

Exploring the role of music in grief



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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to gather descriptive information about the natural interactions between adult griever and music. The survey gathered quantitative and qualitative data and yielded a response rate of .06% (141/2547). Results revealed that the majority of participants (94%) intentionally used music during their grief journey. Unique roles of music in grief were discovered and insights were offered as a pattern emerged that reflected the Dual Process Model of Grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Future research in this area may contribute to a greater understanding of the natural interactions between griever and music.

Keywords: Music, adult grief

The role of music in grief

Music therapists have been employed by hospices for over 30 years (DiMaio, 2015; Hartley, 2013; Munro, 1984). While much of their work has been with clients who are dying, some music therapists are required to participate in their hospice's bereavement program as well (DiMaio, 2015). Not surprisingly, there is little literature concerning music therapy and grief, yet more and more music therapists are working with the bereaved (DiMaio, 2015). Most research concerning music therapy and the bereaved has focused on the effectiveness of interventions (McFerran, Roberts, & O'Grady, 2010; Tyas, 2010; Włodarczyk, 2010; Yu & Gallant, 2010; Hilliard, 2007; Hudgins, 2007; Short, 2007; Strickland, 2006; Creagh, 2004; Hilliard, 2001). While this research is valuable, it does not reflect bereaved people's natural use of music to cope with grief.

The purpose of this study was to explore adults' natural use of music during the grieving process. As children experience grief differently than adults, the present study focused on adults (Pavlicevic & Wood, 2005). As more and more music therapists find themselves working with adults who are grieving, it may be helpful to understand how adults intuitively use music to cope with grief.

Literature review

The range of bereavement services provided by music therapists varies greatly. Often, music therapists are called upon to provide music for funeral or memorial services which generally includes music that the hospice client requested during the end of his or her life. Other responsibilities may include making follow-up bereavement phone calls, providing one-to-one home visits, facilitating time-limited groups, facilitating ongoing groups, providing individual grief sessions, designing workshops, co-designing and facilitating grief camps and facilitating psychoeducational groups (DiMaio, 2015).

Many of the studies conducted by music therapists with the bereaved have lacked statistical significance in their findings, and have focused on grief in children and adolescents with limited attention to adult samples (Kammin & Tilley, 2013; Popkin *et al*, 2011; McFerran, Roberts & O'Grady, 2010; Włodarczyk, 2010; Yu & Gallant, 2010; Hilliard, 2007; Hudgins, 2007; Short, 2007; Strickland, 2006; Dalton & Krout, 2005; Okamoto, 2005; Creagh, 2004; Hilliard, 2001). However, one article is of particular importance in understanding a bereaved person's natural relationship to music during grief.

A recent study examined the role of music in the grieving processes of eight bereaved caregivers of people who died

from cancer within hospices and hospitals (O'Callaghan *et al*, 2013). The authors examined the role of music in participants' grief and reported six themes: (a) recommending music for other people who are grieving; (b) music therapy during the dying process helped continue the bonds during bereavement; (c) experiencing positive feelings when musical efforts, such as a concert to benefit a worthy cause, continued the deceased person's legacy; (d) interacting with music or avoiding music reflected the mourners' process of avoiding or confronting grief; (e) discussing how musical connections with the deceased can be purposeful or unexpected and supportive and/or confronting; and (f) remembering how music enhanced the lives of those mourned became a supportive cognitive process. The authors concluded that music was a medium for bereaved adults 'to continue their bond and forge new connections with the deceased through ongoing memory, image, and sound engagement' (O'Callaghan *et al*, 2013, p38). They also found that bereaved people's relationships with music organically reflected the Dual Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) which posited grief as a dynamic and oscillatory process wherein the bereaved at times confronts, and at other times avoids, the different tasks of grieving. This model acknowledged that times of respite from both the stresses of coping with the loss and the stresses of restoring oneself and one's life are important (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

The study by O'Callaghan and colleagues (2013) shows a foundational relationship that exists between bereaved people and music. The purpose of this current study was to gather information from a larger sample concerning the natural interactions between music and bereaved adults during the bereavement journey.

Research questions

What are the roles of music in the lives of people who are grieving? Can music be helpful during grief? If so, what music activities do people who are grieving use?

Method

Ethical approval

IRB approval was sought and given through Mission Research Institute, which is the Institutional Review Board where the primary researcher worked at the time of the study. Approval was also given from the Health Administration and the Ethics Committee of the hospice where the research took place.

