

Lived experiences of Music and Imagery sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative pluralistic inquiry

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Thesis accepted in fulfilment for the degree *Doctor of
Philosophy in Visual and Performing Arts with Music* at
the North-West University

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Graduation: May 2024

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I assisted **Ms Petra A Jerling** (Student number: 29606888) with the language editing of her doctoral thesis while she was preparing the draft manuscript for examination for the degree *Doctor of Philosophy in Visual and Performing Arts with Music* at the School of Music, North-West University. The title of the thesis is **Lived experiences of Music and Imagery sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative pluralistic inquiry**; her Promoter was Prof. Liesl van der Merwe (North-West University).

I went through the thesis making corrections and suggestions with respect to language usage, and restricted my editing to addressing such issues. Given the nature of the process, it is not necessary for me to see the final version, but I always remained available for consultation as long as necessary.

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Dedication

To my brother, Henry Dunn, who died during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(5 November 1948 - 4 June 2020)

Preface

Dear reader

Kindly take note of the following points.

- The article format was used for this thesis. This means that the document consists of seven chapters, with Chapter 1 being the introductory chapter and Chapter 7 being the discussion chapter. Chapters 2 to 6 are in the format of academic articles, with each article containing its own findings.
- Chapter 2: Jerling, P. & Van Der Merwe, L. (2023). Clients' experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions: An integrative literature review (article 1) was published in *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy*. (Advance online publication, 1-26. <https://approaches.gr/jerling-a20231210/>).
- Chapter 3: Jerling, P. (2024). My journey of personal transformation: An autoethnographic perspective on the meaning I ascribe to my lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) training during the COVID-19 pandemic (article 2) was published in *Religions*. (<https://doi.org/103390/rel15010046>).
- Chapter 4: Jerling, P., Angulo Sánchez-Prieto, C., & Solana Rubio, I. (2024). Selecting the best music for the moment in a Music and Imagery session: How do we experience the choosing? A trioethnography (article 3) has been accepted for publication in *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, and will be published in March 2024. (<https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v24i1.3849>).

This article was co-authored with two of my colleagues who trained with me in applying the MI method. The data collection and analysis were completed by all three

authors and we held regular discussions around the findings and the commentary. However, I was responsible for the overall conceptualisation of the article, including writing the introduction, the sections on the procedures and findings, and the concluding discussion.

- Chapter 5: Jerling, P. (2023). The meaning that five music teachers ascribe to their lived experiences of Music and Imagery sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis” (article 4) was published in the *International Journal of Education and the Arts*. (<http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea24si2.3>)
- Chapter 6: Jerling, P. & Van Der Merwe, L. Exploring meaningful experiences of group Music and Imagery sessions: An intrinsic case study (article 5) has been submitted to the journal *Music and Arts in Action*.
- The referencing conventions and editorial style of the thesis were applied according to the prescription of the journals that were considered for publication. Chapter 1, 6 and 7 were referenced according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition) (APA7).

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to

God for His grace and presence. ALWAYS!

“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of Your wonderful deeds; I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O most High”.

Psalm 9:1-2

Prof Liesl van der Merwe, my promoter. Words cannot describe your kindness, endless patience and support week after week. You were always there with uplifting comments, and not once did I feel criticised or ‘not good enough’ during this journey! I respect you for your wisdom, knowledge, guidance, and especially your always timeous responses. You are more than my promoter. We have become friends and that I will cherish for the rest of my life. Thank you.

Prof John Habron-James, my assistant promoter. I could not have wished for a better colleague in Music Therapy to help me refine each chapter. Thank you particularly for your insight and perspective and motivation when I needed it the most.

Prof Edwin Hees for meticulously proofreading and editing the entire script. I appreciate your enduring patience, mentoring and availability.

Suzannah Scott-Moncrieff for always being available when I needed clinical supervision.

NWU for financial support.

Anneke Coetzee, thank you for answering all my questions regarding referencing of sources.

The participants without whom this study would never have become a reality. Thank you for sharing your lived experiences with me.

Jan, my dear son, thank you for all the figures you so patiently created for me. Also, for the hours you spent with me formatting the final document to perfection! I felt your support, love and care.

Thea, thank you for initiating this doctoral journey and financially supporting me throughout these years of following and realising my dreams. I could not have done this without you.

My children, Willemien and Stian, Jan and Jenni, for your unwavering love and for continuously reminding me that you believe in me.

My family and friends. This kind of journey cannot be completed without the support and prayers and patience of one's loved ones. Thank you all!

Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to explore the meaning that participants ascribed to their lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants included South African self-employed music teachers who had all contracted the virus, as well as three music therapists, one from South Africa and two from Spain, who were trained in the MI method during the pandemic. The researcher was also the participant in the autoethnography.

