

THE MUSIC IN ME:
THE IMPACT OF MUSIC THERAPY ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN COLLEGE
STUDENTS. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY.

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

THE MUSIC IN ME: THE IMPACT OF MUSIC THERAPY ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN COLLEGE STUDENTS. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY.

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College students can be categorized as emerging adults. During this developmental time, transitions and feelings of instability and uncertainty may impact the identity development process. Music therapy groups may help with alleviating uncertainty and deepening the identity exploration process. Music therapy groups have shown to help inform and empower one's sense of self, explore individual dimensions, express needs, and improve self-esteem. The purpose of this study was to explore how music therapy sessions impacted the phenomenon of identity development. Interventions were chosen to provide various avenues and perspectives to lead to insights, awareness, and personal development. Primary interventions used were music presentations, music and imagery experiences, art making, and creation of an identity playlist.

This study took the form of a phenomenological inquiry. Semi-structured interviews guided the inquiry and the descriptions and reflections on individual experiences were used for analysis. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using an adapted form of McFerran and Grocke's (2007) seven-step procedure for phenomenological analysis. The results of the phenomenological analysis identified eight global meaning units: (a) engaging in reflection

during, outside of, and after session series completion provided opportunities to recognize self-development; (b) active participation in sessions helped with focus and afforded more opportunities for individuals to deduce meaning from experiences; (c) balancing structure and freedom within sessions was an important factor impacting participation and development; (d) group music therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced perspectives on connection and sharing, as well as created additional factors impacting identity development; (e) music can play a large role in identity development; (f) using a variety of experiences is beneficial in providing opportunities to experience different perspectives and ways to engage in the identity development process; (g) being honest with oneself and others is important for identity development; (h) emotional experiences arise from relating art and music to identity and can be factors positively impacting identity development.

Results of the study support the presence of music and engaging in various music-based and art making experiences for furthering the identity development process. These experiences provided opportunities to engage in self-discovery, increase focus and engagement, and provided space for reflection and discovery of insights. Additionally, results show a variety of factors that may positively influence identity development. The group was perceived by members as a positive experience that helped with personal development and self-care. Limitations of the study were length of time between the group and interviews, the small sample size, the small number of sessions, and inconsistent attendance in the group sessions. Recommendations for future research are to provide a longer series of sessions, include a larger sample size, and conduct interviews closer to the end of the series of sessions. The findings of this study suggest that music therapy positively impacted the identity development process of group participants.

Keywords: music therapy, identity development, emerging adults, art making

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To Dr. Melody Schwantes, you believed in this study from its first seedlings in my mind, and for that I am so deeply grateful. Your gentle nudges in the right direction and constant support enabled me to learn more about the process of research and helped this thesis to become more than I ever thought possible. To Dr. Tiffany Rikard, thank you for taking on this role despite having never met me in person (thank you COVID-19). The perspective you brought forth and the questions you challenged me to think through were deeply influential in the completion of this study.

I would also like to thank the participants of this study for their time, energy, knowledge, vulnerability, and engagement with this process. It is my hope that you feel the presentation of

your own identity development journeys is well represented within this paper. Without you, this would not have been possible.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of the friends and family who have continued to support and love me throughout the arduous and sometimes defeating journey of graduate school. To my partner, Everett, thank you for your continuous support, countless homemade meals, encouraging words, and patience while I struggled and triumphed. To my friends who helped me step away from the work and to my friends who helped me dive back into the work, you all are loved and appreciated more than words can say. To my parents for supporting me and checking in on my progress, none of this would have been possible without you.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all who are on the journey of identity development. May you find pieces of yourself in the most unlikely places and situations. May you continue to grow and learn about who you are, without fear of the unknown. May you invite music and the arts to join you on your journey. It has been an honor to briefly walk with these three individuals on their journeys.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Human identity throughout history was most often rooted in a community of others (Cote & Levine, 2002). However, in today's individualistic and white-dominated American society, identity development varies greatly from person to person (Cote & Levine, 2002). In modern day identity development, issues may arise such as (a) being unsure of what one believes, (b) being uncommitted to future action, and (c) being more easily influenced and manipulated (Cote & Levine, 2002). This researcher takes the stance that identity development continues to take place at a deeper level during emerging adulthood, a period from the late teens through the twenties, due to the increased opportunity for exploration (Arnett, 2000). The majority of college students can be categorized as part of emerging adulthood. This relatively new developmental timeframe encompasses many changes for an individual, exploration of possible life directions, a broad scope of independence, and a period of identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). It should be noted that this stage of development has only been recognized in industrialized societies and that a distinct characteristic of this stage is the lack of role requirements. There are no set demographics for this period of development (Arnett, 2000). For example, residential status, marital status, and school attendance may vary greatly from one person to the next. The multitude of distinguishing characteristics of this period of life are important factors to consider in this research with college students.

Inspiration for Research

I find it important to share the inspiration for this research. While exploring the world of music therapy, I am consistently drawn back to mental health, young minds, and the questions of “Who am I?” and “How do I engage in the world around me?” While working at a state psychiatric hospital for my internship, I led a group that focused on exploring aspects of relationships through music games. Members of the groups’ ages ranged from 22–43. The individual who was 43 attended one group meeting, without his presence the ages ranged from 22–28. While exploring aspects of relationships, such as trust, boundaries, and communication, the group also began to explore how their own age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic identity, and diagnoses impacted the relationships they form. Identity was not the main focus of our group; therefore, we did not explore identity development deeply in that setting. However, it sparked my interest in the topic of identity development, especially within the emerging adult population. As a half-white half-Puerto Rican who identifies as female, I had little support during my own identity development process while growing up in the white-dominated American society. It is important to note that I am still in this process of identity development, and still feel as though the society I live in does not support this process for me and has different expectations for who I should be and what I should do based on the color of my skin, the texture of my hair, and my last name. The lack of support I felt and feel furthered my interest in this area and strengthened my desire to provide support to emerging adults during this process. For these reasons, I embarked on the journey of this research.

Definitions

Music Therapy

As defined by the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA), music therapy is “the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program” (AMTA, 2005, para #1). This field is constantly growing and changing, striving to provide the highest level of care. The music therapy process is an experience based on relationships between a board-certified music therapist, the musical elements of the session, and the music therapy participants.

Identity Development

An individual creates their sense of self and identity through their memories, experiences, relationships, and values (Sussex Publishers, 2021). With this in mind, I view the development of identity as a lifelong process. One’s sense of self is constantly evolving based on their life experiences. There are many ways to coin this process: identity formation, self-discovery, identity construction, etc. Throughout this research paper, I will use the term “identity development.” In late modern societies, the process of identity development may raise problematic issues for the individual. The process of identity development encompasses largely three dimensions, as defined by Erikson (1968): the subjective/psychological, the personal, and the social. With varying demographic situations in each of these areas, the process of identity development may look drastically different from person to person.

Emerging Adulthood

The phrase, *emerging adulthood*, will be used to describe individuals ages 18–25, with a note that some researchers have expanded this age range to include up to 29-year-olds. Emerging

adulthood is a period in-between adolescence, typically those ages 10–19, and adulthood, which may be reached at varying ages based on subjective opinion. This period is distinct demographically, subjectively, and in the process of identity development. It is during this period of life that there are the most opportunities for exploration in love, work, and one’s worldview (Arnett, 2000). It is important to note that this period of emerging adulthood “exists only in cultures that allow young people a prolonged period of independent role exploration,” most often found in late modern industrial societies.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do college students experience identity development within music therapy sessions?
 - a. How do college students experience and describe music as part of their identity?
 - b. How do college students express their identity through varied art mediums?
 - c. How do college students describe the factors that influence their own identity development?

Chapter 2

Literature review

The role and formation of identity in modern society has become a growing field of interest. A brief literature search will provide a multitude of studies and theories in identity-related topics. For example, a PsychINFO search using the keyword “identity” results in multiple variations and related topics, including social identity, identity construction, identity formation, identity development, racial identity, gender identity, sexual identity, cultural identities, racial identity, etc. In its simplest form, identity is a distinguishing characteristic or personality trait of an individual (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

The components of identity are held within a sense of personal uniqueness from others in characteristics, abilities, interests, and/or physical attributes (Echard, 2019). The development of an identity depends in part on how we present ourselves to others and in part how we present ourselves to ourselves (DeNora, 2006). This sense of knowing who we are is a key experience in our daily lives and how we relate to others through our personal attributes and values. Chapter 2 will cover the following streams of literature as the background of the present research: identity levels and categories, emerging adulthood and identity, minority identity development, expressive arts in therapy, group music and imagery, and music therapy and identity development.

Identities

Within identity development, one must consider a multi-layered approach, recognizing the development of a social identity, personal identity, and ego identity (Cote & Levine, 2002).