Participants

Clients who received services from a hospice's bereavement program (located in North Carolina, USA) during the previous four years were included for recruitment. This list included clients where the deceased person with whom

they had a relationship died with the hospice as well as people from the community seeking grief support. Clients needed to be able to read English to participate in the survey. Clients who were bereaved for three or fewer months were excluded. All clients included were 18 years or older. Names, addresses and email addresses were obtained from a computer report associated with the hospice's bereavement department.

For clients who shared their email addresses with the bereavement department, they were contacted via those addresses and invited to participate in this survey through Survey Monkey. For clients who did not share their email addresses, a letter, including a cover letter describing informed consent, was sent along with a paper version of the survey and a pre-paid returned envelope.

1,950 paper surveys were sent to potential participants through the US postal services. Two separate e-mail invitations, sent two weeks apart, containing an embedded link inviting potential participants to complete the survey, were sent to 597 individuals. A total of 2,547 griever were invited to participate in this survey.

Materials

The researchers created their own measurement tool to gather data concerning bereaved adults' natural relationship to music during the grief process. The O'Callaghan *et al* (2013) article was reviewed when designing questions. When creating this survey, the researchers debated how to refer to the deceased. The researchers decided to use the term 'loved one'. This decision was made because the term 'loved one' was used in all written communication with the bereaved from that specific hospice. However, the authors recognise that not everyone who died was in a loving relationship with the bereaved person and that the bereaved can experience ambivalent connections and relationships with the deceased (Stroebe, Schut & Boerner, 2010).

The survey began with 10 questions meant to gather biographical information such as the relationship to the person who died, spiritual background, age of the participant, if the participant perceived him or herself as a musician and if the person who died received music therapy.

The next 11 questions were then aimed at understanding how the participants experienced music and grief. For example, did participants use music to experience the pain of grief or to avoid grief? The next seven questions were meant to understand how the participants experienced music and were related to understanding the frequency of music experiences in the participant's life. For example, did the participant go to concerts, and if so, how often?

The last two questions addressed specific interventions/roles of music in grief. Possible interventions were listed, such as listening to specific music in the car, writing a song or going to a concert and participants were instructed to check those that they had used to cope with grief. There

were two places within these last questions where the participants could select two or three interventions and comment on them if desired.

Procedure

For participants who received an email invitation to participate, the information they provided was recorded anonymously through the Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) website, and no record of personal information was recorded. For participants who received a paper invitation, the information they provided was entered into Survey Monkey by a research assistant. As there was no space on the survey document for participants' names or any other identifiable information responses, and the return envelopes did not bear addresses or any other identifying information, confidentiality was protected. Surveys were provided to the investigators in aggregate form, and the investigators did not have access to individual responses entered by the participant. Once all surveys were returned, a statistician was employed to assist with processing the data.

Results

Demographic information

A total of 141 people completed the survey, yielding a response rate of .06%. The age ranged from 30 to 94 ($M = 65$, $SD = 11.93$). More participants were women than any other gender: 111 were women, 29 were men and one person identified as being transgender. The majority of participants were grieving the death of a parent, with 34% reporting grieving for a mother and 14% grieving for a father. Many of the participants were grieving the death of a spouse or partner (42%). Other relationships participants were grieving included son, sister, friend, and brother. Of those who gave numerical values, participants reported an average bereavement period of 15.5 months since the death of their significant person ($SD = 18.92$).

Cultural identifiers were particularly interesting to the researchers, and it was hoped that the sample would be diverse. The vast majority of the participants identified as Caucasian (93%) and 4% identified as African-American. One participant identified as Hispanic, one as Native American and one as Irish. Ethnically, the participants were not particularly diverse.

However, there was more diversity within the participants' spirituality. The majority of the participants reported being Protestant Christian (66%). Other participants reported being Catholic (16%), Buddhist (2%), Jewish, (2%), Quaker (2%), and Unitarian Universalist (1%). A sizeable minority (9%) preferred not to answer the question. However, 90% of the participants considered themselves to be spiritual people. A few participants wrote comments about their spirituality, such as 'not into

organised religion but believe in God' and 'non-agnostic'. Other comments included specific church names or making a list of beliefs, such as 'Hindu/Christian/Buddhist/Sufi'. Also, the researchers were interested in whether the participants considered themselves to be musicians. The majority of participants (83%) reported not being musicians while 17% did consider themselves musicians.

