

ABSTRACT

WEBB, JENNIFER MAHONEY. "Has Music Saved You?" How Music Aids (in) Adolescent Grief Response. (Under the direction of Dr. Annie Hardison-Moody).

Adolescents who live through a loss experience grief in deep and sometimes traumatic ways that can be insurmountable or potentially stunting to emotional and physical growth (WHO, 2021). Because adolescents are often overlooked in their grief, they feel alone, inadequate, and unsure how to navigate this uncharted territory. There is a belief that because children are young and appear to be resilient or to not understand the true meaning of loss, they do not need the tools and attention an older individual might seek on their own. Music and music therapy are increasingly used as successful treatments or coping mechanisms for a variety of adolescent concerns. Currently, music is only sporadically applied formally in the adolescent grief process (O'Donoghue et al., 2021).

The purpose of this study was to explore how music aids adolescents experiencing grief during and following loss and to better understand how this vulnerable age group experiences music as healing during grief. Qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews of five diverse music teachers who teach music to adolescents in a variety of environments support the use of music as a conscious strategy to empower adolescents to manage and move forward through grief. In the instances of grief found in this study, there are circumstances of the sadness of having a hard day to the death of a loved one, the loss of will to live and loss of friendship, romance or relationship as an individual transitions to their more authentic self. A transition to more authentic self can be seen as a transition from one's given identity to one's authentic self-identity as in the case of gay or transgender adolescents. The phenomenon being studied is how music aids in the process of adolescents learning to (honor) carry grief following loss.

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“Has Music Saved You?”
How Music Aids (in) Adolescent Grief Response

by
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North Carolina State University
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DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to those who have gone too soon leaving children and loved ones behind. It is specifically dedicated to those who encouraged me to begin pursuit of my master's degree and who are now guiding me in how to honor love in my walk with grief.

Kelli Hill Kukura, my very best friend forever and always. Twenty-five years ago, our worlds collided, and we were two halves of a whole reunited. We learned to work together, mother together, and over the years we learned to grieve together through project upright (PU). Thank you, Kelli, for looking within my protective exterior to see me and to stand by me. You accepted me and my children unconditionally. I have unending gratitude for our forever friendship, for the gift of shared music, for joy and for the push to pursue my study of coaching and family science. No regrets. September 29, 1964 – February 17, 2021.

Joseph “Jay” Merrell Mahoney, my big brother, “growing older, but not up.” Yeah, ‘hey now’ yourself. Thank you for always showing up in the unseen ways. We learned together how to create a safe space with an open-door policy for our families and our children based on faith, love and humor. You enjoyed your music, but you really recognized the value of music and unconditional love when you provided your, then middle-school, daughter with an oboe. You modeled kindness and acceptance in your everyday encounters. I will forever miss your strategy offerings, leaning into your enormous hugs and your big love. January 4, 1964 – May 4, 2021.

Jerry David Henderson, my mentor for the better part of thirty years. Jerry, you always had a smile, humor and a better way of considering the moment. I thank you for introducing me to the light-hearted way of parenting, commitment to family and to the notion that someone can be sweeter than Eagle Brand milk. You may have been from DC (Duplin County) and globe trotted the world through your corporate work, but you showed me “God’s hands at work”

through your unrelenting commitment to saving animals at home. Thank you for always being available as my trusted adult and for encouraging me to reach. April 9, 1941 – April 16, 2021

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Hazel Lafon Wellman Spears, my great grandmother who was widowed in 1938. Widowed with three adolescent sons, she supported her young family as a wedding singer. Grandma Hazel, you understood the value of music well into your later years as you mailed me monthly checks to pay for my own music lessons when I was a teenager. You lived to be 100. It has been 32 years since you passed, but to this day, I can close my eyes and see the wisdom of your hands on the keys of the organ as I hear your voice confidently singing "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses." December 18, 1889 – February 23, 1990.

BIOGRAPHY

With family roots in Kentucky, Jennifer was raised in Eastern North Carolina. Jennifer is a graduate of North Carolina State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication, with concentrations in Public Relations and Interpersonal Communication. Throughout her career Jennifer has been sought out by fellow employees as a confidante and trusted resource for professional and workplace guidance. Thanks to this inspiration and while employed full time as a public servant, Jennifer received her certification as a Family Life Educator and Coach in May 2020. Jennifer has completed training as a RYT200 yoga teacher and frequently uses the tools of yoga, such as deliberate breathing and guided meditation, in her role as coach.

Jennifer's work history includes corporate work with DuPont from their start-up operations in Research Triangle Park to working across a four-state region in government affairs and crisis communication. She left the corporate world for a few years at home with her young children then joined the American Lung Association, a nationwide non-profit, as the Human Resources and Development Manager. Later she received a call from a colleague inviting her to serve North Carolina hometowns as the first grassroots coordinator and member of the start-up government affairs team for the NC League of Municipalities, a statewide municipal membership organization. Ultimately Jennifer was requested to serve as the liaison to the Executive Director in support of executing the long-term strategic vision in tandem with management of the thirty-five-member, statewide board of directors. Jennifer currently works in the role of c-suite advocate, Board liaison and coach for the global nutrient use efficiency corporation Verdesian Life Sciences.

Jennifer is proud mom to daughter Rachel Sommers, MBA, MM (Master of Music) Vocal Pedagogy, a voice and piano teacher in Boston, and son Toler Hayes, Pokémon video

game world champion, music scholar and current PhD student at Emory University in Atlanta. Jennifer enjoys leaving the wi-fi behind in Raleigh for weekends on the farm with her partner, Stuart. She is president of her community homeowner's association, practices flower arranging and tending to her flower garden, and is an avid college football fan. She enjoys being entertained by her rescue dogs Puck and Peaseblossom.

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“Has Music Saved You?”

How Music Aids (in) Adolescent Grief Response.

INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that adolescent emotional health and the accompanying stigma mental illness can bring are often neglected in social conversations. While mental health may not be an approachable topic in the same way society talks about physical care, the body responds to both afflictions in ways that deserve respect and appropriate attention (Smith, 2013).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescent mental health conditions account for 16% of the worldwide strain on our collective medical system. An alarming 50% of all mental health issues start by 14 years of age; however, the majority of these issues not only go untreated, but also are undetected (WHO, 2020). The consequences of not addressing mental health needs at their onset can lead to mental and physical conditions that affect an adolescent's capacity to be resilient and live a full life as an adult. The potential for music to be the link to accessing and improving adolescent mental health, such as grief, is increasingly recognized (McFerran et al., 2013). The Mayo Clinic defines grief as the natural reaction to loss (2022).

Miranda (2013) shared recent empirical research documenting how music influences critical aspects of the development of adolescents. Research on the developmental role of music can provide insight to the everyday social and cultural needs of modern adolescents (Miranda, 2013). Music has been shown to have different emotional resonance for people at different times in their life course of development (Miranda, 2013). For example, in most cultures a mother will share the tune of a lullaby with a newborn child to establish the bond of maternal attachment (Miranda, 2013). Music can also create the ambience of a social setting. It can be an indicator of

ritual such as when a bride walks down the aisle to the tune of Mendelssohn's Wedding March to meet her groom. Music can aid in energizing interpersonal relationships in social settings like concerts or sporting events. For example, tunes like, "Take me out to the ballgame" (Norworth, 1908) help people to feel a sense of connection. The role music plays for dates, dances, and dinners has even led some authors to refer to music as a "social lubricant" (Lewis, 2002, p. 364, as cited by Miranda, 2013). Imagine for a moment the silence of a world without music. It is close to everywhere one goes. Despite the proliferation of music in our world, there is limited research on its impact and music is not an integral part of the core curriculum in most schools. However, in the first part of the twentieth century music became an area of interest in the field of psychology research (Miranda, 2013).

The Social Psychology of Music by Paul R. Farnsworth, published in 1954, argues for the scientific status of the psychology of music (Miranda, 2013). Research with regard to music is generally focused on its reasons for music consumption and that is rarely combined with psychological theories (Laiho, 2004). Laiho contends the psychology of music research shows its strongest relevance during the adolescent years (2004). Adolescent music consumption is enormous, closely matched by the devotion adolescents have for the music they consume (Christenson et al., 1985; Christenson & Roberts, 1998; North, Hargreaves & O'Neill, 2000; Roe, 1985; Zillmann & Gan, 1997; as cited by Laiho, 2004).

There are two instances where my sensitivities to the benefits of music have been heightened ultimately fueling my choice to pursue this research. First, I observed personal growth and a gain in confidence in my own children through the positive guidance of a dynamic voice teacher and inspiring choir teachers through their middle and high school years.

In the second instance, I assisted my best friend in carrying out her desire to die well. Among her wishes, were that her family and carry out a singalong memorial. Prior to her death, she had taken care to create memories for her loved ones with music through creating gifts of playlists, attending concerts, our songs and choosing music with meaningful lyrics for life events. For the singalong memorial, she personally selected who would sing each of the specific songs as a lasting message to loved ones and family members. This sent a lasting message that love always outweighs the sorrow. Her children were emerging adults at the time. The songs were led by my children and her loved ones.

It is my goal with this research study to underscore the need for not only more study of music's impact with adolescents, but also the great potential for music as a connector language to adolescent grief. Through interviews with five music teachers, I explore how they encourage young people to manage grief through: the use of space, trust building, the uniqueness of long-term relationships with music teachers and music as a tool for mood management.