Our social identities are impacted by cultural factors and our different social roles. Our personal identities then fit within the social identity and the uniqueness of self. Finally, the ego identity is impacted by our intrapsychic worlds and biological dispositions (Cote & Levine, 2002). Social identity assists in the process of defining the self both in the eyes of others and for oneself (Echard, 2019). In this sense, it is clear that the social identity development process has a direct impact on personal identity development (Albarello et al., 2018). If one looks at the process of identity development as a whole, it can be characterized by a continuous and evolving process with a commitment to remaining engaged in self-exploration and self-discovery. This is especially true during adolescent identity development (Echard, 2019).

Some literature on identity development describes identity categories. Cote and Levine (2002) labeled five different identities: refusers, drifters, searchers, guardians, and resolvers. However, they recognized that in late modern society, or in what this researcher is referring to as white-dominated societies, there are even more ways in which identities can be formed and categorized. In these white-dominated societies, identities are transitory and unstable, and the formation and maintenance of identity is often problematic and complicated (Cote & Levine, 2002). Crocetti (2017) noted the importance of commitment and exploration within the identity categories of achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and diffusion. In achievement, a commitment has been made after one has actively explored. Foreclosure suggests one has made a commitment but has not previously engaged in exploration. In moratorium, the individual is still exploring alternatives without making a commitment. Finally, in diffusion, the individual has not explored and also has not committed. Based on these four categories, Crocetti (2017) and colleagues created a 3-factor identity model. Within commitment, where one makes choices and gains self-confidence from these commitments. In-depth exploration is representative of the

extent to which people engage and think about the commitments they have made.

Reconsideration of commitment occurs when a current commitment is unsatisfactory and there is a comparison process to other possible commitments.

Emerging Adulthood and Identity Development

It is important to note the significance of this process for the adolescent and emerging adult populations. Most research around identity development as presented below relates largely to the adolescent population. While this is a limiting factor in this literature review, the ideas presented here from adolescent research can also largely relate to the emerging adulthood population.

Broad questions such as “Who am I?,” “Why do I...,” and “What do I find meaningful?” are commonplace in a still developing mind (Echard, 2019). Crocetti (2017) claimed that while developing a clear personal identity is important throughout the lifespan, it is especially important during transitional periods in which feelings of instability and uncertainty may be prevalent. Many difficulties may present themselves during this process of identity development, such as being unsure of what one believes, not committing to action, an openness that may lead to influence and manipulation, uncertainty in current identity commitments, and a continued exploration of identity alternatives (Cote & Levine, 2002; Erikson, 1968). Furthermore, in today’s dominant cultures there has been an increase of barriers to the process of forming and maintaining identity (Cote & Levine, 2002). It has been noted that specifically social identities are becoming more transitory and unstable in modern society (Foot, 1996).

Social identities may be especially challenged during the college transitional period. In this period, many students begin to try out new identities, explore their social identities, explore new skill sets, and address their shifting sense of self (Gee et al., 2019). Challenges to the

process of academic adjustment and identity development may include struggles with anxiety, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, and other stress-derived mental health issues; adjusting to living away from home; the creation of new social networks; managing finances and time; balancing social life with academics; limited input or connection with parents; and experiencing loneliness (Chouhan & Kumar, 2011; Montgomery & Cote, 2008; Quan et al., 2014; Regehr et al., 2013).

While identity instability is becoming more prevalent, Erikson (1968) recognized an identity crisis as normal development or part of everyday life, and Becht et al. (2016) found patterns of identity uncertainty across adolescence. Therefore, a primary journey embarked upon is finding balance in the conflict between identity and identity confusion (Crocetti, 2017). One study found that late adolescence individuals were more likely to go into in-depth exploration (Klimstra et al., 2010). Another study by Meeus (2011) found that continuous progression in identity development was more prevalent than regression and that the formation of identity is a lifelong process. However, Meeus (2011) also found that many people do not change their identity once it is formed, especially in terms of ethnic identity.

Racial and Ethnic Minority Identity Development

The term “minority” has been used to describe those of an ethnic, racial, sexual, religious, or linguistic minority population. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will be reporting on systematically marginalized and excluded individuals based on ethnicity and race. It was beyond the scope of this research to include other systematically marginalized and excluded populations. There is a growing recognition of the importance of including minority identities within academic research and literature. Within university settings, at least 20% of minority students report bias incidents (including both verbal and physical aggression) while on campus in

spite of “diversity-positive institutional change” (Grieger & Toliver, 2001). However, access to cultural resources for minority students is greatly hindered in comparison to majority students. At the time of transitioning to a new school (i.e., college), and often a new geographical location, the new social and environmental contexts often trigger a deeper identity development exploration (Erikson, 1968). As there are limited resources for minority students, the process of developing one’s ethnic identity can be a highly individualized and potentially lonely process. However, Hatter and Ottens (1998) found that the creation and maintenance of a core ethnic identity through a regular interaction with similar others may facilitate more positive experiences. It is therefore important for college and university systems to strive to provide more resources and opportunities for connection for their minority students. Some resources that may have a positive influence on ethnic identity development are “scholarly lectures, student clubs, and other organized activities centered on ethnicity, race, and social justice” (Zhou et al., 2019). As one’s search and reflection on their identity continues, often a deeper sense of commitment to an ethnic identity is formed. Zhou et al. found that another important factor to consider in the process of ethnic identity development is the influence of race and parental ethnic socialization.

Interventions

With a background of what identity development is, how it is experienced in emerging adulthood, and how systematically marginalized and oppressed individuals experience this process, I will now present literature related to interventions that can be used during this process. Streams of literature presented below are visual arts in music therapy, group music and imagery, music therapy and identity development, and music therapy interventions.

Visual Arts in Music Therapy

Using multiple art mediums in therapy sessions may provide more diverse vehicles for developing insight, encouraging individual growth, and experiencing catharsis (Talerico, 1986). The use of visual arts in a therapeutic setting is beneficial in that they may help to bring the unconscious to the conscious (Gupta, 2020). As the unconscious becomes physically visible in an art form, it allows for deeper awareness and may provide an opportunity to confront the reality of the issue or thought. Furthermore, the creation of art is an exploration of the self through the senses rather than through thoughts. This “process of self-education” through art making is more important than the value of the final product (Boldt & Paul, 2010; Talerico, 1986). This process-focused orientation assists in grounding individuals in the here and now, focusing on the present experience, and releases the need to produce and achieve (Boldt & Paul, 2010).

The visual and expressive arts deal with universals, and this aspect is important when engaging with the arts in a group therapeutic setting (Talerico, 1986). When immersing oneself in their own artwork as well as the artwork of others, the experiences held within the art are relived by all. Through this reliving, one can identify with aspects that feel familiar as well as identify those that are unfamiliar (Goodyear, 2018). Creation through various artforms may lead to individuals feeling more empowered to participate and becoming more assured in their ability to make a difference (Gupta, 2020).

Group Music and Imagery

The Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) is defined as “a music-centered, consciousness-expanding therapy” in which a trained therapist selects “classical music sequences that stimulate journeys of the imagination” (AMI, n.d.) Four modified forms of GIM are

recognized: music and imagery, group music and imagery, group guided imagery and music, and short GIM sessions (Grocke & Moe, 2015). In Group Music and Imagery “there is no guiding by the therapists and clients listen to the music and image in silence” (Grocke & Moe, 2015, p. 22). The goals of the session will vary based on group goals and needs. The length of the imaging session is determined by the therapist based on the goal of the session, the music choice(s) to match the goal, and an assessment of the individual needs and imaging readiness and ability of all members. Modified GIM sessions have been used to address anxiety and stress, depression, increase self-esteem, self-expression, self-concept; to expand self-awareness; to confront emotions; to find inner safety; and more (Band, 2019; Beck, 2019; Clarkson, 1994; Fugle, 2015; Gregoire et al., 1989; Papanikalaou, 2015; Powell, 2007; Skaggs, 1997; Weiss, 1996).

Summer (2019) stated that it is important to first foster a sense of trust and unity within the group before engaging in group imaging. Furthermore, for in-depth work to take place, a sense of community must be the foundation. The therapist should emphasize the potential richness of the experience, citing the insights that may be gained and the variety of moods that may be explored (Grocke, 2019). When choosing a focus image, a simple and positive image presented in a hopeful way may help to foster feelings of safety and positive self-esteem (Grocke, 2019; Summer, 2019). The simplicity of the prompt may also make it easier for group members to describe their imagery experiences in ways that can be understood by all group members. The music used in group music and imagery sessions will be the common denominator of the imaging experience, containing and focusing the images (Summer, 2019). Once the imaging is complete, a discussion should take place. During this time, the therapist should encourage the group members to share emotional or personal insights and provide questions as prompts when needed (Grocke, 2019). The therapist’s role after is to reinforce positive

experiences and, time permitting, implement a technique that will encourage continued group unity and expression (Summer, 2019). Some techniques that may be beneficial are songwriting, improvisation, creating a work of art, or writing individual poems to be turned into a group song.