Data reflecting the role of music in grief

Participants reported on various uses of music during the grief process. The majority reported music as helpful in their grief although a small percentage noted it was never or almost never helpful (8%). While the majority (68%) found some degree of comfort from music, a sizeable minority did not (12%). Similarly, in regards to the intersection of music, spirituality and grief support, the majority reported that music offered spiritual support during the grief process while a minority noted that it never or almost never provided a form of spiritual support (13%).

Patterns of the participants' relationship to music were examined. One area examined included how the participants experienced music that reminded them of the deceased. The majority (68%) reported finding comfort when listening to music that reminded them of the person who died. In addition, the majority (84%) found meaning in the same music they appreciated before the death.

Another area examined whether grievers intentionally avoided songs or intentionally accessed songs as a coping strategy. The majority (63%) reported that they did *not* avoid certain songs after their loved one's death although a small percentage noted they always or almost always avoided specific songs (8%). The majority reported using songs as a means of connecting with the deceased although a sizable percentage noted they never or almost never used songs in this manner (29%). While the majority (61%) found songs as a means of connecting to the deceased a sizeable minority did not (29%).

The final area explored possible connections between the role of music and the pain of grief and adapting to the loss. A slight majority reported they had *sometimes* used music to confront the pain of grief (43%). While the majority only sometimes used music in this manner, a sizable percentage always or almost always used music to confront pain (31%) yet another sizable percentage (26%) never or almost never used music in this form. These results are extremely close, whereas other answers had a larger disparity between the majority and minority.

The majority (70%) reported that music helped them find meaning and beauty in life since the death although a small percentage noted music did not help in these ways (16%). In addition, the majority (65%) reported that a musical experience allowed for a cathartic (emotional) release while a sizable minority never or almost never experienced this kind of musical release (24%). The majority

Table 1: Responses from survey questions

Statement	Participants' responses					
	Always	Almost always	Usually	Occasionally	Almost never	Never
I feel that music has been helpful during my grief journey.	29% 40	21% 29	19% 26	23% 32	1% 1	6% 8
I find comfort in listening to music that reminds me of my loved one.	22% 31	28% 39	19% 26	19% 26	5% 7	7% 10
I find meaning in the same music I appreciated before my loved one's death.	39% 55	26% 36	19% 27	11% 15	3% 4	2% 3
I have used music in the grieving process to intentionally connect with my loved one.	20% 28	15% 21	26% 36	10% 14	17% 24	12% 17
Music has provided me with spiritual support during my grief process.	26% 36	20% 28	17% 23	22% 30	9% 12	5% 7
There are songs I no longer want to hear since my loved one's death.	4% 6	4% 6	7% 10	22% 31	19% 26	44% 61
I have been surprised by my emotional responses to some songs I hear.	9% 13	18% 25	13% 18	37% 52	13% 18	9% 9
I have used music to confront the pain of grief.	12% 16	19% 26	14% 19	29% 40	10% 14	16% 22
I have found that music is helpful to find meaning and beauty in life since my loved one's death.	20% 27	26% 36	15% 21	23% 32	8% 11	7% 10
I have used music as a way to experience a cathartic (emotional) release.	10% 14	26% 36	14% 19	25% 35	11% 15	13% 18
I revisit the music that was used at my loved one's funeral.	8% 11	12% 17	9% 13	33% 46	17% 24	22% 31

reported revisiting music from the funeral/ritual associated with the death although a sizeable percentage noted it never or almost never did (39%). While the majority found music to be helpful in confronting the pain of grief, in finding meaning and beauty, and in experiencing music from rituals or funeral, a notable minority did not.

Table 1 displays the full responses to questions on the questionnaire. The results reflect the percentage of participants as well as the corresponding number of participants. Each participant could choose one response for each statement and not every participant responded to the statements. It is important to note the various uses of music and the range of answers. The statement that was ranked is embedded in the Table.

The experience of music and grief

Figure 1 reflects how participants used music while grieving. Eleven options were offered to the participants. The Figure lists the most 'checked' boxes to the fewest. Participants were encouraged to 'check all' that they had engaged in. These numbers reflect the number of people who found these activities helpful.