Research Study Purpose and Phenomenon

The purpose of this research study was to explore how music aids adolescents experiencing grief following loss. The phenomenon being studied was how music aids in the process of adolescents learning to (honor) carry grief following loss.

Research Questions

1. How can music empower adolescents experiencing grief?
2. In what ways do adolescents seek music during times of grief?
3. How is music effective in the grief recovery process?
4. How does music influence the grieving process for adolescents?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review synthesizes some of the available research to gain a further understanding of the role music plays for adolescents as a resource for understanding self, bridging communication, managing mood and transitioning positively to adulthood (Miranda, 2013). The literature review will explore how, when guided by professional music teachers, these factors work together through music to aid in adolescent response to grief.

The literature research reveals: the need for adolescent resources for managing grief, the healing history of music, grief and loss as they are, or are not, approached for adolescents; general stress related to circumstances specific to adolescents; positive psychology and approaches with music as a mood management tool; and consideration of how being proactive with music can aid adolescents in their response to loss.

Recognizing and Acknowledging Adolescent Grief

Mental health is not a topic society speaks of easily (WHO, 2021). Among adolescents who are considered healthy, half of mental health challenges start by the age of 14 years. Of those, the majority are not only ignored, they are not even recognized (WHO, 2020). About 20% of adolescents have a diagnosable mental health disorder (Smith, 2013). Of that 20%, 60 to 90% of these adolescents go either completely untreated or do not get adequate treatment (Smith, 2013). Fewer than half of adolescents who would benefit from mental health assistance, recognize the need and ask for help (Huang & Duell, 2020).

Adolescents who experience loss can take on grief in a deep and traumatic way that is sometimes insurmountable or potentially stunting to emotional and physical growth (WHO, 2020). Ignoring mental health conditions can drown the potential capacity for an adolescent to transition into a healthy, happy adult who lives a robust life (WHO, 2020). Leaving these

disorders unattended frequently leads to life-changing results that include failure in friendships and family relationships, lower academic performance, and a higher likelihood of risky behavior (Smith, 2013). The WHO (2020) reports mental health matters left untreated can lead to life-changing consequences that show themselves later in adulthood. These consequences include, but are not limited to, physical and emotional conditions appearing as disease, disability, and eventual premature death (WHO, 2020).

The Adolescent Transition to Adulthood

An adolescent is faced with the reality of beginning the separation process from their parent(s) while simultaneously undergoing the most rapid physical growth and emotional expansion in their life course (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). This period of plasticity from adolescence to adulthood is intertwined with the ecological systems as the adolescent develops over time nested within the influence of school, peers, neighborhoods, and social media (Miranda, 2013). When the adolescent encounters grief or loss, the darkness can become part of a pile up that adds to the tremendous changes the adolescent is already experiencing simply by growing up. The trauma of loss in one's adolescent years can not only be depressing, it can disrupt and stunt individual development (WHO, 2020). Loss can prevent a return to life and a return to the goals planned and anticipated prior to the loss (Jackson, 2015).

The need to belong is a basic human desire. Baumeister and Leary (1995) explain in the belonging hypothesis that as humans there is a need for frequent, positive interactions with others in a place with a stable and enduring framework where there is a shared concern for each other's welfare. When adolescents experience an increased sense of belonging, it is often countered with a decrease in tendencies toward consideration of suicide, elevated depression rates and low self-esteem (Gonzalez et al., 2022) As adolescents ascend to adulthood by

separating from their parents or caregivers, they need a reliable environment that provides this secondary place of belonging.

For historically marginalized adolescents, finding a space of belonging is even more crucial for positive social, academic, and emotional health outcomes (Gonzalez et al., 2022). This includes adolescents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+). For LGBTQ+ adolescent, it is important to find a place of acceptance as well as a place of belonging to feel seen and validated. The adolescent who does not feel seen and validated tends to conceal aspects of their identity until they are within this safe space of acceptance and belonging (Gonzalez et al., 2022). Summarized research from the National Council on Family Relations reports the need for transgender adolescents to receive familial or community support and affirmation (2021). Additionally, when a transgender adolescent is able to go by their chosen name in familial or school environments with their peers, depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior are reduced (NCFR, 2021).

Music can promote the creation and strengthening of identity and conception of self (Laiho, 2004). Music provides the feeling of connection and a sense of belonging with friends and evokes feelings of unity and acceptance (Laiho, 2004). If an adolescent shares an experience of listening to music with peers, the same music can later reduce the feeling of loneliness by providing the memory of the shared experience (Laiho, 2004).

Adolescents Remain Quiet in Time of Need

The adolescent years are the life chapter of the most physical change an individual will undergo in their lifetime (Scherf et al., 2013). The WHO contends adolescent physical growth in conjunction with the very real possibility of isolation, vulnerabilities at home and school, a

performance bar set seemingly high, and the extra push from parents to be the best, substantiate the perceived need by adolescents for silence when mental health help is needed (2020).

For adolescents, the flood of hormones and rapid physical growth stimulate the need to quickly develop new skills. These quickly developed skills include a change in priorities of an unrelenting need to factor in what their peers might think of their appearance and their behavior (Scherf et al., 2013). Social media provides opportunities to take on a potential new self or to develop an identity (Roberts et al., 2009, as cited by Miranda, 2013). Additionally, during this time, adolescents are forced to recognize and anticipate new challenges that come along with their rapid physical growth and emotional expansion (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). Kistler and collaborators (2010, as cited by Miranda, 2013) found adolescents often quietly compare their physical attributes and self-worth to music media characters.

The Need to Address Adolescent Grief and Loss

Adolescent grief and loss left untreated can affect and lessen the opportunity for an individual to live a robust life. Loss and grief can be silent symptoms that destabilize a life. The Mayo Clinic defines grief as a natural reaction to loss with a mourning time frame that can last for months or years (2022). Because adolescents are often overlooked in their grief, they can feel alone, inadequate, and unsure how to navigate this uncharted territory (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). Loss and grief are identifiable and recognizable, but they have not been deemed worthy of treatment by the healthcare industry. Because they are unrecognized by the healthcare industry, the need for accessible coping resources, outside of the traditional healthcare system, has increased (Jackson, 2015). With no easy access to therapy, adolescents have been identified as an underserved population experiencing the often silent, undetected symptoms of loss (WHO, 2021; McFerran, 2014).

There is an everyday phenomenon that is ubiquitous in adolescence, and it is named music (Miranda, 2013). A variety of sophisticated data exist to support the role of music during adolescence (Miranda, 2013). These data include statistical controls, large data, and the benefit of longitudinal design (Miranda, 2013). Adolescents can listen to music with a friend, play in a band, or sing in a group to enjoy shared feelings and experiences (Laiho, 2014). Together these emotional experiences provide a sense of deep involvement and a connection with peers (Jokinen, 1998; Laiho, 2002; Larson, 1995; Lull, 1987; Partanen, 1996 as cited in Laiho, 2014).

Music provides the opportunity for human interaction and a sense of belonging and social connection as adolescents separate from their parents to reconstruct their own identity (Laiho, 2014). There is a suggestion that music can promote balance for the adolescent when they experience conflict between the need to connect and to simultaneously isolate (Laiho, 2002, as cited by Laiho, 2014). The WHO (2022) states clearly that in order for adolescents to grow and develop in good health, they need age-appropriate information that includes access to safe and supportive environments. Music can provide this environment.

Music as a Resource for Adolescents

The healing powers of music have been known for thousands of years, and music has been recognized as a powerful influence over both individual and community health and well-being (McFerran, 2011; O'Callaghan et al., 2013). Christians may have read the tale of "David soothing King Saul with his harp" in their Sunday school days and inherently understood music as a healing medicine (McFerran, K., 2011). The ancient Egyptians and Greeks in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and Shamanic cultures were prescribed a music ritual to heal from illness and to support those who were dying much like palliative care and hospice do today (O'Callaghan et al., 2013). The role of music in healing and celebration is often underestimated

in large part due to a western culture that is dominated by visual and verbal stimuli (Calitz, 2017). Jackson surmises engagement in music pulls the individual into a space that meets the basic human needs of belonging, safety, and relationship within which an adolescent has the propensity to be heard after experiencing loss (2015).

Music as A Positive for Adolescent Development

Positive psychology, which focuses on recognizing and understanding a person's individual strengths, can provide a helpful framework to understand whether and how the return to a normal daily life is possible after loss. A "normal" daily life is the kind of life that promotes well-being, contentment, and the ability to be comfortably alone (Jackson, 2015). Research findings suggest strong positive emotions result when adolescents' emotional well-being is bolstered by music relatedness to friends and family (Miranda, 2013). Further, Schellenberg (2006, as cited by Miranda, 2013) contends music lessons for adolescents may have small but mighty benefits for intellectual ability and academic achievement. Music education is also shown to encourage flow and creativity among adolescents (MacDonald et al., 2006, as cited by Miranda, 2013). Adolescents often naturally turn to music as an everyday resource to maintain resilience and to creatively thrive (Miranda, 2013).