Music Therapy and Identity Development

Many music therapists have explored the maintenance or development of identity with adolescents and emerging adults. A PsychINFO search in 2020 for identity and music therap* provided plentiful results (e.g., music and identity, music as a structuring resource for identity formation, professional identity, musical identities, identity and self-esteem, self-identity, identity work, developing identities, etc.). This connection may stem from the concept of music as a form of expression, both to express the self and to gain knowledge about others (Lawendowski & Bieleninik, 2017). The shared experience of making music in dialogue with others can inform one's sense of self and often fosters a sense of equality which has the potential to empower this sense of self (Burland & Magee, 2014). Furthermore, Aldridge (1996) suggested that music is a metaphor for identity.

Within dialogue with others, one tests, creates, and confirms understandings of who we are as individuals (Kruger, 2019). It is through the process of connection with others that we gain the opportunity to expand our sense of self and develop our identities further. It is understandable then that exclusion, isolation, emotional difficulties, or long-term diseases may deeply impact the ability for self-expression (Lawendowski & Bieleninik, 2017). Through musical connection, one introduces, consciously or unconsciously, their individual dimensions.

Music therapy also holds space to maintain and develop a musical identity. This musical identity holds both individual identity and social identity in that it helps us to understand ourselves while also providing opportunities for others to see/hear us (Lawendowski &

Bieleninik, 2017). Music provides an opportunity for individuals to express their needs. It is a way of creating and presenting the self as something we “know” (DeNora, 2000). Adolescents frequently use music to assist in the development of their own emotional framework and to engage in a creative process to understand human relations (Gold et al., 2012). Through well-planned music interventions, one can begin to abandon negative self-images and work on improving self-esteem (MacDonald & Miell, 2002). It is important throughout the process of engaging in identity work to maintain a safe psychological and physical space as the work involves letting down one’s guard on multiple levels, being vulnerable, and diving into deeper levels of one’s psyche (Goodyear, 2018).

Music Therapy Interventions and Identity Development

One music therapy intervention commonly used for identity development is musical presentation. As defined by Amir (2012), Musical Presentation “is a therapeutic tool for the purpose of increasing clients’ and students’ knowledge of self and others via presenting their music” (p. 176). The music shared is chosen “by the client/student according to their importance and meaning in their lives, to be played in a music therapy group and receive feedback from their peers.” Musical presentations serve as both a reflection of identity as well as a way to express our current sense of identity (Amir, 2012). Furthermore, the process of creating a musical presentation can serve as a means of identifying or creating aspects of identity. Bensimon and Amir (2010) stated that there are four stages of musical presentations that can assist in the expansion of self-awareness: preparation, playing, sharing, and processing.

Songwriting is also a common music intervention used to explore identity. Through the act of songwriting, writers find space to explore, question, and even challenge the sense of their own identity (Baker & MacDonald, 2013). It has also been found that group songwriting is

especially impactful in a student wellbeing context because of the ability to create and explore social identities (Gee et al., 2019). Engaging group members in exploring their own unconscious areas of identity can be achieved through both live and recorded music (Bensimon & Amir, 2010). No matter the intervention, it is important to remember the different capabilities of differing experiences and musical materials in identity development (DeNora, 2006).

Summary of Identity Development and Music Therapy with Emerging Adults

Identity development is not a clear-cut process and involves finding balance in inner conflicts, deepening one's exploration of self, change, and empowering one's sense of self (Burland & Magee, 2014; Crocetti, 2017; Erikson, 1968). The combined use of the visual arts, group music and imagery, and other music therapy techniques in a group setting provides multiple avenues for exploring identity development. The visual arts provide opportunities to have the unconscious become conscious and the universality of the arts is beneficial in group settings (Gupta, 2020; Talerico, 1986). Group music and imagery also evokes material from the unconscious and may provide a richness in exploring one's own psyche in a unique and individual way (Grocke, 2019). Music therapy techniques provide ways to express our current selves, challenge this sense of self, and assist in the expansion of self-awareness (Amir, 2012; Baker & MacDonald, 2013; Bensimon & Amir, 2010). The use of multiple techniques to address identity development in a therapeutic setting provides a more holistic perspective on oneself and the topic at hand.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of identity development and how a series of music therapy sessions impacted personal identity development in emerging adults. This research stemmed from an interest in how individuals engage in the process of developing,

maintaining, and expressing their own sense of identity. This research was not intended to provide a method for working on identity development but rather to continue the exploration of how to engage in identity work in a therapeutic setting. This researcher's epistemological view is that knowledge is embodied, and the discovery of that knowledge is a constantly evolving process that relates closely to one's social context.

Chapter 3

Method

This chapter provides details about the method used for this study. It describes recruitment and the participants, the research design, and methods of data collection and data analysis.

Design

This study was a phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenological inquiry aims to “explore and explicate the nature of a phenomenon” to discover its essence (Jackson, 2016). All descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon are subjective in nature, representing individual understanding as opposed to a generalized truth. In this study, a semi-structured interview design guided the inquiry, generating conversation with set questions but allowing the participant to elaborate if and when needed.

Recruitment

The researcher invited members of the music therapy group, The Music in Me, to participate in the interviews for this study. The Music in Me group took place in the Spring semester of 2021 and focused on identity development. Participants were asked to share about experiences within the group, reflections during and since, their artwork and permission to share their artwork, and feelings about the group. The recruitment email is included in Appendix A.

Researcher and Participants

Researcher Positionality

The researcher believes the transparency of a researcher's positionality is essential to any study. I, the researcher, am a half white and half Puerto Rican who identifies as a Hispanic, neurotypical, non-disabled, heterosexual, cisgender woman. I am a board-certified music therapist writing this thesis in pursuit of a Master of Music Therapy degree. As a clinician, I operate from an eclectic approach involving elements of existential, person-centered, and analytic approaches. I view myself as a learner while operating as a therapist, meaning I do not view myself as an expert. While conducting this research, I operated as both therapist and researcher. These roles are congruent in the sense that my philosophical stance remains the same. Furthermore, while approaching this study from a phenomenological perspective I take the epistemological stance that knowledge is both created and found.

Participants

Four undergraduate and graduate equivalency students participated in The Music in Me group. One undergraduate member only attended one session and therefore was not included in the interview process. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 23 and all three participants identified as female. The researcher invited the three participants to participate in post-session interviews. During these interviews, the researcher gave participants the opportunity to choose how to be described for this study, including the option to use a pseudonym. All interviews took place and were recorded on Zoom.

The members chose to introduce themselves as follows: H is a sophomore, elementary education major at the University. In the future she wishes to pursue more in volunteering and

teaching overseas. M is a cisgender Christian female who is in graduate school at the University. L is a 20-year-old University student who lives in the local area.

Arts Based Avenues in the Group

During The Music and Me, participants chose how to incorporate arts-based experiences. Most frequently, participants chose to make artistic responses after song presentations. Art forms included drawing, painting, creating jewelry, and poetry. For a final encompassing reflection and presentation during the group, participants were given the option to create individual identity playlists or create a group song. One member was not present for this session and therefore the other two members chose to create individual identity playlists as they thought it would be more considerate of their peer's absence.

Sources of Data

The primary source of data for this study was each participant's interview. Specific sources of data from the interviews include participant reflections and thoughts on the group and how they experienced identity development, descriptions and reflections on their song choices and music presentation, descriptions and reflections about their arts-based responses to music presentations, and descriptions and reflections on imagery experiences.

Interviews

The researcher invited members from the music therapy group, The Music in Me, to participate in a semi-structured interview to share their experiences of participation in this group, to offer descriptions and reflections on the music and art-based experiences, and to discuss their personal identity development. The three subsections below describe in further detail topics that were discussed during the interviews. Interviews were conducted over Zoom. The researcher recorded, transcribed, and deleted them after they were transcribed. De-identified transcriptions

remain in the possession of the researcher. See questions for the semi-structured interview in Appendix B.

Interview Descriptions of Song Choices for Music Presentation. During the group that took place in Spring of 2021, participants shared songs in response to prompts given by the therapist. After presenting their song, group members were invited to share more about the song, why they chose it, and any other information that felt important to share. During the interview process, the participants were again be asked to share about their song choices, what felt meaningful about the song, and any other important information. These interview descriptions were used for analysis. Related information shared by each participant during the interviews are included in Chapter 4.

Interview Descriptions of Artwork. After some music presentations, music and imagery experiences, and other music-based experiences during the group from Spring 2021, the participants chose to do an artistic response to a peer or their own experience. Participants were given the option to share their artwork with the group during the session. In the semi-structured interview, they were again be invited to share this artwork with the researcher for the purpose of presentation with the results. Artwork was categorized based on analysis of their descriptions of the art. Shared and fitting artwork is included in Chapter 4.