When exploring activities with music that were helpful, there was an 'other' option where participants could write an answer that was not offered. Table 2 reflects the answers that were given in the 'other' category:

Descriptive information analysis

When designing the survey, the researchers created a place where the participants could pick two or three items and comment on the role of music and grief. This allowed the participants to share their own thoughts/feelings/insights related to the subject. The section related specifically to how the participants used music in their lives to grieve. The majority (98 participants) took the opportunity to share their thoughts. One participant did not answer any of the survey questions, but wrote a letter instead. That letter was transcribed and incorporated into this analysis.

Each researcher, separately, used an open coding process (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) which began with reading the responses several times. Then each researcher created her own categories as she read the responses, constantly comparing her categories with the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Axial coding emerged

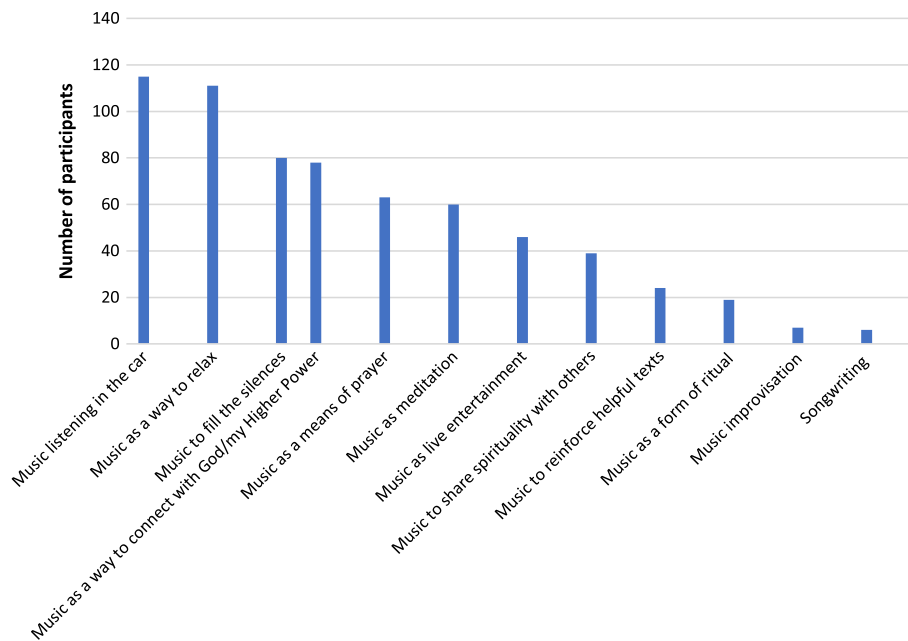


Figure 1: How participants used music while grieving

Table 2: Responses in 'other' category
Used music to feel and release the grief emotions.
Music is a time to reflect inwardly & to put words to grief that I do not have words for.
Dancing around the house.
I feel all of life experiences are enhanced by music. The grieving process deepened that experience.
Almost wishing that I had studied or learned to sing or play an instrument. I had not really had a desire for that before.
Music as expression of emotions and reconciling emotions.
Music is a daily part of my life.
Music as a life purpose, to give meaning to my life.
Music as community - in chorus and by teaching.

(Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011), where core phenomenon were created and categorised (Creswell, 2013). The researchers then completed a final reading and made adjustments to her coding system. Afterwards the researchers compared the various codes they created. They then negotiated and agreed upon a final coding system.

Codes

Six main codes were discovered. They were as follows: confronting the pain of grief, adapting to the loss, continuing the bonds with the deceased, music experiences during group supportive activities, elusive descriptions of music, and other. Subcategories were created within each main code. Each code is examined closer and has quotes from the participants embedded. Each quote is from a different participant.

Confront the pain

The researchers used language from Stroebe & Schut’s (2010) Dual Process Model, confronting the pain of grief or adapting to grief, when coding some of the participants’ responses. The researchers agreed to place the following sub-categories in the ‘confront the pain’ category: to get in touch with feelings, music as a way to connect to the ‘heart’ of grief work, avoids music because it is too painful, creating music to express grief experience, and music to experience the pain of grief.

One participant wrote ‘I avoid his music and listen cautiously to my own. Some of my music reminds me of moments with my dad and makes me cry’. This participant was mindful about when he or she listened to music. It appears that for this person, music could be a trigger for intense grief experiences.