The unique characteristics of music have been shown to improve adolescent coping and mental health (Laiho, 2004). McFerran agrees music plays an important role in supporting the mental health of adolescents (McFerran et. al., 2013). The everyday experience of adolescents can be intense and restless (Laiho, 2014). The words and sound music offers can provide adolescents with a mirror into their feelings of emotional turbulence (Lull, 1987; Wells & Hakanen, 1991, as cited by Laiho, 2004). Through a song or personal humming, music is accessible as a resource for adolescents (Miranda, 2013). Music is not only accessible, it is easily

available, portable and through the use of Earbuds and AirPods, it can be listened to privately, without interruption to others (Laiho, 2014).

During this acute developmental stage, music can become a soundtrack for adolescents. Adolescents have reported fantasizing while listening to music. For example, they play the music to imagine social scripts and then rehearse various social skills to prepare for possible encounters with peers, teachers, or family members (Miranda, 2013).

Adolescents need resources and coping mechanisms to successfully respond to grief or loss that pile on to the known physical and emotional challenges that naturally occur for their age group (WHO, 2020). Throughout the literature there is a consistent theme showing music-based responses can meet an adolescent where they are since they intuitively listen to music more than 10,000 hours throughout their adolescent growth period (Miranda, 2013). There is a need for further research on how music can be an accessible resource to aid adolescents who are experiencing grief associated with loss.

Theoretical Framework

For this thesis, I draw on family stress and resilience theory to understand how music can aid adolescents in their response to a time of crisis such as the death of a loved one, loss of will to live or perceived loss of relationship during a transition to a more authentic self. I also see attributes of Baumeister and Leary's belongingness hypothesis wherein there is a basic human need for an ongoing relational bond. This presence of a trusted, longer-term bond can affect emotional patterns and well-being (1995). Allen and Henderson (2017) define family stress as an "upset in the family system" resulting in stressors being placed on the family. Family stress comes from any of a variety of life events and provides an opportunity for growth and establishment of family stability. During a time of major crisis, such as a death or the onset of

mortality, a family is tested in their capacity to come together in resilience (Allen & Henderson, 2017).

My research is focused on music as an aid in adolescent grief response. For this research study, I consider the secondary family music environment such as chorus or band as it can parallel the family one is born or adopted into. Baumeister and Leary (Allen, 2022) express that adolescents want to be valued and that they are willing to work hard to belong to their own social groups such as the secondary family provided in a school setting. The work of Steve Asher supports that when adolescents meet their need to belong, the result can have a positive impact on both academic and nonacademic achievement (Allen, 2022).

Family stress and resilience theory provides a framework for understanding the coping mechanisms that can emerge during times of grief and loss. Adolescent emotions are often short-lived, but they are often substantially stronger than adult emotions (Laiho, 2014). Family stress and resilience theory reveals how individuals often lean in to shared family rituals, spirituality, and cultural and ethnic traditions when they are hurting or experiencing stress (Allen & Henderson, 2017). This exhibited family response showcases how family members respond to stress and their potential capacity for resilience. Grief offers a significant and naturally occurring opportunity for families to come together (or come apart). Positive coping resources, such as leaning into family rituals or traditions and collective family strengths, reliable support, and a place of belonging can be assets for the family to draw on during these times (Allen & Henderson, 2017, p. 211). For many families, the role of music and singing provides a natural opportunity toward healing and resilience in a time of crisis (Calitz, 2017).

Family stress and resilience theory demonstrates that by taking a positive approach, families can grow and, in some instances, thrive in the face of loss and crisis (Allen &

Henderson, 2017, p. 219). Researchers and practitioners agree there are certain tasks individuals and families must go through to encourage and allow healing. These steps include acknowledgment, sharing of the experience, finding a way to pay tribute or memorialize the lost loved one, and working toward redefining an individual life plan with reimagined hopes and dreams (Allen & Henderson, 2017). Based on the literature reviewed for this text, music offers the adolescent, and their secondary family, the tools to approach each step identified as a need in their response to loss and can be a source of resilience and growth during periods of grief.

Summary

The chapter of adolescence is a difficult transition period that is stressful even when everything is going smoothly and according to plan. This stressful adolescent transition period can benefit from more resources of effective coping skills for achieving self-esteem, positive mood, and growth-enhancing activities (Laiho, 2014).

Grief brings with it an unexplainable sense of loss and abducts one's sense of direction no matter an individual's age. The adolescent may already be reluctant to share concerns or worries related to this normal chapter of rapid physical and emotional growth in part because they are trying to determine if the adult (music teacher) can be trusted (McFerran, 2010). Experiencing a loss can create a pile up for adolescents who are already struggling to reveal their own identity and independence.

The silence of adolescent grief must be given a voice through the use of music to carry grief introduced by loss. Music can foster positive, healthy development for adolescents regardless of individual backgrounds (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017). Adults and adolescents may not move to the same musical tune, but there is a harmony to be achieved in playing their tunes together. Music can serve as the language to bridge communications in responding to loss.

METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative Case Study

For this research study, I chose to use a collective case study (also known as a multiple case study) involving five volunteer participants (Creswell, 2013). The issue of concern to me was how music is an aid in adolescent response to grief brought on by loss, death or the loss of a desire to live. In order to have a more in-depth understanding of the case, I collected forms of qualitative data that included interviews and literature that supported the issues of adolescent need to belong, adolescent need for trusted adult mentors and adolescents' natural interest in music. This methodology allowed me to study the perspectives and experiences of five participants through deeper understanding of the specific concern of how grieving adolescents can be empowered through the use of structured music lessons. I further drew on Moustaka's grounded theory approach (Creswell, 2013) to document how music aids adolescent response to grief brought on by death or loss. For an adolescent, grief can be experienced through the death of a loved one, a loss of will to live, or an expected loss of relationships for LGBTQ+ students as they transition to becoming their authentic self. I explored adolescent grief and grief response through semi-structured interviews with the participants. Through interviews, I asked the participants to share how their teaching of music and teaching environments aid adolescents in their response to grief.

A key to my understanding of the analysis of this instrumental case study was the rich descriptions provided by the five participants in their interviews. An instrumental case study has the intent of developing a better understanding of a specific concern (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the specific concern was music as an aid for grieving adolescents. Because the research included five case studies, it is considered to be collective (multiple case study). Delimitations in

this study were those topics chosen by the researcher to bound the study. The delimitations for this study included value of a safe place of acceptance and belonging, such as a music classroom or voice studio, contribution of relationship with a trusted adult, and adolescents learning to lean in to mood management in times of grief through the use of music.

Procedure

For this research study, I used social media channels to recruit participants who work with students in the age range of 12 to 19. In addition to social media channels, I used snowball sampling to recruit participants. Snowball sampling allowed me to give recruiting details about my research study to people who might know of potential participants with information-rich cases (Creswell, 2013). Through Facebook, I reached out to the administrators of nine private music communities through the private message feature and requested they share my research study flyer. Of the nine administrators, four were excited to post the flyer within their private communities. I gave the administrators a brief summary text invitation to use to solicit study participants along with the flyer but have no real way of knowing what happened next. Facebook analytics suggested my research flyer reached 487 individuals. Instagram likes and shares were more modest in the fifty to seventy-five range. Seven participants volunteered to participate in the research. Of the seven participants, four arrived as a result of snowball sampling and three volunteered after seeing the Facebook post. Of the seven participants, five scheduled interviews. Two participants did not follow up to requests to schedule an interview date and time. Of the five participants, snowball sampling provided three and the Facebook flyer distribution provided two. As I recruited over a one-month period of time, I collected participant information through a brief intake survey to ensure the inclusion criteria were met and to collect demographic

information. After completing the fifth interview of the homogenous group, data collection was concluded as saturation had been met.

Interview

Prior to the start of the study, semi-structured interview questions were developed and tested through a mock interview with a music teacher. Following the mock interview, the interview questions were honed to allow introductory questions to position the participant experience and build rapport. Introductory questions were followed by two central questions with potential subquestions dependent on individual participant responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interview questions were designed to investigate the participant's experience within the guidelines of the research being conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The central questions asked how adolescents share, or do not share, their grief experience, participants' definitions of grief, and how participants responded to students when they learn of their grief. To understand the participant's interpretation of the adolescent response more completely, subquestions were included to explore the 1) teaching environment 2) identification of occurring grief and 2) music teaching methods to support the adolescent grief response. The full interview guide is included as Appendix B.

Participants

During the interview process, participants volunteered demographic information that included responses shown below.

Table 1*Self-reported Demographic Characteristics of Five Study Participants*

Pseudonym	State	Race	Gender	Age	Education	Teaches Ages	Currently Teaches	Has Taught	Plays Instrument
Renee	NC	White	Female	29	Bachelors	14 to 19	Public High School Chorus	Middle School Chorus	Piano
Hazel	NC	African American	Female	30's	Bachelors, Masters	12 to 20	Private Lessons & College Music Education	Middle School Chorus	Piano, Trumpet
Leonard	NC	White	Male	41	Bachelors	12 to 14	Public Middle School Chorus & General Music	High School Chorus	Piano
Frederick	MA	White	Male	29	Bachelors, Masters	13 to 19	Private Lessons, Performing Arts School		Piano
George	TX	White	Male	39	Bachelors, Masters	5 to 18	Public K-12, Middle & High School Band	High School Band	Percussion

The group was homogenous in terms of all being music teachers. The five participants in this study include two females and three males ranging in age range from 29 to 41. Their teaching experience in the field of music ranged from three years to more than twenty years. Their teaching environments are a blend of private school music studios, middle and high school chorus rooms, a high school band room and a college classroom. The participants have different levels of authority in personalizing their teaching spaces.