Interview Descriptions and Reflections on Imagery Experiences. Imagery experiences were used during the group from Spring 2021 to address identity issues including exploring past, present, and future identities and exploring themselves with and without boundaries. During the interview, descriptions and reflections on these experiences were documented for analysis and are included in Chapter 4.

Ethics and Consent

This study was approved by the University's IRB on September 27, 2021. Participants determined how to share their own identifying information, and all other information was excluded from the research presentation and from advising discussions. Participants read and signed a consent form for the interviews. The consent form is shown in Appendix C.

Furthermore, the researcher sent the interview questions (see Appendix B) to participants approximately 24 hours in advance of the interviews.

Data Analysis

The data from interviews were analyzed using an adapted form of McFerran and Grocke's (2007) seven-step procedure for analysis within a phenomenological framework. This procedure found its roots within writings of others, specifically within the more structural approach presented by Giorgi (1975) through the Duquesne School of Empirical Phenomenology. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed word for word (Step 1), then the researcher identified the key statements from each transcription (Step 2). During this stage, only information related to the research topic was included and all information was recorded on a second document in chronological point form. During the third step, the researcher combined McFerran and Grocke's (2007) third and fourth steps into one in which meaning units were created. Themes and subthemes were identified and categorized for each interview.

The fourth step, sending interview transcripts and meaning units to each interviewee, was included to increase trustworthiness and validity within this process. Trustworthiness in a study supports that the "researcher's interpretations of the data are credible or ring true to those who provided the data" (Anderson et al., 2007, p.36). Member checking, along with continuous

consultation with the thesis advisor, increased the trustworthiness of this research. In step four, two members approved the meaning units, and one did not respond to the member check.

After this correspondence, the meaning units from all interviews were compared to find common, significant, and individual themes as they related to the research questions (Step 5). For the purpose of this research study, the definitions of the three themes from McFerran and Grocke's (2007) sixth step of analysis are slightly modified. Common themes are those that were created from the analysis of all participants' interviews in the study. Significant themes are those created from two participants. Individual themes are those created from only one participant. From these themes, global meaning units (GMU) were created. Finally, the researcher compared these GMU's to discover the distilled essence of all interviews and their relation to the research questions (Step 6).

Based on descriptions given during the interviews that were then analyzed as described above, the researcher included artwork created by participants who had consented for their work to be shared, where appropriate, under the meaning unit categories mentioned above. The artwork was included to provide a different view of the process of identity development in college students and to further support the use of the arts in this process.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter details the findings from the interviews. Each global meaning unit (GMU) is presented along with common, significant, and individual themes as supported by direct quotations from members. These GMUs and themes are outlined in Table 1. This chapter will conclude with the final distilled essence of the collective phenomena from these interviews.

Table 1

Global Meaning Units and Themes Derived from Participant Interviews

GMU 1: Engaging in reflection during, outside of, and after session series completion may provide opportunities to recognize self-development.	Group members notice changes within themselves across the sessions and since the sessions have concluded. (Common Theme 1) Reflection and processing during interviews brought about more insights and recognition of development. (Common Theme 2) After group experiences and realizations within sessions, members may be implementing or ready to implement changes in their lives. (Significant Theme 1) Sometimes, change is scary and uncomfortable. (Individual Theme 1)
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Table 1 Continued

<p>GMU 2: Active participation in sessions helps with focus and affords more opportunities for individuals to deduce meaning from experiences.</p>	<p>Creating art after a music-based experience helped with focus and made experiences, realizations, thoughts, and ideas more tangible and “real.” (Significant Theme 2)</p> <p>Music and imagery experiences may help ascribe meaning to current life. (Significant Theme 3)</p> <p>One-to-one session led to more focus and movement toward restructuring and reevaluating self. (Individual Theme 2)</p> <p>Art-making experiences are active but calming. (Individual Theme 3)</p>
<p>GMU 3: Balancing structure and freedom within sessions is an important factor impacting participation and development.</p>	<p>Members felt able to participate however they wanted/needed. (Significant Theme 4)</p> <p>There were varied expressions of authenticity and engagement within the sessions. (Common Theme 3)</p> <p>Balance is an important factor in identity development. (Significant Theme 5)</p> <p>Group size and setting are important factors impacting participation and development. (Significant Theme 6)</p>
<p>GMU 4: Group music therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced perspectives on connection and sharing, as well as creating additional factors impacting identity development.</p>	<p>Experiencing connection is an important influencing factor regarding identity development. (Common Theme 4)</p> <p>There were varied experiences of sharing personal experiences outside of the session. (Common Theme 5)</p> <p>Music therapy is a free and safe place to explore oneself. (Significant Theme 7)</p>
<p>GMU 5: Music can play a large role in identity development.</p>	<p>Music experiences led to learning more about oneself and recognizing oneself within music. (Common Theme 6)</p> <p>Instrumental music provides a unique way to explore one’s identity. (Significant Theme 8)</p> <p>Songwriting provides an opportunity for freer self-expression and may help bring the unconscious to the surface. (Individual Theme 4)</p> <p>The group used music for self-learning and transition. (Individual Theme 5)</p>

Table 1 Continued

<p>GMU 6: Using a variety of experiences is beneficial in providing opportunities to experience different perspectives and ways to engage in the identity development process.</p>	<p>Members were able to find parts of self through collaboration and connection in music. (Common Theme 7)</p>
<p>GMU 7: Being honest with oneself and others is important for identity development.</p>	<p>Members found meaning when reflecting on and/or creating art after the initial experience. (Significant theme 9)</p>
<p>GMU 8: Emotional experiences arise from relating art and music to identity and can be factors impacting identity development.</p>	<p>Honesty within sessions and with oneself is a factor impacting further change, development, and awareness. (Common Theme 8)</p>
<p></p>	<p>Environments that foster open-mindedness and support is an important factor to being open and honest within the group setting. (Significant Theme 10)</p>
<p></p>	<p>Personal emotional states influence participation and interpretation of sessions. (Common Theme 7)</p>
<p></p>	<p>Emotional experiences arising from reflection often played a role in furthering identity development. (Significant Theme 11)</p>
<p></p>	<p>Individual internal emotional states were reflected within group experiences. (Individual Theme 6)</p>
<p></p>	<p>Reflecting on an emotional experience in a session led to recognition of growth and change. (Individual Theme 7)</p>
<p></p>	<p>Experiencing hope impacts change and identity development. (Individual Theme 8)</p>
<p></p>	<p>Experience of beauty and meaning within sessions. (Individual Theme 9)</p>

GMU 1: Engaging in reflection during, outside of, and after session series completion may provide opportunities to recognize self-development.

Common Theme 1. Group members notice changes within themselves across the sessions and since the sessions have concluded. All three group members spoke to noticing changes within themselves. M spoke about a change she noticed in herself related to music,

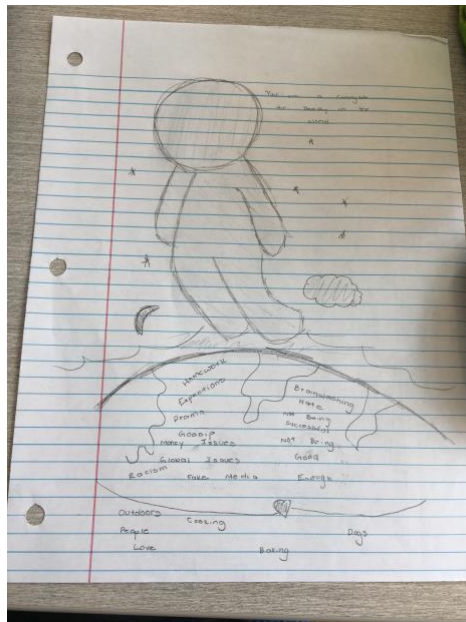
stating that throughout the sessions she slowly lowered her wall of only using music as a tool and began to take the time to create or listen to music with others and engage in discussion about the music shared. M also shared that the group was impactful on her entire semester, raising her mood and increasing self-awareness. Recognizing that since the sessions ended, she had experienced “a lot of life change” that allowed her to focus more on herself than before.

H also acknowledged changes in herself since the sessions, noting specifically that she was currently doing a lot of things that during the sessions she was only hoping to be able to do (ex: outreach, volunteering, going places by herself). This acknowledgment of change came up while discussing the drawing she made after the past, present, and future imagery experience.

The following is a picture of this drawing:

Figure 1

H's Past, Present, and Future Drawing



Note: Drawing is on lined notebook paper and drawn in pencil. There is an outline of a body, with no facial feature or extra details. Next to the body is written “You are a catalyst for beauty in the world.” Also surrounding the body are drawn stars, a crescent moon, and a cloud. Below the body is a half drawing of the earth. Inside the earth these words are written: “Homework, Expectations, Drama, Gossip, Money Issues, Global Issues, Racism, Fake Media, Brainwashing,

Hate, Not Being Successful, Not Being Good Enough.” Then a line with a heart is drawn across the page. Below this line are the words “Outdoors, People, Love, Cooking, Baking, Dogs.”