MI is a receptive music therapy method which is part of the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM) in which the client's (participant's) preferred music is used for therapeutic purposes. Clients listen to their chosen music repeatedly while they draw, and afterwards, they verbally discuss the process, which leads to new insights. The first level on the continuum is to support the client. I wanted to know if and how experiencing MI sessions was helpful in recovering from this global traumatic occurrence. MI has not been explored as a mitigating therapeutic method during the pandemic.

This pluralistic qualitative thesis comprises five articles. They include an integrative literature review, an autoethnography, a trioethnography, an interpretative phenomenological analysis and an intrinsic case study. Each article made use of a different research approach, which allowed the adoption of different perspectives and insights into the meanings that were ascribed to the sessions by the participants. The first article focused on clients' experiences of MI as depicted in the literature. In the autoethnography I had an opportunity to reflect on the meaning that I personally ascribed to MI; the data were collected during the training and directly afterwards during supervision. In the trioethnography, I, together with two other therapists, explored the meanings that we ascribed particularly to the importance of choosing of the music in MI sessions. Data for this article were collected during intervention sessions. Five music teachers each participated in individual as well as group MI sessions. Data for the IPA were collected through individual semi-structured interviews, while for the case study focus group interviews were conducted.

After analysing the data across the five articles, I constructed the following six super-ordinate themes:

- 1) Music as activator: each piece of music had qualities that contributed to the engagement of the clients;
- 2) Emotional experiences: both positive and challenging emotions were stirred up by the music for clients;
- 3) Strengths and growth: through engaging in sessions, clients could realise their own strengths and experience personal growth;
- 4) Trusting self and others: clients experienced a sense of liberation when they trusted themselves and others;
- 5) Relatedness: the value of shared experiences was celebrated by clients; and
- 6) Spiritual experiences: surrendering to the music led to a sense of transcendence and transformation for clients.

I found that these themes related to each other and furthermore that all these experiences could lead to improved well-being.

This study is unique within the South African context, and findings show that MI as a therapeutic method was not only helpful to cope in difficult circumstances, but also contributed to improving well-being. The pandemic had a global impact, which makes these findings applicable to other challenging contexts and circumstances as well.

Keywords: Music and Imagery (MI); lived experiences; pluralistic inquiry; COVID-19; music teachers; music therapists

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Chapter 1

Lived experiences of Music and Imagery sessions during COVID-19: A Pluralistic qualitative study

Introduction

This qualitative pluralistic study explored the multiple meanings participants ascribed to their lived experience of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher started by reviewing the qualitative literature on clients' lived experiences of MI sessions. The lived experiences of a music therapist who completed her training as an MI therapist during the COVID-19 pandemic, was included in this study, as well as the experiences of three music therapists (the author and two other music therapists) in training, which focused on finding the most useful music for these sessions. The lived experiences of five music teachers who tested positive for COVID-19 and who participated in seven Music and Imagery (MI) sessions, is also included in the study. These sessions included individual as well as group sessions.

COVID-19 is a disease that is caused by a new strain of the coronavirus. The first infections were reported to the World Health Organization on 31 December 2019 (WHO, 2020). It is highly infectious, and infected people can have mild to severe symptoms of respiratory difficulty (WHO, 2020). The music teachers who participated in the study all tested positive for COVID-19. The research aimed to understand the meanings that a music therapist, who was also the researcher, two music therapists who trained with the researcher, and five music teachers ascribed to their lived experiences of the MI sessions.

MI is a receptive music therapy method. Receptive music therapy involves listening to music for therapeutic benefits. On the other hand there is improvisational music therapy. In this method the client and therapist create music for therapeutic benefits (Wigram et al., 2002).

Various MI approaches exist, all using an image or a series of images to ensure a relaxed state of mind for the client during the therapy session. The purpose of the image is to help the client focus while they listen to the music and it augments the involvement of all senses, which deepens the experience. Examples of such images include a scene from nature, particularly water, or the client's favourite place (Grocke & Moe, 2015).

MI approaches can be used when working with an individual client (Brink-Jensen, 2015) or in a group setting (Rudstam, 2023). Some MI approaches include listening to music with closed eyes while the client visualises in their minds and shares their images afterwards (Cohen, 2015). In other approaches music is narrated by the therapist whilst the client is listening (Meadows, 2015). Another approach is to listen to the music with open eyes and drawing during the time of listening to the music (Summer, 2015).