Participants were interviewed in the fall of 2022, just a few months into the school year. Interviews were conducted at the availability of the participant over a period of seven days. The five participants were interviewed virtually via Zoom, an online web meeting platform. Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 1 hour and 12 minutes, with an average interview duration of one hour. The interviews were recorded via Zoom. The Zoom audio transcript tool was used to provide transcription of the interview. After each interview, I captured nuances of the participants' experience with a written summary memo of the interview. The summary memos and transcripts were compared for accuracy. Pseudonyms were generated for the participants and for individuals they referenced during the interview process. These pseudonyms were used in all transcriptions and sections of the thesis to keep identities confidential. The five participants reside in three different states. States were referenced but all locations were either removed or referenced as regions. So that I could more clearly recall the participants stories once they were

assigned a pseudonym, I selected pseudonym names representative of their stories and associated with a history of music. For example, participant Frederick spoke of his dream as an adolescent to sing opera on stage while sword fighting. His pseudonym is based on Frederick Federici, an Italian-born British opera singer known for his work in the Savoy Opera in the late 1800's. He enjoyed success in England and America in comic opera but was also an above average composer and tremendous musician. Renee was assigned in honor of the American soprano Renee Lynn Fleming, known for her performances in opera, concerts, recordings and at major public occasions. Ms. Fleming is also a favorite of my deceased brother. The American conductor, composer, pianist, and music educator Leonard Bernstein was my inspiration for Leonard. I assigned the name of Hazel to the African American female participant who not only sings but plays the trumpet. Hazel was selected based on the American jazz pianist and singer Hazel Dorothy Scott, known as an outspoken critic of racial discrimination and segregation. She was also the first Black American to host her own TV show. For the band director participant, I assigned the pseudonym George after George Cates, an American music arranger and conductor known for his work with the Lawrence Welk orchestra. George Cates also produced an album *Polynesian Percussion* which feature more than fifteen percussion instruments. Percussion was participant George's instrument of expertise. I do recognize conducting an orchestra and a band are different, but the name George also offered the added connection to the state of Texas as home to former President George W. Bush. The assigned pseudonyms were used to create this final transcript, the coding synthesis and in all published documents.

The participants were very forthcoming with their stories of the use of music and recognition of adolescent grief. They seemed grateful research is being conducted to explore the role of music as it aids adolescents. It was clear they have a passion for using music to reach,

teach and empower adolescents. I used my own experience as a parent to build genuine empathy and understanding of their teaching experience.

I took great care to minimize bias and engender confidence and trustworthiness in the data collection and analysis process. The data as it unfolded and is shared is a plausible and credible explanation of the phenomenon. The explanation and interpretation of data included deep relationship with the data, the use of summary memos, and debriefing with my advisor to confirm a set of themes and quotes to get it right (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Data Management

Each interview was summarized in a written memo, recorded via Zoom, transcribed via the Zoom audio transcription tool, and reviewed to confirm accurate transcription. Data was stored and managed within the North Carolina State University VPN. The data included participant volunteer responses, inclusion criteria collected through the use of a google doc questionnaire, Zoom audio transcriptions, a codebook and codebook synthesis matrix spreadsheet. The synthesis matrix spreadsheet was created using Excel with color coded columns and rows that directed back to the color coding I provided myself in the codebook. Assigned pseudonyms were used in all documents with the exception of the initial volunteer response and interview scheduling.

Analysis

The data collected through the interview process played an important part in understanding the case study. As the interviews were conducted, themes and patterns began to emerge – some expected, some were a surprise, and some were simply heartbreaking. Informed by Moustaka's grounded theory approach, I performed a thematic analysis of the data (Creswell, 2013). I began the coding process by reading the transcripts for accuracy and to become more

acquainted with the data. Then I compared each interview transcript to its companion summary memo, taking notes on patterns and identifying overarching themes. I used this analysis to build a codebook focusing on the terms and concepts that emerged most often in the data. Once I identified the themes, I looked at descriptor patterns to assign less mentioned yet significant references to the themes to create open codes for a codebook (Appendix A) and working codebook synthesis matrix as a researcher reference tool.

Building on the data from the primary research questions regarding grief and music, I followed Moustaka's (1994, as cited in Creswell, 2013) horizontalization approach and highlighted significant statements, sentences, and quotes to capture the essence of how the participants had experienced the phenomenon of music as an aid to adolescent grief. The ethnographic constant comparative method was used to collect the small, medium, and larger data segments and sort them by codes related to the research questions and existing literature to populate the codebook synthesis matrix (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The case study approach allowed me to build a theory and compose a narrative of two themes following the use of central questions that were broad enough in nature to allow for probing and support by participant response (Creswell, 2013). The data provided by the participants gave me detailed information about the daily interactions between the participants and their adolescent students. This helped me to more thoroughly understand the concern of grieving adolescents and the response methods provided to them by the participants thus bounding the study. The interview analysis offered thicker descriptions of the consistency in the experiences of the participants with their students. The analysis highlighted the multi-faceted layers of relationship and music as a language for reaching grieving adolescents.

Positionality

As a single parent with my own background and lived experiences, I entered the research process with an inherent bias unique to me. As Creswell (2013) reminds us, a researcher's own outlook naturally shapes their collection and interpretation of data. Being aware of my personal experiences, gained through my background, history, and inherent bias, is critical in keeping my interpretation of the data reliable and credible (Creswell, 2013). My goal is to inform the reader's own interpretation, not define it.

I am a heterosexual, cisgender, divorced female in my fifties still learning to understand the privilege I enjoy because I am white. I grew up in a single parent household on a limited budget with an appreciation for a sense of humor. I have made a conscious effort to draw strength from adversity. I earned my bachelor's degree while working full time and starting a family. I have experienced grief related to loss, heartbreak and altered hope since I was an adolescent. In those moments, months and years, music has been a reliable companion.

My goal in pursuing this research has been to investigate the value of music for adolescents. I have witnessed the heartbreak of unresolved adolescent grief experienced in young adults. I feel an urgency to identify accessible, credible ways to offer healing. It has been my observation that participants support positive adolescent emotional health in sync with their transition to adulthood. Through a combination of strategy and luck, I was able to provide my own children access to school environments with strong music programs and through paid music lessons. These programs provided my children with guidance on using music as an aid in their own response to grief. My role as a parent has given me an intimate understanding of the adolescent loss experience and the value of music (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

RESULTS

Overarching Themes

The research interviews revealed two overarching themes. The first theme revealed music as a foundation for relationships. All five teachers were emphatic that a teacher-student relationship is key to open communication and the potential for full emotional support for the student. The relationship must be one of acceptance, built over time, on a foundation of trust.

The second theme is music as a language for grief. I heard from the participants how music serves as an intermediary language connecting the participant and the student. This shared language enables a deeper level of communication and quiet understanding between the teacher and the student during times of grief.

Music As a Foundation for Relationship

The participants defined communication used in relationship building as the efforts made to establish, build, and sustain relationships with their students. The dynamics of a school environment demand additional layers of relationship building between students and their peers, teachers and their teacher colleagues and an extra layer of relationship building between teachers and their school district staff.

All five participants were adamant that positive, trusted relationships are the core foundation supporting their impact as teachers. The teachers shared the key factors in constructing the foundation for relationships revolved around providing a safe space where the students feel a sense of acceptance and belonging. The teachers shared once safety and a place to belong and feel accepted are in place, the teacher can build trust over time. They shared that the offering of trust in a safe space gives the student room to be themselves, to expose their emotional needs and to grow.

Acceptance & Use of Space

Participants emphasized the value of fostering a sense of acceptance and belonging in their classrooms. The importance of relationships between the students is introduced on day one by Renee to her students. She shared:

This is a respectful classroom. We're going to like everybody. Well, we're going to respect everybody. I don't care if you don't like them. If you don't like them, leave it outside. Because I'm not dealing with that person. That person can stay away and that's day one.

To build community and reinforce the sense of belonging within the classroom, Renee tells her students:

You've made connections with classmates. You've made a personal connection with me, and we are connected all together unified, so to speak, because Chorus is US right? We will never be a choir. Because choir becomes about 'I' and there's no 'I' in Chorus.

Hazel echoes the value in a space where the students feel like they belong. Hazel explained when it comes to music, she wants to provide an open space where the students can be themselves. She recognizes her classroom may be the only space where they can be creative and learn about new types of music. Hazel shared:

I want my students to have what they may not have at home. So, I had to set that tone of comfortability, so they can be open to the things that I wanted to share. But I had to make that connection. So that was one of the ways I made connection. I made my classroom very friendly and colorful, very welcoming. I also let them present their own artwork (to hang) around the room, too, so they can make it, you know a little bit close (to home) to

where they would like to put things, so I wasn't a one-woman show. I wanted them to have a safe, happy place where they can be involved, and have a little bit of themselves.

Hazel said the students leaned into the home away from home feeling she offered. For many of them they did not have a stable home experience or traditional family. The classroom home Hazel provided where the students could display their artwork, gave them a sense of what it felt like to be wanted.