L recognized that she was “significantly better at identifying” parts of herself than she was when she completed the opening questionnaire. She used a metaphor to describe her process and changes in identity development.

[It’s] like a blank puzzle where it’s just you’re sticking puzzle pieces together and you don’t know what shape it’s making but you know that those pieces are there. Whereas before, I definitely didn’t even have the pieces... now I’ve found the pieces, some of them, and they’re making a shape.

Common Theme 2. Reflection and processing during interviews brought about more insights and recognition of development. All members shared insights about themselves and their experiences within the interviews that had not been shared during the group. When sharing more about a song she included on her playlist representing all of her identity at that time, L expressed that she felt “less compelled” to be shy and always agreeable like she used to be. H shared that she enjoyed “looking back at the things [she] wrote and just kind of seeing [her] mindset at the time” because she was able to notice that there’s a difference in her mindset now. She also expressed that reflecting on her experiences in the group offered up a different perspective and she thought this was “cool.” M realized and shared that during the group sessions she was balancing back and forth between staying within the labels she had named for herself and going further into herself. She shared this after being asked to describe the idea of identity development.

Significant Theme 1. After group experiences and realizations within sessions, members may be implementing or ready to implement changes in their lives. Two members shared experiences of implementing or deciding to implement changes in their daily lives due to session happenings. For example, L had the experience of feeling able to speak up, take up

space, and share freely within the sessions and this experience led her to deciding to try and “emulate that from the sessions in [my] daily life with... a little more vigor.” M had a similar experience after the songwriting experience in her one-to-one session stating that she was able to implement “different little changes in [her] life.” She also shared that during an imagery experience she gained the courage to explore and let go of “safety nets” that were becoming more like boundaries. Sharing that this impacted her experience of these boundaries in her daily life, as well. M drew windchimes after a relaxation experience and the drawing led her to realize she should implement that practice into her daily life. She shared that she then began to purchase windchimes for her home and more actively engage in self-care practices. A copy of this drawing was not shared with the researcher.

Individual Theme 1. Sometimes, change is scary and uncomfortable. M shared that during an imagery experience when her boundaries fell away, it felt like she did not have an identity. She said this was a “change that at first was scary” because of the lack of her identity. She also expressed that at the beginning of the sessions she was staying “surface level” and did not yet feel comfortable to “actually like [dive] in.”

GMU 2: Active participation in sessions helps with focus and affords more opportunities for individuals to deduce meaning from experiences.

Significant Theme 2. Creating art after a music-based experience helped with focus and made experiences, realizations, thoughts, and ideas more tangible and “real.” For some, the act of creating a piece of art was beneficial for focus and for making experiences more concrete. M stated that her artwork often helped her to “focus in and pick up on what the person was saying” while also providing an opportunity to intentionally meditate on the experience. She shared that without the focus point of the artwork, she found it “difficult sometimes to stay

focused.” However, M stated that although it often helped her focus, she sometimes lost the purpose or reasoning behind the art due to her critiquing her work. L believed that the artmaking was a crucial part in her view of making her experiences real and allowing them to “exist a little bit more.” Specifically, the artwork that she created after the PPF imagery experience allowed her to view each version of herself in a different light and to gain further insights about herself. A copy of this drawing was not shared with the researcher.

Significant Theme 3. Music and imagery experiences may help ascribe meaning to current life. Some members were able to relate their imagery to their current lives, giving deeper meaning to both the imagery and their lived experience. For L, this was the past, present, future imagery. She shared that the experience was “a good gauge for where I was... in comparison to how I used to be” and she was able to look at her past self and connect it to the present in a less negative sense than she previously was able. M also shared that the past, present, future imagery experience provided a space for her to put meaning and depth into the “current live [she was] living.” She also was able to translate her experience within the boundaries-based imagery experience to her own life by recognizing that her own boundaries were keeping her confined and that she did not “have to be tied down to be safe.”

Individual Theme 2. One-to-one session led to more focus and movement toward restructuring and reevaluating self. M shared that she felt the single one-to-one session we had together was the most beneficial and impactful. She credited this partially to the fact that she felt more comfortable and partially that we had more time and freedom to explore her. Furthermore, she felt that the songwriting experience we did together provided her with something to continue thinking about and processing after the session. She stated, “It was not just an emotional release,

but it was a kind of a building, a restructuring, a moment of reevaluating and implementing different little changes in my life to continue on a new path or a new mindset.”

Individual Theme 3. Art-making experiences are active but calming. H shared that her interpretation of artmaking in sessions was that they were a relaxing experience. She also did not feel like she was forced to create anything, which she found helpful. Furthermore, she was able to continue engaging with the music experiences while creating and bring them into the present moment.

GMU 3: Balancing structure and freedom within sessions is an important factor impacting participation and development.

Common Theme 3. There were varied expressions of authenticity and engagement within the sessions. The group members shared their views on authenticity and engagement within the session, some sharing similar interpretations. M felt that she was most vulnerable and authentic during her one-to-one session and often gave her “[professional] response] in the group while H and L felt like the group was a place that they were allowed to say how they felt and be authentic. H also thought that everyone in the group was attentive, helpful, and listened without judgement. L, on the other hand, thought that the other group members were softer spoken in comparison to her “obvious” desire “to do this.” She clarified that she did not think that meant they were not interested or putting in effort. M shared that she witnessed a lot of distraction, long “monologues” from other members, and disconnected comments and responses. She thought this might be partially because we were all on our own computers using Zoom.

Significant Theme 4. Members felt able to participate however they wanted/needed. Two group members described that they did not feel “forced” into creating or participating in a certain way. L also said, “it felt less like I had to bring something super

substantial” and that experiences “didn’t feel so invasive.” H pointed out that sometimes people just want to listen and that was okay and allowed within the group.

Significant Theme 5. Balance is an important factor in identity development. The idea of balance was brought up by two group members but related to different types of balance (internal vs. external). M found that throughout the sessions she felt the rigidity and balancing act of not categorizing herself so much that her labels were causing her not to look any farther into herself. L related balance to the sessions themselves, stating that she thought there was “a good balance of structure but also personal liberty.” Stating further that she’s the kind of person that likes to be able to do what she wants but within some type of structure.

Significant Theme 6. Group size and setting are important factors impacting participation and development. Some group members spoke to the group size and how that impacted their experience. L said that she enjoyed that it was a smaller group and that it felt more effective that way (as opposed to a large group). M shared that she thought in person would have been “much more monumental” while specifically talking about the way we experience hearing music in-person versus over Zoom. As stated previously, M also felt that the one-to-one session she experienced had a longer lasting impact. The Zoom setting was also interpreted by these group members as contributing to different levels of engagement.

GMU 4: Group music therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic led to experiencing various feelings, opportunities for reflection, and created factors impacting identity development.

Common Theme 4. Experiencing connection is an important influencing factor regarding identity development. All group members described varying levels of connection and group cohesion within the group and contributed these experiences to their experience of

identity development. H thought that everyone seemed comfortable and just wanted to “get to know each other and just support one another.” She also said the group was very interactive which was helpful and showed that people were caring. L expressed a similar view, stating that she found collaboration was a helpful tool in finding out more about herself. M, on the other hand, felt like there was less interaction over Zoom and that there was “a bit of awkwardness with interactions.”

Both H and L shared their experiences of isolation and lack of connection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the group, H found different forms of support and a way to experience connection without being face-to-face. L decided during the group that she would “only let COVID drag [her] down so much” and that some of her music choices were giving her back excitement.

Common Theme 5. There were varied experiences of sharing personal experiences outside of the session. H and L did not share their own in-session experiences with others. H said she did not feel like she had to share because she took the experience and “treasured it.” L said she did not share with family because she does not “like talking about that with those people in my life” and not with friends because the “feeling of isolation was just really getting to [her].” M, on the other hand, shared with family and her personal therapist, despite stating that she “wouldn’t think a lot about the sessions in between.” She said that sharing experiences helped her to remember them better and that hanging her artwork up on the wall was an act of self-care.

Significant Theme 7. Music therapy is a free and safe place to explore oneself. L found that she felt able to “take the space a little bit” within sessions and that she was able to “share things that [meant] a lot to [her].” This, she shared, had been something she struggled with but felt comfortable exploring the act of sharing freely within the group. She also felt that

what she shared was “caught or at least seen by someone,” acknowledged, and “got a name.” H said that “music therapy is a safe space to be translucent in your thoughts and reflect.” She also recognized that seeing things from a different perspective was beneficial.

GMU 5: Music can play a large role in identity development.