The MI approach which was developed as a method by Lisa Summer (2015) forms part of the Continuum Model of Music and Imagery (CMGIM). This specific approach was the focused MI method of this study. It is one of many adaptations of the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM). BMGIM, often referred to as just GIM (Bruscia, 2015), is a psychotherapeutic practice developed in the 1970s, using receptive music and imagery techniques (Bonny, 2001). Starting around 1999, MI was developed by Lisa Summer (1999) and, similar to GIM, the ultimate goal of the therapy is transcendence (Summer, 2010). In receptive music therapy, transcendence refers to moving beyond reality or the known to the unknown and connecting to the psyche (Summer, 2010). MI and BMGIM are the two methods included in CMGIM and thus lie on a continuum from a supportive level through re-education to the reconstructive level (Montgomery, 2012). Each MI session is structured as follows:

(1) Prelude: The purpose of the introduction of a session is to find a focus for the client. What is the issue at hand, or which resource needs to be explored during the session, is the question that will be answered during the prelude.

(2) Transition: After a focus is established, the client and therapist collaboratively find suitable music to explore the focus deeper during the music listening. The transition also serves as a second induction, where the client gets an opportunity to relax into the moment and return to the focus.

(3) Music experience: The chosen music is played whilst the client expresses themselves through imagery, most often through drawing. The music is repeated until the client's drawing is complete.

(4) Postlude: During the last part of the session, the drawing is used to discuss the client's process. Discussing the image leads the client to new insights (Summer, 2015).

Two problems drove this study. The first was the real-life problem of the pandemic and its influence on everybody's quality of life and general well-being. The second was that experiences of MI sessions as a supportive and creative form of therapy have not yet been explored during the time of a pandemic, which made this study unique.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people experienced increased stress, anxiety and depression symptoms (Khan et al., 2020; Sommer et al., 2021). People who were confined to small spaces and had little interaction with others presented with psychotic symptoms and cognitive problems (Allé & Berntsen, 2021). Sleep patterns were interrupted (Altena et al., 2020), and normal physical activities and eating habits were also influenced negatively (Ammar et al., 2020).

COVID-19 has also had a detrimental impact on the performing arts, as live performances and face-to-face instrumental tuition were not permitted during the lockdown. Artists and performers in all spheres and on all levels were influenced, as everybody was compelled to engage in their art form virtually (Bartos et al., 2021; Mak et al., 2020). A study specifically aimed at exploring the impact of the pandemic on performing arts professionals reported hardships that included anxiety, loneliness, less work and reduced income (Spiro et al., 2021).

Music teachers and students were challenged during the pandemic as live tuition came to a halt, but even when schools reopened, the possible spread of the virus still kept music teachers and their students at a distance (De Bruin, 2021). Music as a subject and as an extracurricular activity in a face-to-face scenario was still negatively impacted in more than a quarter to a third of schools in England after reopening (Daubney & Fautley, 2021).

Although no research study focused on music teachers who tested positive for COVID-19 exists these teachers must have been challenged in multiple ways. Apart from being physically ill, the emotional impact of the diagnosis, exacerbated by isolation, included anxiety: Not only were they not able to teach and generate income, but there was also the fear of losing students. Even when they could teach again, they had to find novel ways to engage with their students.

In an online survey during the COVID pandemic across 11 countries, Granot et al. (2021) found that music was one of the most effective activities in reaching various goals such as enjoyment and connection. In a South African narrative study, 11 musicians concluded that making music, either virtually or in their own homes, active music listening, or engaging with musical icons and connecting with other musicians, was helpful in their coping with the pandemic and giving them hope (Van der Merwe et al., 2021). Martínez-Castilla et al. (2021) also reported that music was helpful for most participants in achieving emotional stability and enhancing resilience during the lockdown in Spain. Willis et al. (2019), in a systematic review completed even before the pandemic, concluded that performing and music-making have a positive influence on the general self-care of performers and artists. From all these studies, we know that music, whether it is active music-making or listening, positively influences the well-being of people from various backgrounds in a range of occupational fields.

Research is available on how various populations have dealt with the pandemic. Examples include patients in hospitals in China (Chen et al., 2021), vulnerable people in Argentina (Yacobitti et al., 2021) and healthcare workers worldwide, some of whom

committed suicide after diagnosis (Jahan et al., 2021). One South African study was found which explored virtual (online) musical performance as a way to “retain (my) visibility in the community” (Erasmus-Alt, 2021, p.272). Yet, to my knowledge, music teachers have not been part of such studies. Furthermore, we do not know how music therapists made sense of their MI training during COVID-19 in South Africa. Also, we do not know how music teachers who have lived through the pandemic have experienced MI sessions.

This study differed from previous studies in three ways. Firstly, the population of music therapists and music teachers who have experienced structured MI sessions during a pandemic had not been explored before. Secondly, MI had not yet been researched specifically in the South African context. Thirdly, a qualitative pluralistic research approach to explore MI sessions is new.