When Renee got the high school music teacher job at her alma mater, she was quick to develop plans to make her classroom a safe space for the students. Renee sees the ages of thirteen to eighteen as the most crucial years of any child's life. Renee shared her prior experience teaching middle schoolers when she said:

They're like fish flopping out of the water. They don't really know what to do. Their bodies are changing. Things are happening to them that they're not used to and then they get to high school, and it's like okay, good luck. It's why I harp on that safe classroom the kids can share.

She believes providing a safe, accepting space for her high school students is just as important for this older age group. Renee said high school presents the students with their first real chance to try out independence as the boundaries are loosened. She said some days, the students need a spot to take a time out and regroup so she provides just the spot.

I have a couch in my office, and my office is very cozy, and you want to go sit in there and like, snuggle up. I have a blanket, I have a pillow and a couch, and you can sit there, and it's like my therapy couch. ... and when the kids want to talk, I'll lower my chair, so that I'm at the same height as them so that it's not like, I'm condescending where they'll be like, oh, okay, and I listen.

Renee shared that she likes being able to lower her chair and get to eye level. She wants the students to understand that she is there to listen without casting judgment.

Because Frederick is a music teacher of individual voice lessons in a performing arts setting, his teaching environment changes with each student. I asked Frederick about his mentioning mental health earlier in our interview, probing to understand why he mentioned this. Frederick replied:

It's tough to say, but because I'm obviously not in any way, like there's the joke. They'll go: your voice teacher is your therapist, or like your hairdresser, is your therapist, and I think in a lot of ways. There's a lot of truth to that. I try to be more the therapist in the way that I'm the open ear.

Frederick continued by describing the value of, at minimum, a neutral space where open communication can occur:

Some days, I'm in the green room at the green studio, some days I'm in the navy studio, they all have colors, various color codes. You've got what you've got. Whether it has a mirror, whether it has a grand piano or an upright, whether there's enough room to run around. Most of the spaces are pretty well equipped, but some are better than others. Some I vastly prefer. One of the spaces has this carnival mirror that makes you look bigger in the middle. And I just, I can't function in that space, because I need people to feel awesome when they're singing. If they look in the mirror and they look bigger in the middle, nobody's happy about it.

Frederick shared key themes consistent with the other teachers. In order for his students to grow, they need to feel accepted. Frederick added that neutral space is much better than a

negative space like the one voice studio with the carnival mirror. Frederick recognizes the need for people to feel awesome about themselves to sing well.

For Leonard, transparency holds the key to unlocking barriers and building relationships with his students. Leonard is openly gay and speaks fondly of his husband. It was important to him that the students feel accepted the minute they walk in his classroom. The room has the standard music room setup of chairs in a semicircle and a piano. But it was an incident with a coworker, where his identity and the challenges he faces as a gay man were over simplified and dismissed, that stirred a change in him regarding his classroom. Leonard stated:

It was that moment I said, I'm going to make my room as gay as possible. Color. All my room is color. I have color in my room, and it's so bright. This is the first time in my career - it's been like this for about three years - first time in my career I feel like my classroom is bright and inviting, and fun. I want people to walk in my room, and say, 'Wow! You have so much color, and I love that.' I have posters. I have borders on the three bulletin boards. Each one's a different color.

And I've got two periodic tables. One of them is the periodic table of rock and roll, the other is the periodic table of human emotion. And I talk about emotion. I actually refer to the periodic table when we're talking about music, too. So, it's not like they're just there for color. I utilize the posters in my room.

Nothing about the classroom directly references Leonard being gay, but he wanted to create an environment of true acceptance and belonging for his students. He decided to start with letting the classroom be a better reflection of himself.

Leonard maintained during the interview that the student teacher relationship is key to the success of not only the music program, but success for the students. The measure of success is

not always specific, but for Leonard success resonated for him years after he had a student in class. When Leonard was a new teacher, he taught high school. Years later he understood the value of his offering a place of acceptance. He shared the following story:

I used to teach high school, and I keep up with several of the students, they were really close to me. I was out one day and ran into this student, she's in her thirties now, but she told me that there was one day where we were rehearsing something, and I just I pulled her outside of the classroom, and of course she thought she was in trouble. I said, hey, I just noticed that there's something about you that's different today, and you don't have to tell me what it is, but I'm here if you need to talk. She said that completely changed like her demeanor, and she still tells that story today, and that was years ago. The first time she told me, she said I don't think you understand how much that moment meant to me, because in that moment I felt like I was not visible. And you saw me and you said to me I see you, and if I needed something that I had someone I could turn to.

It was this moment shared by a previous student that reinforced for Leonard the success he was building in his classroom, and the value he was offering the students by providing a trusting relationship.

A Place for Belonging

This research uncovered that participants see and address inconsistencies in adolescent moods and how adolescents express their emotions, or don't. Due in large part to these inconsistencies, participants found themselves determining the presence of grief through observation, reading between the lines, or sometimes receiving cryptic emails from students.

Renee shared how transgender high school students she worked with experienced a need to belong as they evolved to their more authentic self. Often as adolescents become their

authentic selves, they fear they are losing relationships and can experience isolation. Because of their gender transitions, these students struggled to fit in in the mostly cisgender choir. Renee explained:

They're girls wanting to be boys, and because they're not taking any medicine, their parents aren't supporting them. You know I take myself out of that equation because it's not about me at that moment. It's just about showing that child that they're loved. So they both just sing higher, and I'm like hey, guess what, I love that you sing (You make that happy little positive sandwich) So it's you are doing a great job, but I need you to sing in soprano land (or alto), and they're like, but I'm a guy, and I'm like, it's okay. I've had guys in ensembles sing soprano, ... and I put them right by my base section because my base section is in the middle. So, like I have all my guys here in the middle, and then all of my girls are on the outside, no matter if they're transgender whatever. Cause again feeling safe matters.

Renee's students are confident their transition is right for them. In this, they are no different than any other adolescent finding their way. But in chorus, they have to find a way to communicate to Renee, so she understands how they are feeling. Each of the participants I spoke with builds a relationship with the student, but they choose their student placement location in the chorus by the vocal sound the student makes as they sing and how their voice blends with the other voices in the chorus.

Leonard is facing similar situations with transgender students who are struggling with belonging in cisgender-normative spaces. Leonard shares his students are also concerned about where they are placed in the chorus for singing:

Of course, in the choral world we tend to do a lot of things by gender, because our body produces the levels of hormones that will affect our voice. And I do talk about that with my kids. I tell them, you know, if I label you soprano, or alto, or tenor or base, it has nothing to do with your gender.

That is just your voice type for this moment. In time it's going to change because your hormone levels are going crazy right now. So don't think that if I say you're a soprano, that means that you're a girl, because that's not what it means. It's just the range right now with your voice that fits into that part. So I will have you sing that, and I remind them that at their age I was an alto like I'm not a female, but I was a really good alto at your age. That didn't mean anything about my gender, and it just meant that in that period of time I was able to sing that range of notes.

It is different in the High School (chorus) because the body is a little bit more developed, but they were experiencing an identity crisis, and they weren't singing, and they told me without telling me, they said, this is just not. I'm not comfortable singing that. And I said, Okay, just sing what is comfortable for you.

Leonard sees the struggle with his (prior) high school students and his (current) middle school students. The transition from the sex you were assigned at birth to the gender you self-identify with can be a difficult road. The teachers expressed that the students know they are on the correct path, but they also recognize they are leaving a part of themselves, or trusted relationships, behind. Leaving a part of themselves behind brings new hopes while extinguishing older dreams their loved ones had for them. This transition necessitates an enhanced need for a place of acceptance and belonging.

Hazel has also gained experience with adolescents whose gender identity is in transition. In 2020 as the pandemic loomed and the platform for learning became virtual, Hazel had a sixth-grade student ask to speak to her privately after class (on line) ...

Well, this is my name (female), and this is what I like to be called (male). I said, "What does your mother say or your grandmother?" What my mother doesn't know ... I was like, well, it was a sticky situation, ...Because I was like freaking out, like, what do I do with this because the child doesn't want the mother to know?

My thing, that's just making them feel comfortable and loved, and knowing that I'm not judging them, and I'm looking at you as a person, and you're here to learn, and whatever I can do, to help you reach your goals. I'm going to be here, it's not based upon any choices, or you know, whatever you do, that doesn't matter to me. I'm here for you.

The participants believe these students shared their stories with them because the student felt acceptance and a sense of belonging in the classroom and in the chorus. Those personal foundations of acceptance, trust and belonging allowed music as a communication link to share sensitive information without fear of judgment.

Building Relationship Over Time

Four of the five participants echoed the value of the unique opportunity they have as participants to build relationships with students over time. In most schools, there is a single music teacher for the school giving the teachers the benefit of teaching students over consecutive years. Within this group of teachers, the years they will consecutively teach the students ranged from three to 13 years. The relationship building that occurs over time can create a second family for the students wherein the teacher is the caregiver, matriarch, or patriarch.

Hazel teaches young college students now, but for a number of years she was the middle school chorus teacher in a public-school setting. She spoke of giving her students a fresh start when they first enter her classroom:

But when they walk through that door, I tell them, some of you I have heard a little spill of tea (gossip) about you, but you know what? I don't believe that because when you walk through this door, you have a clean slate. I'm not holding anything against you or over your head, and then they're like (surprised). That is a real gift that I'm giving them by letting them sort of start fresh. That's something you have to take advantage of when you get the opportunity.