Adapt to the loss

The researchers agreed to place the following sub-categories in the ‘adapting to the loss’ category: music to be in the here and now, a need for entertainment, finding comfort in silence, music brings comfort, a shift in the person’s relationship to music, change in how the person listens to music, music to inspire hope, music as a distraction technique, music for a new normal, socialising at music events, place to belong, shifts the person’s energy, musical connection to spirituality to cope, relaxation, and not able to tolerate silence. Music as a distraction technique was placed in this category as the researchers agreed that adapting to a loss would include both actively mourning and also finding a means of functional coping.

Grievers have many needs when adapting to their lives without the deceased. One participant spoke to how music is a flexible experience, meeting more than one need. 'Music reaches past the conscious to the essence of what's going on - soothing, stroking, revealing, stirring... and at other times as a desired distraction'. Here, the participant alluded to unconscious and conscious needs and stated that music intrinsically helped.

Another participant wrote 'At my age and from experiences along the way, I no longer separate out things about music and life, they are the same for me. Music is life and life is music'. This person's relationship to music and to living is the same. It would appear that over this person's lifetime he or she has used music to live and experience life, that music is an important part of living and therefore also grieving.

A different participant stated that 'Music soothes me when I am sad. It is 'something to do' - an activity to keep me from wallowing in the pits. I have heard that departed souls are called to be with us when we sing'. This quote speaks to the participant's spirituality and as a means of coping. For this person, and others who wrote similar comments, spirituality, and music's role in spirituality, was helpful. This participant also wrote about how being active with music transitioned the person out of the pain of grief.

Continuing the bonds with the deceased

When reviewing the comments from the participants there was a clear connection between music experiences and the bonds the participants had with the deceased. These sub-categories include: reminiscing, reference to music during dying process, music as a way to connect to deceased, and referred to music experiences during dying process.

As one participant stated 'I travel frequently in my job and music allows me to pray and express my grief on the road and at home. I listen to songs that bring me closer to God and my daddy'. This quote illustrated how the participant continued to experience a relationship with the deceased through music and was able to recognise the change in that relationship. Here again the role of music in spirituality and grief intersect.

A different participant wrote 'At my brother's bedside, it was a very beautiful and emotional experience to listen to all the beautiful Irish music that was requested and played for us. I always believe that my brother heard it too, since hearing is the last thing to leave the person dying'. A few other participants also shared a memory of music experiences during the dying process. It is important to point out that none of the questions ask about the bereaved's experience of music during the dying process, yet several participants spontaneously shared a similar experience. It appears that music from the dying process can also be important to revisit during the grieving process.

Music experiences during group supportive activities

Another category that emerged was the helpfulness of music experiences from the music therapy program at the hospice. At the hospice where the research occurred, the music therapists actively participate in the bereavement services, facilitating grief groups as well as psychoeducational and process oriented workshops on creativity and grief. Both forms of support were mentioned by several participants. Those comments were coded as music experiences during workshop and music therapy during grief groups. One participant wrote:

I prefer to be a listener and admirer of words that flow with music as the delivery system not as an active musician. Music is a personal journey that I am glad to experience in the presence of others but not share with others until I am comfortable. Music therapists have been kind and patient and allowed me space which I will always be eternally grateful for.

This participant spoke to his or her own bereavement process and the role of being a listener. The concept of listening is a unique point: it is important both in the experience of and the creation of music. Often bereaved people do not have much energy. In music, one can listen to the music experience and still be considered an active participant. Beyond listening, one participant shared this thought:

I love words and would love to be able to put my writings to music. Yet what stops me is the idea I hold that I am not a musician, after my experience in the group with Alexa I now see that truly is a possibility and something I choose to now pursue.

Alexa Economos was a music therapy intern at the hospice where this research occurred. She co-led a grief support group with a social worker for seven months. In full disclosure, she is also a co-author of this paper, yet she did not choose this quote to be a part of this paper. This quote speaks to the importance of music therapy experiences during this participant's grief process.

Elusive descriptions of music

The category, 'elusive description of music', refers to a negligible or avoidant relationship to music. Two sub-categories emerged: no motivation to participate in music and music experiences were a place where felt I did not belong. One participant wrote 'I am just kind of numb and the use of music as solace has not occurred to me. Perhaps it would be of benefit'. Here the participant appeared to have little to no relationship to music during his or her grief process. Again, this sentiment was echoed by a small number of participants.