Common Theme 6. Music experiences led to learning more about oneself and recognizing oneself within music. All of the group members spoke about learning more about themselves through music. M specifically mentioned the songwriting experience from her one-to-one session, stating that she was able to “find realizations about [herself] that [she] might not have had” and that the experience as a whole was “very beneficial.” L shared a similar sentiment: “I really liked the way that music was being used to kind of help me get to these realizations...” H shared that there were some songs shared where she felt her thoughts were being “triangulated” onto the music and that songs were able to explain a lot about her that she didn’t know, even if it was describing things she hadn’t experienced yet. When sharing more details about the songs chosen for their final playlists, all of the group members expressed feeling like parts of themselves were represented in the music and/or that they found out something about themselves by choosing the song to describe a part of their identity. When asked how music impacts her identity development, M shared that she uses music for “self-awareness and self-discovery.”

Significant Theme 8. Instrumental music provides a unique way to explore one’s identity. L and H both felt that instrumental music offered a chance for them to “speak for [themselves]” (H). L said that “words tend to occupy a lot of space” but within instrumental music, more space is given and therefore the “words, if you will, the story” is able to come on its own.

Individual Theme 4. Songwriting provides an opportunity for freer self-expression and may help bring the unconscious to the surface. The songwriting experience used in the one-to-one session with M was a big point of discussion for her. She contributed part of its meaningfulness to the fact that music is “a big way [she] can communicate to people.” Furthermore, she felt that the process helped to bring unconscious thoughts and emotions to the surface and allowed them to form in the song. She spoke about being able to verbally manipulate what she says in order to block or change what her emotions are saying. However, it was “harder to do that on the spot” in that experience and it was “an easier way for [her] to let out what [she] can sometimes get trapped in with [her] own vocabulary.”

Included below are the lyrics created during this songwriting experience:

Which way will she choose?
Behind is disappearing. Discover what's ahead.
If she could see, would she still choose that path
Or would she fly away?
Does it even matter

She stands at the threshold.
She looks but doesn't move.
Behind her there's nothing left.
She must choose to walk on.
If she could see where she goes, could she get to know,
Or does it matter anyway?

Individual Theme 5. The group used music for self-learning and transition. When asked how she might describe the group to someone else, M said it was a “social group where the focus is transitioning” and “learning of the self” and we used music to accomplish those tasks. She also felt that the music was used mindfully and that she was able to use it as “a tool” to “discover parts of [herself].”

GMU 6: Using varied types of experiences and techniques was beneficial in providing a larger perspective and more opportunities for engaging in the identity development process.

Common Theme 7. Members were able to find parts of self through collaboration and connection in music. All group members shared that hearing others music and motivations was beneficial in their own self-discovery process. L said that she felt more able to “sift through the fog of other people’s opinions” and decide with which parts of them she connected and recognized as a part of herself. H also shared that being open minded while listening to people’s interests and music was a beneficial way to connect and learn about others and herself. M shared this realization from the sessions: “I learned that I can use music to help myself become aware, or I can allow others and their music to penetrate me and allow myself to find discovery of myself. My identity.”

Significant Theme 9. Members found meaning when reflecting on and/or creating art after the initial experience. As stated in other themes, M found that the artmaking was a beneficial way for her to become more focused. L also found meaning within one of the artmaking experiences, using permanent markers (instead of a medium that could be manipulated further) led her to the discovery that she can “handle ... moderate spontaneity.” Furthermore, she was also able to find deeper meaning and connection with others while creating art. For example, when she was creating an artistic response to one of M’s music presentation, she discovered that she did not feel like she could capture “the grandiosity” of what M had shared despite thinking that what M shared “was more concrete.” Below is the image that L drew:

Figure 2

L's Artistic Response to M's Music Presentation



Note: Drawing is on a square piece of paper and is done in pencil. Centered is a depiction of a woman with long bangs and her hair in a ponytail. Her body is positioned with her looking to the left. Behind her are drawings of mountains. On the forefront two, crowns are drawn on top. On the furthest two, two crosses are drawn. In between the two furthest mountains is a large sun with beams and a cross drawn on top.

GMU 7: Being honest with oneself and others is important for identity development.

Common Theme 8. Honesty within sessions and with oneself is a factor impacting further change, development, and awareness. Group members experienced honesty impacting their identity development. L exercising her ability to speak freely and honestly within the group led to a shared experience that was viewed and seen by others. This encouraged her to continue to “make the effort” and “do it... And I did it!”

H specifically stated that “really feeling the honest truth” greatly impacted her development and that honesty itself is a big part of identity development. She said, “in order for something to develop, you have to really figure out what’s gonna change... ‘cause I think if you’re not honest with yourself, it’s just going to go back to how it was.”

M reflected on remaining “surface level” and only “giving enough so that I’m trying... but I’m not unloading my personal turmoil” during the first few group sessions. She also stated that she occasionally is just “faking it until [she makes] it.”

Significant Theme 10. Environments that foster open-mindedness and support is an important factor to being open and honest within the group setting. Both L and H felt that the support and open-mindedness of other group members impacted their willingness to share and engage in the group process. L said that the group felt “less daunting” and that she would not “be punished in a negative way” for openly sharing. H said that she felt everyone was “attentive to the words and actually like soaking it all in” which helped her to feel a sense of honesty and genuineness.

GMU 8: Emotional experiences may arise from relating art and music to identity and may be factors impacting identity development.

Common Theme 9. Personal emotional states influence participation and interpretation of sessions. M’s comfort level in the one-to-one session was higher than in the group sessions and this led to her feeling that the one-to-one session was more impactful. H feeling relaxed and not forced to engage, led to experiencing the sessions as calming and helpful. L decided that she would be “vulnerable” and “basically just give this whole emotional vulnerability thing a shot” and this helped her to be more involved and feel “less weird” within the sessions.

Significant Theme 11. Emotional experiences arising from reflection often played a role in furthering identity development. M imagined herself dancing within an imagery experience and later stated that “dancing is freedom.” She also shared that her experiences within the sessions were “very impactful” on her semester and “raised [her] mood” and awareness of

self. L said that although sharing her song choices with the group was “nerve wracking” she was able to focus less on the anxiety and more on the fact that she really liked the song. She also noticed that reflecting on her past self within an imagery experience “didn’t feel so like icky and ugly and like uncomfortable.”

Individual Theme 6. Individual internal emotional states were reflected within group experiences. M shared that while engaging in an artmaking reflection, she began to scribble all over the page and lost the point of the artmaking. She said that her “scribbles were like just [her] being frustrated” because she was criticizing her artwork while drawing. An image of this drawing was not shared with the researcher.

Individual Theme 7. Reflecting on an emotional experience in a session led to recognition of growth and change. When asked about an experience in which H shed tears, she said that it was “good to talk about and just let it like destress.” However, she said that although she “was probably feeling a lot” in that moment, “over time [she] healed from that.”

Individual Theme 8. Experiencing hope impacts change and identity development. L shared twice about how feeling hope and optimism is important to her. One time was while reflecting on her past self, stating that the experience made it “easier to deal with” and that gave her hope that she will not always be “trying to repress it.” When talking about one of the songs on her Identity Playlist, she said that she would like to be in a similar headspace with “unbridled type of optimism and certainty that things would be okay.”

Individual Theme 9. Experience of beauty and meaning within sessions. H frequently shared that she sees beauty and meaning in life, “even [in] the little things like the little conversations that we had in the sessions.” She wrote the following poem in response to group members sharing a song to introduce themselves to the group:

Beauty In The Minds

Beauty.
There is beauty in the minds of others.
Thoughts that are so elegantly crafted like a temple.
Yet, every stumble makes us humble.

The melodies of our music dance in our heads like a perfect ensemble.

Beauty is in the things you do.
Beauty is in the things we see.
Beauty is you.
Beauty is me.

Final Distilled Essence

From the perspective of these three college students, participation in the music therapy group, The Music in Me, positively impacted their identity development. The use of various interventions, including music and imagery, art making, music presentations, and playlists, provided varied perspectives and more opportunities for members to engage in their own development process. The use of music was deemed “powerful” and an essential part of their self-learning. Group members experiencing connection and collaboration, especially in the inherently distant times of the COVID-19 pandemic, was a critical factor influencing participation and continued development. Additional important factors were being honest with oneself and others and the size and setting of the group. Furthermore, engaging in a reflective process assists in furthering insights and influencing change.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore college students' lived experiences of identity development and how music therapy sessions impacted that development. The results of this study show that college students positively experience progressive identity development in a music therapy setting. Using a variety of experiences to explore this topic was beneficial for their development process. Additionally, they believed the presence of music was essential in their process. The group meeting during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their experiences of connection and continued development. Other factors impacting development were honesty with self and others as well as the group size and setting. In this chapter, the results will be summarized, and each research question will be answered. This section will also include recommendations for future research in this area. Finally, limitations of this research study are presented, and conclusions are offered.