Because Hazel knew she would have her students for a number of years, she saw great benefit in offering acceptance when they first walked through the door. As she shared above, Hazel made a point of telling her students to always take advantage when you have the opportunity for a fresh start. Hazel teaches college now and some of her students are adolescents she taught in middle school. They sought her out when they were considering the collegiate path.

Leonard, a middle school chorus teacher with more than twenty years teaching experience, will typically have students three years in a row. They may enter his classroom as sixth graders new to middle school, but they are not new to Leonard. Leonard, explained the basis for a solid student teacher relationship:

Because we are music teachers, and because we are the only person that teaches that subject in the school. We have the opportunity to build those long relationships with them (the students) that build this trust, that build the fact that who you're going to turn to first. You're going to turn to your (music) teacher you've had for three years more so than the teacher you've had for three months.

Leonard and two of the other participants expressed that because music is an elective, music teachers have to recruit students to their classes. They do this by visiting the lower grade schools to introduce themselves and the chorus program. The relationship building begins when the student is younger before the student enters the (middle school) classroom. For a student, choosing to join a music class gives the student a group to belong to on their first day in the new school. This belonging combined with longevity builds a history for the student teacher relationship. It gives the students an adult mentor they can trust and a direct witness to their growth.

George teaches band to grades K-12. He spends most of his time with the older grades who have classes that meet daily for up to an hour in class time. George shared that to have the best success with the high school band students, he has to establish his teaching style in earlier years when he teaches the students as middle schoolers. George has learned that setting boundaries helps to establish a safe space the children can trust. George tells his younger students:

You come in and be quiet. You just raise your hand if you want me to answer your question, you know, sit still like that. It's a tight ship and I only have thirty minutes each day with them so if I can't get at least twenty minutes in with them, you know it's a waste of our time. If I can't get through at least twenty minutes of music, I feel like we all fall behind.

As a teacher with fourteen years of experience, George has learned different (teacher) behaviors work in different settings. As a new teacher, George said he would often get frustrated and sometimes yell to get the students attention. He quickly realized that was not going to work for him or the students and it certainly was not building the trust George needed for their

relationship to succeed for the long term. Needing a solution, he sought to establish the balance between the stricter classroom boundaries and the looser social settings he can enjoy with the students outside the classroom. George shared one of the ways he builds on student teacher trust:

After class I will go walk the hall a little bit, and kind of joke with them and what not.

And someone would be like. Why, you such a jerk in class, but so chill in the hall. And

I'm like well in class there's ninety of you and one of me, and I wouldn't have to be that much of a jerk if you all would just stop talking.

It's getting to the point where, first and second graders. If they see me at a football game, they walk up to me and give me a hug. They see me in the hall. They'll walk up to me.

Give me a hug or a high five.

The younger students learn quickly and one of the ways this tough love George offers in the classroom is rewarded, is by the students giving him nicknames. George is certain within the next two to three years, the students will not know his real name. He's okay with this as long as there is no discipline issue. If it becomes a discipline issue, he will resume his official name of Mr. Odesza. George seems to appreciate the nicknames. The last three band directors at this small school have burned out and left after two years, but George plans on staying around. He would like to usher his kindergarten students through until their high school graduation year. The same year George will be eligible for retirement.

The teachers all shared that to build the relationship in the classroom, you have to build the relationship outside the classroom. It takes time and isn't always convenient, like when attending an away football game, but each teacher agreed - the time invested with the students consistently pays off. And as a bonus, George shared it keeps the parents happy too.

A Foundation of Trust

The participants agreed that their student relationships need a firm foundation of trust. All five participants strive to be known for their accessibility and for providing an accepting, judgment free zone to the students. But they are not pushovers. The teacher's judgment free zone is balanced with healthy boundaries rooted in a love for music and for the kids they teach.

Hazel shared that the school community where she works isn't always safe, and some of her students have died from neighborhood gun violence. She said she would attend the funeral for a student one day, and the next day, Hazel would return to school to teach their siblings. She made a very conscious decision to create a safe, happy space of acceptance in her music classroom to counter the students' experiences in the outside world. She shared:

Has music saved you from doing something that you, you know, probably would have done if you didn't have somewhere to go to? The challenge, your feelings and your energy, and how many of them (the students) agreed that they're safe place, when they're going through things and where they want to shut things out. Music was the thing that they would go to. And even now, when I teach, a lot of them come into class with their earbuds in. I'm not going to be like this: it goes out, I'm talking. I let them have their earbuds in, because a lot of them that's how they stay calm. That's how they stay focused, and I get that. I understand that so, and they are in their school. They are engaged in the class. They know what's going on. They answer questions, all of that. So I'm probably a little unorthodox when it comes down to that.

Hazel has seen the difference when she allows the students to keep their earbuds in. She told me the students show her appreciation for accepting them where they are (emotionally) when they come through the door. Sometimes they just need that few minutes of calm to

transition to the classroom. She said allowing them to do their thing made them respect her even more. They also went on to share what they liked about their choices in music and engage in the music she had to teach.

Frederick teaches private lessons to 41 students. Because of the setting, he is able to meet with the students one on one and adjust and adapt to their needs. He likes to tell his students:

Hey, you choose your own adventure, and I like throwing them the ball and having them decide. You know, whether they want to have a vent session, then do something, or they would just rather dive in, and I see both. But I think and maybe I'm imagining it. But you know, putting it for them to decide what they want but that understanding that you know I'm going to respond to what they want, not what is scheduled, or that I don't actually have an end goal.

I don't have to teach them this material so they can pass this standardized test so that they can, you know, and we have to hit like a certain number of modules or lessons. I could have a kid that learns two songs in the semester, or I could have a kid that learns ten songs, and it's a win either way, if they're having a good time.

Frederick said for him it is all about accepting the students where they are each time they enter the studio for a lesson. He believes accepting them by giving them control over what they work on on a given day builds a better relationship. He is comfortable letting them have the control because the topic is still music and there is still progress made. It may just be through conversation that day.

The participants agreed they are better teachers because they provide their students with the firm foundation of trust. They are better teachers because the students respond by participating in learning the music. And they don't just learn to sing. They talk about the music

and what it means. The students go one step further in not only discussing what the music means, they become open to sharing what it means in the context of their adolescent perspective.

Music as a Language for Grief

The second theme that emerged in through the interviews is music as a language for grief. For the purposes of this research paper, grief is recognized by the participants as implied or expressed by their (adolescent) students following the loss of a loved one, loss of will to live and anticipated loss of relationship for those students coming out as gay or transitioning to one's authentic self.

Here, I examine how the participants engage music as the intermediary language to respond to grief through expressing emotion and managing mood. The use of music as a language for grief is available because of the foundation built through the use of space and establishment of trust referenced above.

Mood Management

The participants were consistent in sharing how music could be used as a tool for them to manage adolescent moods and to teach adolescents to manage their own moods. The teachers could use music to manage the moods in the moment of the school day. The adolescents could use music to manage their mood in their own environments. They believed that a shared language of music enables a deeper level of communication between teacher and student and an understanding of emotional response for the student.

During the last year, Frederick learned one of his students has attempted suicide several times. You may recall from earlier Frederick's comment to students when they are having a tough day of "hey, it's your adventure what would you like to do today." Here Frederick's shares

a student response to his adventure offer, as the student responds with the music she wanted to dive into that day:

She was very enamored with the music of a particular singer songwriter .. so we really dove into the, you know some of these darker issues, and grappling with feelings of you know, wanting to kill yourself and what that means, and what that feels like. And we're talking heavy, heavy music. She had been studying these (songs) independently and didn't realize she could bring them into voice lessons, and I was like, Oh, my gosh! Of course, you've got to bring them in voice lessons.

I want to hear all your work, and so you know. Obviously, I didn't have as much to contribute to those as if we were working on Mozart or Rodgers & Hammerstein, but I just really, in trying to understand the music it really gave her a platform to explain to me like, Oh, no, no! This has to be this way, because it's a reference to this, which is, you know, as it's in whatever the specific, nitty-gritty things were.

But she said that these particular songs which she had learned in the past and listened to in the past, had really given her a means of like expressing some of these really harmful ideas and not acting on them, I guess, and so we didn't have like, if they're depressing songs they're like so depressing, but something about relating to them made her less depressed, and it was really powerful. And so when she would bring these into lessons like you know, there weren't tears, she was seeing them, and then we'd laugh about a reference, or oh, my God, this this line is awful! ... But she's also like 14 so that's (age) is definitely a factor.

Because Frederick teaches private voice lessons, he is positioned well for this type of one-on-one conversation. Because his lessons move around the performing arts school from one

studio to the next, he does not get to personalize his space. The acceptance Frederick offered weekly, and his foundation of trust allowed this student to share in ways that were welcome, but unexpected. Frederick recognizes students, especially at a performing arts school, can sometimes lean into their performing skills in a lesson. However, with this student, the song conversation has been genuine, and he is seeing an improvement of mood from week to week.