Another participant stated 'I used to sing impromptly [sic] at home or in the car or at karaoke but now I have no inspiration to sing'. Unlike the previous quote, the participant appears to have had a relationship to music, but no longer did. Or, at least, that relationship had changed. It is possible that the loss of music is a secondary loss from the death. A secondary loss is defined as 'those losses that are a consequence of a primary loss and vary according to the individual and the contexts in which loss occurs' (Humphrey, 2009, p20).

A different participant wrote 'I used to play my harp prior to my husband's passing. He so enjoyed listening. Now I find it difficult to play knowing he's not here offering feedback and support'. This quote demonstrates how the bereaved's relationship to music was strongly tied to the deceased and therefore changed because the husband was no longer present. The previous quote appears to conflate the relationship to music with motivation. However, it is clear there was a dynamic relationship between the participant, music and the deceased husband.

Other

Finally, there were statements that seemed to not have an overarching category and were therefore placed in the sub-category of 'other'. These included: noticing silences, discussing the metaphysical nature of music, the enjoyment of listening to music in the car, and stating that the participant's relationship to music has not changed.

One participant wrote 'I can't stand the silence in the house so I turn to music'. This participant used music to mask the sound of silence. Several participants wrote about this phenomenon of not being able to tolerate silence. A different point of view of silence can be seen in this quote by a different participant 'music helps to feel the silence'. Silences or 'rest' have a powerful role in writing and performing music and, as music therapists, the authors were intrigued by this quote. Perhaps in grief, music can highlight or capitalise on silences. Silences, in grief and in music, are necessary. The role of music in grief may be to heal through the silences.

Figures 2 and 3 reflect the categories and sub-categories found from the narrative descriptions submitted during the survey.

Discussion

This research explored possible uses of music during the grief process. The qualitative aspect of the survey builds from the findings of O'Callaghan *et al* (2013). That article interviewed eight participants and shared valuable information from these intimate conversations about the participants' relationship to music and grief. From the narrative comments in this current survey, similar themes emerged yet differences were also found.

The concept of using music to 'continue the bonds with the deceased' was mentioned in both projects. Also mentioned in both projects was the idea that the bereaved use music to reflect their bereavement needs, such as in avoiding or confronting the grief. Participants in both research studies mentioned being intentional about the use of music in their grief journey. Finally, both research studies demonstrated that the bereaved found comfort in remembering that music had enhanced the lives of their loved ones.

However, the participants in this current research project did not mention a recommendation of music to other people who were grieving, although it certainly could be implied with the positive experiences mentioned. Nor did the current participants discuss 'musical efforts, such as a concert to benefit a worthy cause' (O'Callaghan *et al*, 2013, p38).

Dual Process Model

From the O'Callaghan *et al* (2013) study and this current research it appears that participants naturally used music in a manner that reflected the Stroebe & Schut (2010) Dual Process Model. Participants expressed an understanding of their readiness to confront grief through music. Where some participants avoided music because it caused responses they did not want, others found that their cathartic reactions to music were therapeutic. One participant remarked 'I feel that listening to Puccini arias instrumentally played without singing begins to express the depth of feeling that aches to surface'. Another shared that music 'helps release tears of grief'. This quote suggests that music may serve as a catalyst to support both loss-oriented and resource-oriented coping during the grief journey.

From the narrative categories, it appears participants are more likely to use music to help them 'adapt to loss' rather than 'confront the pain' of grief. This possible discovery could be attributed to the amount of time since the death. Of the reported numerical entries, the average length of time since the death was 15.5 months. It is also possible the trend reflects bereaved peoples' natural relationship to this model of processing grief. Other studies suggested that a balance between loss-oriented and resource-oriented coping were important for constructive grieving, but that this balance may change as time passes after the death (Richardson, 2007; Richardson & Balaswamy, 2001). It may be notable to add that the present study did not seek to differentiate between constructive and destructive grieving, only to report how adults naturally use music to support their unique processes.

Music

Music, viewed as multiple experiences, appears to be helpful, in some form, for the majority of the participants in this study. Musical experiences allowed participants to feel connected to the deceased, to access spiritual support, to cope

Confronting the pain of grief	Adapting to the loss	Continue the bonds with the deceased
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To get in touch with feelings •Music as a way to connect to 'heart' •Avoids music because is too painful •Creating music to express grief experience •Experience pain of grief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Music to be in here and now •A need for entertainment •Finding comfort in silence •Music brings comfort •Shift in relationship to music •Change in listening to music •Music to inspire hope •Music as a distraction •Music for new normal •Socialising at music events •Music is a place to belong •Shifts the person's energy •Musical connection to spirituality for coping •Music for relaxation •Not able to tolerate silence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reminiscing •Reference to music therapy during dying process, perceived as comfort •Music as a way to connect to deceased •Reference of music during dying process

Figure 2: Chart of categories: confronting the pain of grief, adapting to the loss and continue the bonds with the deceased

with the pain of grief, to help find meaning and beauty in the world, and to find comfort and release. Bereaved people discovered numerous means of allowing music to be a part of their grief journeys.

