gardstrom, S., & Sorel, S. (2015). *Music therapy methods*. In B.L. Wheeler (Ed.), *Music therapy handbook* (pp. 116-127). The Guilford Press.
- Grocke, D. (2017). *Receptive music therapy*. In J. Edwards, (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of music therapy* (pp. 684-706). Oxford University Press.
- Hansom-Abromeit, D. (2015). A conceptual methodology to define the therapeutic function of music. *Music Therapy Perspectives* 33(1), 25-38. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/miu061>
- Hiller, J. (2015). *Aesthetic foundations of music therapy: Music and emotion*. In B.L. Wheeler (2015), *Music therapy handbook* (pp. 29-39). The Guilford Press.
- Hiller, J. (2016). *Epistemological foundations of objectivist and interpretivist Research*. In B. Wheeler, & K. Murphy, (Eds.) *Music therapy research* (3rd ed., pp. 250-264). Barcelona Publishers.
- Hinman Arthur, M. (2018). A humanistic perspective on intersubjectivity in music psychotherapy. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 36(2), 161-167. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/miy017>

- Hodges, D. A., & Sebald, D. C. (2011). *Music in the human experience: An introduction to music psychology*. Routledge.
- Hunter, P., Schellenberg, E., & Schimmack, U. (2010). Feelings and perceptions of happiness and sadness induced by music: Similarities, differences, and mixed emotions. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 4(1), 47-56.
- Juslin, P.N., & Timmers, R. (2010). Expression and communication of emotion in music performance. In P.N. Juslin & J.A. Sloboda (Eds.), *Handbook of music and emotion: Theory, research, applications* (pp. 31-33). Oxford University Press.
- Koelsch, S. (2014). Brain correlates of music-evoked emotions. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 15(3), 170–180. <https://doi-org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/10.1038/nrn3666>.
- Kolchinsky A, Dhande N, Park K, & Ahn Y. (2017) The minor fall, the major lift: Inferring emotional valence of musical chords through lyrics. *Royal Society Open Science* 4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsos.170952>
- Lima, C. F., & Castro, S. L. (2011). Emotion recognition in music changes across the adult life span. *Cognition & Emotion*, 25(4), 585–598. <https://doi-org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/10.1080/02699931.2010.502449>
- Lo Coco, G., Gullo, S., Di Fratello, C., Giordano, C., & Kivlighan, D. M., Jr. (2016). Group relationships in early and late sessions and improvement in interpersonal problems. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 63(4), 419–428. <https://doi-org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/10.1037/cou0000153>
- Moore, K. S. (2013). A systematic review on the neural effects of music on emotion regulation: Implications for music therapy practice. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 50(3), 198-242. Retrieved from <https://libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/docview/1441290143?accountid=12761>

- Pilgrim L., Norris J., & Hackathorn J. (2015). Music is awesome: Influences of emotion, personality, and preference on experienced awe. *Journal of Consumer Behavior* 16(5), 442–451. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1645>
- Preyde, M., Berends, A., Parehk, S., & Heintzman, J. (2017). Adolescents' evaluation of music therapy in an inpatient psychiatric unit: A quality improvement project. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 35(1), 58-62. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/mtp/article/35/1/58/2631796?searchresult=1>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Schubert, E. (2007). Locus of emotion: The effect of task order and age on emotion perceived and emotion felt in response to Music. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 44(4), 344-368. Retrieved from <https://libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/docview/223554120?accountid=12761>
- Thoma, M. V., Ryf, S., Mohiyeddini, C., Ehlert, U., & Nater, U. M. (2012). Emotion regulation through listening to music in everyday situations. *Cognition & Emotion*, 26(3), 550–560. <https://doi-org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/10.1080/02699931.2011.595390>
- Van Goethem, A., Sloboda, J. (2011). The functions of music for affect regulation. *Musicae Scientiae* 15(2), 208-228. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258173202_The_functions_of_music_for_affect_regulation.
- Wheeler, B. L. (2015). *Music therapy handbook*. The Guilford Press.
- Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2008). *Theory and practice of group psychotherapy* (5th ed.). Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu>

Appendix A**Email to Potential Participants**

Dear SUNY New Paltz Students,

My name is Michael Colleran, and I am a graduate Music Therapy student at SUNY New Paltz.