Leonard also used song lyrics with his students to better understand grief. As part of a classroom exercise, every four or five weeks Leonard has the students complete listening logs. The process is to read the lyrics of a piece of choral music, then listen to the piece as it is played. After reading the lyrics and listening to the piece the students independently dissect the meaning of the lyrics by writing a listening log. After the individual process, the class takes a deeper dive to discuss the piece for further reflection. Recently Leonard recognized some of his students were having a tough time emotionally. He was not sure the root cause, so Leonard chose to (quietly) address the mood through the listening log exercise. In this instance, he introduced them to a musical arrangement by Frank Tichelli based on a poem written by Sara Teasdale in 1933 called *There will be rest*. Leonard shared:

Sara Teasdale is known as a dark, brooding poet, and the rumor is this gorgeous piece, ... the rumor is that this gorgeous poem is actually her suicide note because it talks about there will be rest and sure stars shining over the rooftops crowned with snow, a reign of rest serene forgetting, the music of stillness holy and low. And I will make this world of my devising, out of a dream in my lonely mind. ... (I shall find the crystal of peace, above me. Stars I shall find.)

I can't remember all the lyrics. But it's basically talking about, you know how she's leaving this world, and we get to talk about the emotional side of that. And why we create

music, how we create music, to match our mood and our emotion, and why we set things to music because the kids were like, as I told them, like. If this stirs anything for you, I've already talked to the Counselor and the Counselor is ready to speak with you, but I want you to hear how we can take things that are dark, and bring beauty into them through music, and it gives them an opportunity to express what they feel in response to music.

Leonard's message to the students was that things might feel really negative and dark, but that the feeling is a moment in time. Leonard used the song to show that while Sara felt depressed, she could still see the beauty around her. The listening log process and group discussion used the music to give the students the opportunity to really open up and express what they were feeling. After the class discussion about the poem and hearing the song, Leonard shared that the students exhibited a mood change to lightness. Through the use of the poem and the shared experience of listening to the song, the adolescents can later remember the experience to improve their sense of belonging.

Music Provides a Secondary Family

Grief shows no favorites and visits adults and adolescents alike. I have heard through the research interviews how the participants establish relationships with their students through providing a safe environment to build a trusting relationship over time. Because the teachers build relationships with their students over time, they build a secondary family. This secondary family places the teacher in the parental role and the student in the role of child. When this secondary music family loses a student member, the participants talked about how they take on the role of head of the "family," making decisions that initiate the healing process for themselves and their students.

George adds the teacher's perspective to the experience of responding to adolescent grief. In the last six years, George has lost four high school students in three unrelated deaths. He expands the idea of adolescent grief to include managing his own grief as the patriarch of the (band) family while supporting the adolescents he has come to know and love as they go through the loss of a peer. Here George shared examples of student loss from his teacher perspective:

One thing that I was going to bring up is one of the hardest things that you can deal with as an educator is the loss of a student. And, throughout my fourteen-year career. I've lost four band students.

And the most recent one was maybe four years ago. A student was driving home not wearing a seat belt. went off the road a little bit, over corrected and the truck rolled. He got thrown from the truck, and the truck, from what I understand, the truck landed on him and killed him instantly, and he was only sixteen. He was in high school, and I knew this kid for three years.

A student from the school that I had just been at rode, was riding ATVs with some friends at night, drove full speed into an iron fence or metal gate got thrown off and broke his neck. We had another kid about eight years ago. That and It was the night of his birthday, too. Him and two friends went out to one of the friend's houses, and we found out they were experimenting ... and one of them starts with hallucinations and freaking out and shot both of them and that was just. That was just hard. It's hard to deal with it.

You never anticipate it happening. And so, you get that phone call that happens,

George reflected:

When this happened, and, you know, there's a lot music can bring out, I guess, an emotional response, in a student who's grieving or something like that. Every kid grieves

differently like, you know. For me, you know sometimes it depends on the lyrics of the song. Sometimes I guess, depending on my mood. It depends. Do I want to listen to some hard rock music or country music, or jazz, or whatever. But there's amazing grace. It always seems to bring people together.

The moment of silence before the football game. The band will play amazing grace during the moment of silence.

Usually when something like that happens (death of a student), we won't play the next day. When this (two students died) happened last time, (I had) the administration, the principals and assistant principals all come down. And the counselors will come hang out for the period just to hang out, in case anyone has a breakdown or needs to leave or wants to talk, or anything like that.

So typically, we won't play anything or listen to anything. We'll just hang out and talk.

With the last one (car wreck) that happened. It happened the week before the Christmas concert, and we pulled all the seniors in. We asked them, do we want to cancel the concert? This happened like on a Wednesday night, and the concert was supposed to be the following Monday. And we asked the kids. Do we want to cancel the Christmas concert, and all of them were like, no, I don't think they would have wanted that. So, at the concert. We left his seat empty, and his French horn sitting by his chair.

That's kind of symbolic in a way that he's still with us, even though he's physically gone.

The responses to the student deaths varied from the pregame moment of silence to the addition of Amazing Grace to the need for conversation. George was acting as the head of a “secondary family,” providing the students with acceptance for how they were feeling emotionally and with tools to use for managing their responses.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how music aids adolescent grief response. To examine the phenomenon of music as an aid to adolescent grief response, I used case study methods and collected qualitative and demographic data with five music teachers. The participants shared the experiences they have had with adolescents experiencing grief. The causes of grief for adolescents ranged from the sadness of having a hard day to the death of a loved one, the loss of will to live and loss of friendship, romance, or relationship as an individual transitions to their more authentic self.

Adolescence is a period of plasticity that creates a turbulent time in one's life course (Miranda, 2013). There is a strong connection between the need for adolescent support from adult mentors such as music teachers, and the potential to provide this support through the use of music (Miranda, 2013). Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed and supported the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation. Through interviews with the participants, I learned music can become a shared language for communication between adolescents and adults, cultivating this sense of belonging. Research supports the ability to use one's chosen name in community settings with peers reduces rates of depression and suicidal behavior among transgender youth (NCFR, 2021). Affirming adults play a crucial role in facilitating a better standard of emotional health for transgender adolescents. These interviews illuminated two overarching themes of music as a foundation for relationship and music as a language for grief, which are reinforced throughout the stories of each of the five participants interviewed. All five teachers were emphatic that a teacher-student relationship is key to open communication and the potential for full emotional support for the student. Participants shared that in order for students to feel

comfortable talking about grief or any other topic, they needed to have a trusting relationship, a safe harbor from the turbulence of their emotions.

The participants provided these safe harbors, by creating a welcoming classroom. They greet the students on day one with an offering of acceptance for who they are and what they will contribute to the music classroom. Music is open for interpretation and can be easily like or disliked based on one's own background, bias and preference. The teachers provide space for the conversation and allow the students to be themselves.

When the conditions students experienced included an emotionally safe and welcoming environment, when they were able to create stable relationships with their instructors, and when those instructors worked to build trust with their students, students and instructors were able to use music as a communication tool — music became much more than just words that match a particular tune. What I heard from the participants is how music serves as an intermediary language connecting the music teacher and the student. Music serves as a shared language that gives the teacher and student a neutral space for communicating. Music is the human-to-human connector.

The role of music teacher is unique in that it provides an environment for relationship building with the adolescent over an extended period of time in a safe space. The primary themes of using music as a foundation for relationship and music as a language for grief work together to affirm music as an aid in the adolescent grief response.

One of the critical ways music teachers empower adolescents is through establishing a relationship of reciprocal trust and respect. Renee, Hazel, and Leonard shared they started building this relationship on the first day of class. They have each created a classroom environment that speaks for them to welcome the adolescents into a safe space for belonging and

acceptance. For George, the relationship building begins with the kindergarteners in 20-minute weekly classes. George looks forward to knowing them as they grow to become middle and high schoolers, he will see on a daily basis for sixty-minute classes.

For students who feel they don't belong, school can be a very lonely and sad place (Allen, 2022). Adolescents work very hard to be included in social groups and it pays off with positive long-term impacts in both academic and social settings (Allen, 2022). Teenagers are not being reserved because they do not need anyone, they are trying to work out if you (the adult) can be trusted (McFerran, 2010).

All five participants in the study emphasized the value of relationship building and the role of trust between themselves and their students. Renee, a high school chorus teacher, described how she starts on day one of class by explaining to the students that Chorus is about the collective "us" and that while you don't have to like the person in the chair next to you, you must respect the person. Hazel applies her same methods with her (current) college students as she did when she was teaching middle school band and chorus. She develops a relationship with the students. Hazel directly tells them "Once you're my baby, you're always my baby, no matter how old you are, no matter where you're going." The students have taken Hazel at her word. It is not unusual for Hazel's past students to come to her as adults for advice and guidance.

Individuals and families exhibit strength in their capacity for resilience. Resilience is the "capacity to overcome adversity, or to thrive despite challenges or trauma" (Allen & Henderson, 2017). It is how an individual responds to an adversity, like grief, that determines the ability to face life challenges and move forward with confidence. Researchers and practitioners agree there are certain steps individuals and families must go through to encourage and allow healing after a trauma (Allen & Henderson, 2017). These steps include acknowledgment of the event, sharing of

the experience through storytelling, finding a way to pay homage or memorialize the lost loved one, and working toward redefining one's individual life plan with reshaped hopes and dreams (Allen & Henderson, 2017). These themes emerged in the interviews when the music teachers recognize and accept their students so the students can in turn share their emotions and the loss(es) they have experienced. Hazel talked about attending a funeral for a student one day and then teaching their siblings the following day. In these teaching moments and through the trusted relationship Hazel has built, the students are able to tell their story in a safe environment. Hazel, as a music teacher, provides the space for the adolescent to begin the healing journey.