Bereaved people reported using music in a variety of ways. These included active uses of music such as song-writing, singing, dancing to music, improvising, singing in a choir, and teaching music lessons. Reported uses of music also included receptive experiences, which primarily describes various ways of listening to music. Music listening included listening to music in the car, at home, at a concert, individually or with others. For both active and passive interactions with music, there were a variety of reactions to music.

Yet a minority (6%) noted that music was 'never' helpful. This negative response reminded the researchers that music experiences can be unwanted during the grief process. This reminder is also echoed in the survey question asking if there were songs the participants no longer wanted to hear and 23% reported 'occasionally'. If grievers use music to naturally heal during the grief process, then the idea of trusting them to avoid certain aspects of music is important to honour. The idea of not wanting to hear specific songs

and that music is not helpful needs to be further explored to better understand this phenomenon. The idea that music is innately 'good' or 'helpful' is the foundation on which many music therapy interventions and theories are built (Edwards, 2010). Our study suggests that it may be important to consider scenarios when music is benign or even harmful during the healing process.

Without prompting, participants wrote about music and the dying process. Several participants wrote comments that referenced their memories of music during the death. Perhaps these participants needed to revisit the dying process, and music was a meaningful way to access that event.

The majority reported that they did not consider themselves to be musicians. However, most participants could experience some use of music that impacted their grief process. There was no obvious trend between being a musician and music impacting grief. Perhaps music experiences are a universal resource and more attention could be given to promoting their use during grief.

Limitations

This research is limited in several ways. The response rate of .06% is low. A total of 73 people completed the survey

Music experiences during group supportive activities	Elusive descriptions of music	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music from workshop/psychoeducational • Music therapy during grief group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No motivation to participate in music • Music experience a place where felt did NOT belong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticing silence • Metaphysical nature of music • Enjoyment of listening to music in car • Relationship to music has NOT changed

Figure 3: Chart of categories: music experience during group support activities, elusive descriptions of music and other

online, whereas 68 completed through a paper copy. A similar response rate was found for both means of gathering data. There are several possibilities for this low response rate. The survey and cover letter were not piloted before their use and may have benefitted from a trial. In addition, completing a survey about music and the grief process may have seemed unimportant or trivial. Perhaps completing a survey may have appeared to be a taxing chore for a person who had been bereaved. Finally, some possible participants could have been uninterested due to the use of the term 'loved one' if their relationship to the deceased was ambiguous.

Other limitations include who was invited to participate. Participants were limited to the community surrounding the hospice. Due to this geographic location, many cultures are not represented in this study. Therefore, issues of grief, music and culture are still under-researched.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gather more information concerning the natural interactions between music and adults during their bereavement journeys. From the findings of this research, it is suggested that music experiences may be helpful to adults who are grieving. Music could help the griever connect to the deceased, to connect to others, to avoid silences or go into silences. Music created a sacred space for griever to heal and could trigger painful emotions that needed to be expressed.

Music experiences were active practices such as singing, improvising and songwriting. However, most participants reported using music in a receptive manner, suggesting that the participants primarily listened to music in some fashion to assist with their grief. This trend of primarily using music in a receptive manner may be tied to the participants' comfort level with music. For example, since most

of the participants did not identify themselves as musicians, it would make sense that they would not actively make music.

Finally, the results of this study reveal that using music to assist with a person's grief journey is not a prescriptive process. As expected, there is not one music experience that will magically help people 'feel better'. Bereaved people use music in many forms to help themselves cope with a death. As demonstrated in the comments, bereaved people who used music did so with intentions that were unique to them. Yet, a small number of participants did not use music at all. It is important to remember that not every person has a meaningful or even positive relationship to music. However, the majority of griever in this study engaged with music in a manner that was helpful to them. Despite the variations in relationship and practice, this study suggests that bereaved people naturally use music as a resource to cope with the grief journey. ■

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