Each research question will be considered separately in the following discussion. The sub questions will be addressed first in order to build the foundation for the final discussion of the overarching question.

How do college students experience and describe music as part of their identity?

This research question is answered by GMU 5: Music can play a large role in identity development, and Common Theme 6: Members were able to find parts of self through collaboration and connection in music, from GMU 6. All of the group members shared various ways that music has impacted their identity development and how music is a part of their identity, similar to how Aldridge (1996) proposes that music is a metaphor for identity. When

asked about individual songs on their Identity Playlists, members described in detail how and why it was chosen and what meanings they ascribed or gained from the song.

Members attributed some of their identity development processes to music experiences such as songwriting, use of instrumental music, and music presentations. The first of these may provide a space to freely communicate through music without the ease of manipulating language, like with spoken word. This is similar to Baker and MacDonald (2013) finding that songwriting is a space to explore, question, and challenge one's identity. Furthermore, songwriting as a form of creation and expression may allow unconscious thoughts and emotions to make themselves known. This is similar to Gupta's (2020) finding that visual arts may help to bring the unconscious to the conscious. Instrumental music may provide space for individuals to explore ideas and self without a preconceived idea. The impact of instrumental music, versus non-instrumental music, was not discussed in the previous studies presented. The last of these, music presentations, has many layers in which individuals can engage in their identity development process. The opportunity to share one's own music choices may help to foster group cohesion and a sense of safety and freedom within the group. The act of receiving and hearing others' music may assist in discovering parts of one's own identity, previously unknown or uncovered. This is supported by Kruger's (2019) finding that through connection with others, individuals expand their own sense of self and are provided the opportunity to further their identity development. Overall, the presence of music in sessions and one's own life may assist in increasing mindfulness and self-awareness, provide opportunities for increased self-realizations, and afford time for collaboration and self-discovery.

How do college students express their identity through varied art mediums?

This research question is answered by Significant Theme 2: Creating art after a music-based experience helped with focus and made experiences, realizations, thoughts, and ideas more tangible and “real”; Significant Theme 10: Members found meaning when reflecting on and/or creating art after the initial experience; and Individual Theme 3: Art-making experiences are active but calming. Within sessions, members created using various forms of art including drawing with pencil, drawing with markers, writing poems, creating a melody on guitar, writing a short song, and creating a bracelet. The freedom to create with any material available was beneficial in providing a sense of freedom within expression and engagement. Furthermore, the lack of being forced to create was beneficial for the same reason. The freedom to choose one’s own art making materials was not an influencing factor discussed in the previous studies presented. However, Boldt and Paul (2010) support the importance of releasing the need to produce and achieve while creating art.

Including art making activities in group sessions may assist in increasing focus, engagement, and provide a space for non-tangible experiences to become tangible. Furthermore, these experiences led to further insights and personal development. Bold and Paul (2010) support a process-focused orientation to art making that leads to a similar state of focus and presence in the here-and-now that group members experienced. The act of sharing about and reflecting on artwork, both in the sessions and in interviews, helped individuals find deeper meaning. Finally, art making experiences may provide a space for intentional meditation and relaxation.

How do college students describe the factors that influence their own identity development?

Many of the GMUs contribute to answering this research question, including GMUs 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8. In short, the factors described were related to the group size and setting, feelings

experienced or discovered within the group, experiences of being with others, and sharing outside of the sessions. There were a few factors reported to influence identity development in the group. The size of the group was important for some members, noting that the smaller size felt more “effective.” Additionally, group versus individual sessions influenced focus and participation, the feeling and expression of comfort and authenticity, and for some impacted the amount of discovery within sessions. Previous studies such as Kruger’s (2019) support the use of group settings that foster connection with others. However, no studies previously presented discussed identity development in one-to-one settings. The COVID-19 pandemic influenced feelings of isolation and connection, both of which were reflected in the identity development processes in the group. Group settings and experiences may provide opportunities for individuals experiencing isolation to discover different avenues of support and motivation. Furthermore, as supported by Lawendowski and Bieleninik (2017), engagement levels and self-expression within the group may have been impacted by long-term isolation and the accompanying emotional difficulties.

Members who experienced hope for the future were likely to express a desire to continue engaging in their identity development process. In terms of group cohesion, those who feel comfortable, supported, and able to collaborate with others contributed these things as helpful in discovering more about themselves. Those who did not feel a sense of connection with others in the group were less likely to engage, be authentic, and learn more about themselves. Over time, however, those who did not feel connected experienced a change in feeling more open and connected within the group.

The final factor discussed was the act of sharing with others. This relates to the feeling of connection experienced within the group but goes beyond that into being connected outside of

the group. Individuals who find deep connection and support within the group may decide they do not need to share their experiences beyond the group. Those who feel less connected and supported may find sharing with others to be of high value, increasing the meaning of experiences and increasing self-discovery. Sharing with others is not a topic found in previous studies of music therapy and identity development.

How do college students experience identity development within music therapy sessions?

This over-arching research question was answered in part by all GMUs. However, the predominant GMUs discussed here will be GMUs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8. Opportunities for reflection, relating experiences to current life, finding balance, experiencing safety, and engaging in and reflecting on emotional experiences all contributed to experiences of identity development within the music therapy group. While experiences varied, these ideas can be condensed to expressing a need for reflection, connection, and emotional engagement in music therapy sessions.

Opportunities for reflection and discussion afford an opportunity for individuals to notice changes within oneself as well as describing and finding further insights. Reflecting on an experience in a tangible way, such as art making, may assist in making emotion states real and furthering the identity development process. Music making and sharing one's music preferences is also a beneficial way to engage in emotional expression and development. Amir (2012) similarly found that music presentations are a way to engage in expressing one's current sense of identity. Furthermore, use of metaphor, musical or otherwise, may help individuals describe experiences and gain further insights. Engaging in reflection in order to relate and experience to one's current life may help ascribe deeper meaning and insights to lived experiences. The importance of space and time for reflection found in this study is not mentioned in other studies.

This may be because other studies were looking at in-session experiences only and did not include inquiries about outside reflections and processing.

Individuals in music therapy who experience a freedom to share and openly express oneself may lead to a deeper engagement in sessions and implementation of changes in their lives outside of the sessions. Additionally, providing a safe environment for individuals to feel comfortable in expression is important for group cohesion and individual identity development. This is supported by Goodyear's (2018) statement that throughout the process of engaging in identity work it is important to maintain a safe psychological and physical space. This safe space may assist in letting down one's guard, being vulnerable, and diving in deeper. For those who do not feel comfortable initially, encouraging a continued sense of group connection may assist in the individual becoming more open, receptive, and engaged in the process. Furthermore, finding balance within oneself as well as in the group sessions is important for providing both structure and a sense of freedom. Burland and Magee (2014) similarly found that finding balance in inner conflicts is a part of the identity development process.

Limitations and Recommendations

Limitations of the study included the length of time between participation in the group and the interviews, the small sample size, the number of sessions, and inconsistent attendance to sessions. Trustworthiness and the lack of participant demographic information were also limiting factors. The length of time between the sessions and the interview was roughly 5 months. The final session occurred on May 4th, 2021 and the interviews took place between the 4th and 13th of October. The extended time in-between might contribute to the interviewees' ability to recall information about the sessions. Conducting interviews shortly after the final group session may be beneficial in providing more detailed data. Conducting interviews shortly after the final

session and again 3 or 6 months after the final session may provide details on the long-term effects of music therapy groups on identity development.

The limited number of participants and the number of sessions provided was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic world presented challenges to recruiting members, keeping group members, and providing enough structure for meetings to encourage consistent attendance. The GMUs and themes generated from the interviews were limited by the small sample size. Further studies with larger sample sizes are needed to show whether these results are consistent among emerging adults. Additionally, providing a longer series of sessions may provide both more in-depth data and meaningful experiences for the participants. One of the participants said, “further research should definitely be considered going forward.”

Although trustworthiness was influenced by the member checking stage of data analysis and continuous consultation with the thesis advisor, it is important to note that the findings were based on interpretations of only one researcher who also served as the therapist. For future studies, separating therapist and researcher may increase trustworthiness. Furthermore, including more member checking within the analysis process may deepen the validity of the findings. Additionally, the researcher did not gain approval to share participant demographic information. Although this information was shared during for the group, *The Music in Me*, it was not shared for the purpose of this study. In future research, it would be important to gain permission to share that information as it may influence data analysis, interpretation of results, and the discussion of findings.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of identity development and how music therapy sessions impact this development. Three college students shared their

personal experiences of identity development within the context of a semester-long music therapy group. This included reflections on music, art making, and factors influencing development. Results showed that the presence of music and engaging in varied music-based experiences provided opportunities to engage in self-discovery and development. The addition of art making experiences to sessions assisted in increasing focus, engagement, and provided members with opportunities for deeper reflection leading to further discovery and insights. Results also showed a wide variety of factors that may influence identity development for college students. Overall, the group was perceived as a positive experience, as beneficial to personal growth and self-care, and as having a positive impact on the semester. More research and group and individual music therapy sessions should be made available for college students to help provide more access to safe spaces for personal exploration and identity development.