For my Master's Thesis, I am conducting a study on how musical characteristics affect lyric interpretation in a group setting. If you are 18 years or older, do not identify yourself as a "musician," and have not received any musical training in the past ten years, you are eligible to participate. This study will last approximately one hour, and will be conducted on the SUNY New Paltz campus. Participants will listen to a recorded song or poem, and take part in a small group discussion (no more than five participants, in addition to myself) of the lyrical and musical content. Your help would be greatly appreciated! NOTE: This research has been approved by our campus' Human Research Ethics Board (HREB).

Sincerely,

Michael Colleran

Appendix B**Informed Consent*****A Grounded Theory Exploration of How Musical Characteristics Affect Lyric Interpretation***

This consent is being sought for research purposes, and participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to explore how musical characteristics affect lyric interpretation in a group music therapy setting. Participants will be engaged in a small group discussion about a recorded song. This session will last up to one hour. Groups will be audio recorded; the discussion within the group will remain confidential. Following their participation, the researcher will analyze the discussion in order to develop a theory in regards to the research questions. There is no foreseeable risk or benefits as a result of participation in this study.

Name of Researcher: Michael Colleran, Music Therapy Graduate Student

University Affiliation: State University of New York - New Paltz

Telephone Number: 203-610-4833

Email: colleram1@hawkmil.newpaltz.edu

Study Location(s): SUNY New Paltz

Faculty Advisor: Heather Wagner, PhD, MT-BC

Faculty Advisor Email: wagnerh@newpaltz.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to explore how musical characteristics effect lyric interpretation, and develop implications for music therapy practice.

PARTICIPANTS

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age and a current SUNY New Paltz student. You may not participate in this study if you identify as a “musician,” or have received musical training of any kind within the past ten years. The approximate number of people who will participate in this study is fifteen.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur:

1. Participants will be randomized into study groups.
2. Participants will listen to a recording of a song or spoken lyrics. This will take about five minutes.
3. Participants will listen to the same recording, with lyric sheets provided by the researcher. This will take about five minutes.
4. Participants will take part in a discussion on the lyrical content of the song, and how the music may have affected their interpretation. This will take about forty-five minutes. This discussion will be audio recorded for later analysis. Please see the “Audio Recording” section of this consent for further details.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is no foreseeable risk in regards to this study.

BENEFITS

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study. Participation will help to further music therapy practice, which will benefit future clients.

COMPENSATION

You will not be compensated for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Human Research Ethics Board and University or government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records. All identifiable information about you will be removed, with only a code to identify you. The code that links your name to the data will be kept separate from the study data.

DATA STORAGE

Your research records will be stored in the following manner: Data will be kept on a password protected laptop in the possession of the researcher.

This information will be protected and kept confidential in the following manner: All physical study data will be kept under lock and key and only authorized research team members will have access to it. All data stored electronically will be stored on a secure network server, or on portable devices, such as a laptop with encryption (special software) and password protection. Any hard copies will be shredded and disposed of following the conclusion of the study.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the researcher at colleram1@hawkmail.newpaltz.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the State University of New York at New Paltz Human Research Ethics Board (which is a group of people who review the research to protect your rights) at 845-257-3282.

The Human Research Ethics Board of the State University of New York at New Paltz has determined that this research meets the criteria for human subjects according to Federal guidelines.

AUDIO RECORDING

Your participation in this study will be audio recorded. These recordings will stay in the possession of the researcher, and guarded through the data storage means outlined above. Your comments will not be shared with anyone. Following completion of the study, this recording will be destroyed.

Please sign below if you are willing to be audio recorded. Please note, audio recording is a necessary component of this study and if you do not consent to be recorded you will not be chosen as a participant.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation in this project is voluntary. Even after you agree to participate in the research or sign the informed consent document, you may decide to leave the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise have been entitled. I will retain and analyze the information you have provided up until the point you have left the study unless you request that your data be excluded from any analysis and/or destroyed.

SIGNATURES

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study have been explained to the above individual and that any questions about this information have been answered. A copy of this document will be given to the subject.

Signature of researcher

Date

Printed name of researcher

Appendix C

Sample Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What were your initial impressions of the song?
2. What stood out to you about the music itself?
3. How did having the lyrics provided change your thoughts?
4. Did the music play a role in your thoughts on the lyrics?
5. What specifically about the music do you think may have impacted your thoughts on the lyrics?
6. Have your thoughts on the lyrics changed as a result of someone else in the group?
7. Would you feel differently about the lyrics if the music was different? If there was no music at all?
8. What do you think (*passage from lyrics*) means?