The interview responses demonstrate key concepts of resilience, including how the music "family" can become adaptable and can even find meaning in family adversity (Allen & Henderson, 2017). When a tragedy occurs within the music family, it parallels how this can emerge within the (blood or chosen) family. Because music teachers serve as heads of the "music family," over time there is a sense of history and understanding. The use of shared rituals and tradition can support positive emotional interactions and connection when healing is needed (Allen & Henderson, 2017). George shared a powerful story of experiencing the deaths of four students on three separate occasions. Hearing George's story, I had to pause to absorb the enormity of the loss. George's stories of student death and his role as head of this secondary family, show family stress and resilience theory in action. Because George had taken the time and made the effort to establish a relationship with his students, he was able to intuitively understand both his needs and the needs of his students. Through his story, one can recognize his role of teacher transitions to a parallel role of family through these losses. Because of the longer-term relationship George has with his students, he is personally experiencing grief. However, he has to set his needs aside to provide his band family with the necessary coping tools. George

shares each response with us: 1) the addition of the band playing Amazing Grace during the pregame moment of silence, 2) the decision to still perform a holiday concert and 3) the need to bring in administration and school counselors for a time of conversation.

From this study, we can see music teachers' support of students illuminating key themes of resilience theory to their school music family. This includes music classes that provide adolescents the time to listen to music as a collective, play in a band or sing in a choir to enjoy shared feelings and experiences (Laiho, 2014). Music teachers are using music as a tool for connecting with and empowering their students.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of the research study include the homogenous sample size of five music teachers as participants. The participants teach music within the same adolescent age range through the different platforms of chorus, band, and private voice lessons. Interviews revealed consistencies in the teaching experience to reach grieving adolescents. Each of the participants had formal academic training and personal, hands-on experience in their field of music. Their knowledge was earned through years of teaching adolescents in public and private school settings.

There are also limitations, including the small sample size of five participants. The study is limited in only offering a one-sided perspective of music teacher student (adolescent) relationships. However, the case study approach allowed me to explore the complexities of how adolescents experience grief and the ways their music teachers can support them. Similar interviews with music therapists could potentially add another dimension to the study results further defining and supporting the distinct needs of adolescents experiencing grief. Because of the differences in perspective and educational training, a future study could be conducted with a

group of music therapists. Depending on the comparison results of the music teachers to the music therapists, a third study could be developed to consider the longer-term impact of music for adolescents over time encompassing stages of growth from adolescent to emerging adult to adult.

The Last Note

Music is a valuable tool and an available resource for improving adolescent response to grief. The teen years are the chapter of greatest change in one's life course. Music is often accessible and is available at no charge on a radio or through mobile applications, referred to as an app, like Spotify, Apple iTunes, YouTube, or Amazon.

Young people need and want supporting caring adults in their life who are committed to them for the long term. Although music teachers are not family scientists, this work demonstrates that music teachers, through relationships and music, are able to provide this connection to adolescents over time. This study helps affirm that adolescents need ways to feel supported and safe. As the music teachers in this study shared, grieving adolescents are deserving of access to meaningful adult support provided in a stable environment on a reliable schedule. This adult support provided in an accepting environment promotes positive emotional health and well-being for one's life course. Beyond the field of music, we can see the importance of providing adolescents with a stability of relationships to support them in their grief. The perspective of music teachers in this study reinforces music as a shared language worthy of further consideration for grief support. Adolescents need adult mentors in their life who have a long-term commitment to them. Music teachers are these adults.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

CODEBOOK

Seeking Music ► Influence of Music ► Adolescent Grief ► Empowering Adolescents

MUSIC AS A FOUNDATION FOR RELATIONSHIP

Belonging

Any mention of music as a tool for acceptance, healing or providing safe space

Goals

Any mention of teaching goals with students, retention of students, gathering students,

Hospitality

Loss of Relationship / Change in Identity

Any mention of gender identity (crisis), transgender

Relationship | Relationship Building | Family

Any mention or suggestion of respect for individual(s), their needs, family (school) or creating, negotiation, building or sustaining relationship: student - teacher, student – peer, student – parent, teacher – teacher, teacher – staff, teacher – district

Use of Space

Any mention of use of space with regard to teaching environment: classroom, band room, studio, shared space, walls

MUSIC AS A LANGUAGE FOR GRIEF

Cause of Death

Any mention of cause of loss: accident, invasion, vehicle, gun(s),

Death of Loved One

Any mention of death or loss (separation from): caregiver, parent, peer, student, suicide, emancipation

Music for Mood Management | Confidence Building | Resilience

Any mention of use of music as a mood management resource or tool, confidence building opportunity or tapping the capacity for resilience

Teaching Norms or Process

Any mention of intake process, flexibility in teaching, adaptability, coaching, counseling, therapist, practice, variations on teaching norms, lyric writing, song writing

FAITH

Faith | Call and Response to God

Any mention or reference to faith, belief, religious, hope, positive outlook, spiritual

STAR QUOTE

Star Quote

Any memorable or interesting quote, mantra, or saying

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Jennifer Mahoney Webb
NC State University, Raleigh, North Carolina

Research Topic (v 04): How do music and or music therapy aid in adolescent grief response (mental health)?

Introduction by Researcher to Participants:

Thank you for taking time to join me today. As a reminder, I am a graduate student at NC State University doing research for my thesis. My focus is on how music and music therapy aid adolescents learning in their response to grief during or following a loss. I expect we will take about an hour to go through the prompts I have. If at any time you need a break or have any questions for me, just let me know.

Demographic / Survey Questions:

1. Can you talk a few minutes about how you were introduced to music and how that led to your formal study of music / music therapy? (the academic experience)
2. Tell me about the environment where you teach music / host music therapy?

Warm-Up Questions:

1. How do you select your students?
2. What does a typical therapy session / lesson involve? (Intake, welcome, time of individual session, overall time frame - weeks, season, school year)
3. What do your students share with you about why they are interested in music?
4. I'm sure you see a variety of personalities in your work. (pause to allow for response)
Can you tell me what themes or commonalities you see across your students?
What about differences?
5. Can you talk about how you plan sessions / lessons?
What does a standard process look like or how are sessions individualized?
(Individuals in crisis defined as: grieving, injured, chronic illness, disability, mental health)
6. How has the teaching of music / study of music therapy surprised you?

Grief Specific Questions:

1. Tell me about a time a student/client who was grieving (or in crisis) came to you for support.
Probe:
How did that student find you/know they could talk to you about this?
How did you know they were grieving/experiencing a loss? (traits / behavior exhibited)
How did you support them?
How did you feel during that time?
What was that like for you?

2. Can you tell me about the methods you might use with adolescents who are suffering from loss?
Probe:
How can you tell when you are making progress with an adolescent?
How do you know that what you are doing is supporting their healing?
3. How did your academic study prepare you to assess your students and meet their needs? (ie. psychology, family theory, coaching)
4. How have you seen music serve/be a way for young people to open up or be more open in their grief?
Probe: What other impacts have you seen or heard about in their lives, related to their study of music? (Ex: Relationships, emotional release, able to verbalize feelings)
5. If you were designing a music program in a middle or high school, what would it look like?
Probe: How would you incorporate some of what you've learned about music and grief into that program? What resources do you think grieving adolescents need related to music?
6. Now that you have a better idea of what I am researching, is there a personal circumstance or a loss that you feel comfortable sharing that drew you to the study of music?
Probe: How did music help you during that time? What were you feeling?
7. Is there anything about adolescent grief that gives you pause?
8. What do you find most intriguing about adolescent grief?

Closing Questions:

1. What do you find the most challenging or rewarding about working with your students?
2. Is there anything you would like to share that I have not touched on?
3. Do you have any questions for me?

Conclusion and appreciation by the Researcher:

I know working with music and students can be an exhilarating experience and a challenging one. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Please feel free to reach out to me if you think of anything else. If you would like to talk again or if you have any questions about our conversation, you can reach me via email at jmwebb4@ncsu.edu.

If there is additional time, questions that may further inform the topic:

1. What age group(s) do you reach through music (therapy)?
2. Is teaching music / music therapy your primary income source?
3. Can you talk about how music / music therapy might work for anyone?
4. How do you define progress for a student?
5. Has music / music therapy been what you expected it to be?

TABLE

Table 1**Table 1**
Self-reported Demographic Characteristics of Five Study Participants

Pseudonym	State	Race	Gender	Age	Education	Teaches Ages	Currently Teaches	Has Taught	Plays Instrument
Renee	NC	White	Female	29	Bachelors	14 to 19	Public High School Chorus	Middle School Chorus	Piano
Hazel	NC	African American	Female	30's	Bachelors, Masters	12 to 20	Private Lessons & College Music Education	Middle School Chorus	Piano, Trumpet
Leonard	NC	White	Male	41	Bachelors	12 to 14	Public Middle School Chorus & General Music	High School Chorus	Piano
Frederick	MA	White	Male	29	Bachelors, Masters	13 to 19	Private Lessons, Performing Arts School		Piano
George	TX	White	Male	39	Bachelors, Masters	5 to 18	Public K-12, Middle & High School Band	High School Band	Percussion