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Appendix A
Recruitment Email

Dear [Music in Me member],

I hope you have had a great summer and that classes are going well for you so far! I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a semi-structured interview about your experience in the music therapy group “The Music in Me” last semester. As part of my master’s in music therapy, I am writing a thesis about the process of identity development in music therapy sessions. More specifically, I am interested in your experiences of this process.

I plan to hold the interview meetings over Zoom or in person, depending on your preference. I will attach the consent form to this email for you to review.

Please respond to me at your earliest convenience if you are interested in participating so that we can schedule a time to meet. Feel free to respond to me with any questions or concerns you may have; I’d be happy to speak with you in more detail about my research goals and the interview process.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kathryn Santiago, MT-BC

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. For presentation in the research study as well as for the thesis defense, how would you like to be described? What pseudonym, or letter, would you like to be referred to by?
2. In relation to your playlist:
 - a. Discuss each song (or the most important songs to them) and its meaning/purpose for being on the playlist
3. In relation to the imaging experiences: (Prompts from sessions: Past, present, and future self)
 - a. Describe your experience, what felt meaningful, what did you learn about yourself in this experience, etc.
4. In relation to the music presentation (MP) experiences: (Prompts from sessions: Your introductory song)
 - a. Describe how it felt to share the song(s) and your interpretation of the song with the group
 - b. Describe the meaning of the song to you then vs. now.
5. Thank you for bringing in some of your artwork that was creating after MPs and imaging experiences
 - c. Discuss your process for making this art. What did it mean to you when you created it? What does it mean to you now? What factors in your life at the time of its creation were influencing what was created?
6. Describe the most impactful music experience. What stood out to you?
 - d. If already mentioned, prompt further. Ex: What stands out to you about that experience for you now?
 - e. What experiences were the most beneficial to you?
7. How did you participate in music therapy? How did others participate? Did you notice anything about the different levels of engagement in group members?
8. Outside of the music therapy sessions, what thoughts did you have about what happened in the sessions? Did you notice any times when you thought about or reflected on the sessions? Did you share any of your experiences with important people in your life?

9. Reflect on your answers in the opening questionnaire (Referring to the following questions: What do you think identity means? How would you describe your identity? How do you think music impacts your identity?). Where are you now compared to that? What has changed and what has stayed the same? How would you describe your identity now?
10. The group focused on identity development. How would you describe the idea of identity development in your own words using examples from your own experiences?
 - f. What music stands out as being important to this process?
 - g. What artwork stands out as being important to this process?
11. How would you describe the music therapy group to others who were thinking about participating in a similar experience? What do you think they might want to know?
12. Is there anything else you feel is important to share?
13. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

The Impact of Music Therapy on Identity Development in College Students: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Researchers:

Kathryn Santiago, MT-BC, Principal Investigator (PI)

PI Contact Information: santiago km1@appstate.edu, (843) 610-3803

Faculty Advisor: Cathy McKinney, MT-BC, PhD.

FA Contact Information: mckinneych@appstate.edu, (828) 262-6444

Researchers Statement:

We are inviting you to be in a research study. This form gives you information to help you decide whether or not to be in the study, such as the purpose of study; the procedures, risks, and benefits of the study; how we will protect the information we will collect from you; and how you can contact us with questions about the study or if you feel like you have been harmed by this research. Please read it carefully. You should ask any questions you have about the research and, once they are answered to your satisfaction, you can decide whether or not you want to be in the study. Being in the study is voluntary, and even after you agree to participate, you can change your mind and stop participating at any time.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of music therapy on college student's identity development. Identity development is highly individualized, and this study intends to represent this individual process.

STUDY PROCEDURES

This study involves one, one-hour interview in which we will discuss your experiences in the music therapy group, The Music in Me. The interview will take place over Zoom or in-person and consists of 13 open-ended questions. Questions will relate to music and arts-based experiences from the group as well as your own process of identity development. You may at any time, for any reason, chose not to answer a question. You will also be asked to bring the artwork you created in the music therapy group to the interview. Having the artwork present may

make it easier to answer some of the artwork-based questions. You will also be asked for consent to use photographs of the artwork in the presentation of data.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

This study may be of no benefit to you but may help others have a deeper understanding of participants' experiences of music therapy in identity development.

PROTECTION OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

The data that will be collected and stored will be confidential. Data will be kept separate from identifiers and linked with a code (a pseudonym or letter of your choice) on a University-protected computer system.

The link between your identifiers and the research data will be retained for the time period required by University policy and will be destroyed no later than one year after the end of all study procedures and analyses are completed.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your identifiable data may be examined.

All of the information you provide will be confidential. However, if we learn that you intend to harm yourself or others, we must report that to the authorities .

RETURNING RESULTS TO YOU

This study may produce clinically relevant research results. If you would like to read the results of the study, the research paper will be posted at <https://musicgraduate.appstate.edu/students/music-therapy-theses-and-creative-projects> after December of 2021. Additionally, the Principal Investigator will be defending this research in December, you will be sent an invitation to attend this event if you wish. Attendance is not required and there will be no repercussions for not attending.

USING YOUR DATA IN FUTURE RESEARCH

The information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

RESEARCH-RELATED HARMS

In the event of study-related distress, contact the Principal Investigator or the Faculty Advisor using the contact information provided on the first page of this consent form.

By signing this document, you are not waiving any legal rights that you have to act against Appalachian State University for harm or injury resulting from negligence of the University or its investigators.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty and you will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have.

If you choose to take part in the research, you can change your mind at any time and stop participating.

If you agree to participate but decide later that you don't want to be in this study, please let the researcher know. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as someone taking part in research, please contact the Appalachian State University Office of Research Protections at **828-262-4060** or **irb@appstate.edu**.

The University IRB approved this study by expedited review on 9/27/2021.

Subject's statement

By signing below, I volunteer for this study and agree that:

- The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me;
- I have been informed of the risks of participation;
- The study is voluntary, I do not have to participate, and I can withdraw at any time;
- I have been given (or have been told that I will be given) a copy of this consent form to keep.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and was able to get all of my questions satisfactorily answered;
- If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form.

**Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date _____

Copies to: Researcher
 Subject

Appendix C

Opening Questionnaire

Please answer all information you feel comfortable sharing with the music therapist. This form is confidential and will only be viewed by Kathryn..

Name: _____ Date: _____
Preferred Name (if different from above): _____
Preferred Pronouns: _____
Age: _____
Native Language: _____
Ethnicity/Cultural Identification: _____
Race: _____
Year in School: _____
Major: _____
Email: _____

It's okay for the music therapist to email me about (mark all that apply)

Group meetings Related announcements
 Related resources. Future semester groups

Answer the following questions to the best of your ability. This information will be collected and used by the music therapists to plan sessions based on the needs of the group and to learn from changes over the semester.

Using this scale ...

Almost Never	Infrequently	Sometimes	Often	Almost always
1	2	3	4	5

... answer how often you agree with the following statements:

	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.					
I am kind to myself when I feel stressed.					
When I have a bad day, everything feels hopeless.					
I have healthy and helpful ways to manage my stress.					
I am managing attending school from home during the COVID-19 pandemic well.					
I have healthy and helpful ways to express how I'm feeling.					
I enjoy being in school.					

What kind of music do you like (genre, songs, artists, etc.)?

What is your relationship to music?

What brings you to this group?

What are you hoping to gain from this group?

How do you experience stress?

Rate your average daily stress on a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest):

What do you do when you're feeling stressed?

What do you think identity means?

How would you describe your identity? (Include aspects of your identity you feel comfortable sharing)

How do you think music impacts your identity?

Has music helped shape your identity? If yes, how?

Have you been in therapy before? If yes, include if it was an individual or group setting.

Any other information you feel is important to share with Kathryn:

Vita

Kathryn Santiago was born in Florence, South Carolina and grew up there and in Evans, Georgia. In March of 2020 she completed her full-time music therapy internship at Springfield Hospital Center, a psychiatric hospital in Sykesville, Maryland. The following May she graduated from Appalachian State University with a Bachelor of Music Therapy degree and earned board-certification as a music therapist. She returned to Appalachian State University in August 2020 to pursue her Master of Music Therapy degree with a specialty area in expressive arts therapy. While working toward her master's degree, Kathryn served as a graduate teaching assistant supervising pre-internship students in music therapy. She was awarded a Graduate Certificate in Expressive Arts Therapy in December 2021 and received her Master of Music Therapy degree in May of 2022. She continues to live in Boone, North Carolina, with her two cats and currently works as a music therapist at Northeast Correctional Facility, an all-male prison in Mountain City, Tennessee.