In the field of music therapy, interpretative phenomenological analysis has been used as a research approach only in improvisational music therapy (Pothoulaki et al., 2012). A self-inquiry and a phenomenological inquiry that focused on receptive music therapy (GIM), where clients were asked about their experience of the postlude of the GIM session, have also been conducted (Young, 2012). GIM sessions have a specific structure, and the postlude is the final phase of the session when the client’s experience of the journey in the music listening is discussed with the therapist. In the self-inquiry, Young (2012) explored her own varied and even confusing personal experiences during GIM postludes as a client. She also wanted to know how clients perceived the postlude. The findings of the study showed that the postlude phase of the session helped clients give structure to some of the difficult and confusing experiences during music listening. Also, the client-therapist relationship was of the utmost importance for the postlude to be meaningful (Young, 2012). However, neither of these studies focused on MI as the therapeutic method.

Music teachers have been involved in research exploring the role of music therapy in special education (Gu & Hwang, 2019). Independent music teachers teaching children with special needs, and the implications for music therapy, have also been researched (Furman

& Steele, 1982). The addition of education-oriented music therapy as part of the after-school programme in the case of children with behavioural and emotional problems was the focus of a study conducted by Chong and Kim (2010). However, all these studies were focused exclusively on the child as the client and did not consider the teachers' or music therapists' lived experiences.

In a recent study conducted during the pandemic, receptive music therapy was applied successfully to clinical staff, who reported that their tiredness levels were significantly lower, as were their levels of fear, worry and sadness (Giordano et al., 2020). Music teachers, however, have not yet been subject to receptive music therapy studies. The application of GIM and its adaptations, including MI, can address post-traumatic stress (Blake & Bishop, 1994; Scott-Moncrieff et al., 2015), depression (Paul et al., 2020), improvement in quality of life (Bonde, 2005; Burns, 2001), coping with pain and promoting personal growth (Fox & McKinney, 2016) and dealing with work-related stress (Beck et al., 2015). GIM has been used with cancer patients (Bhana, 2016; Bonde, 2005; Burns, 2001), people who suffer from mental health problems (Paul et al., 2020), substance use disorders (Heiderscheit, 2017), and individuals recovering from a stroke (Poćwierz-Marciniak & Bidzan, 2017).

Music therapy, similar to positive psychology, focuses on the strengths of the client which then become their resources for change (Wigram, Pederson, & Bonde, 2002). This places them in a position to grow and rectify dysfunctional behaviours (Cummins, Sevel, & Pedrick, 2012). Bruscia (2014) also claims that music therapy, because it is a systematic therapy, motivates the client to stay engaged, giving them time to build their own resources

Receptive music therapy has proved successful in improving quality of life in relation to resilience, well-being, confidence and efficacy (Jerling & Heyns, 2020). Finding and developing clients' inner resources is one of the main purposes of supportive MI. Meadows et al. (2015) refer specifically to clients' ability to cope better after having MI sessions. This is

in line with many positive psychology principles and can be expected as either the focus or the outcome of an MI session.

Well-being is the focus of positive psychology through assisting people to grow, develop personal strengths and thrive (Lopez & Gallagher, 2011). The focus in positive psychology is thus on those things that can help people flourish (Hefferon & Boniwell (2011). Important positive psychology theories through which lens this study looked at MI as a therapeutic method include mindfulness, hope, resilience, courage and self-determination, all of which were seriously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mindfulness is a “way of being” (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. x), a practice that has self-compassion at its heart (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). It helps to regulate emotions. When emotions are regulated, better perspective and greater objectivity can be achieved (Du Toit, Wissing & Khumalo, 2014). One of the main tenets of MI is to help the participant to relax, slow down and stay in the here and now (Scott-Moncrieff et al., 2020).

The hope theory was developed by Snyder in 1989, and it was renewed in 2002 (Rand & Cheavens, 2011). The basic components of the hope theory include goals, pathways and agency. All humans pursue goals, and to achieve such goals, a pathway or a route is needed to assist in reaching the goal. Agency is the driving force, the way of thinking or believing that the goal can be accomplished (Snyder, 2002).

Resilience is the capacity of someone facing adversity to find pathways back to health resources and well-being (Ungar, 2008). Ungar (2008) stresses that the community also plays a part in this process. Resilience can also be defined as adjusting in a positive way after difficult circumstances (Masten et al., 2011). Both hope and resilience are constructs that can be explored in supportive MI sessions.

Courage, similar to hope, is one of the character strengths or virtues described by Park et al. (2004). Similar to resilience, emotional courage is experienced in difficult

situations. Courage is especially virtuous when one feels helpless or hopeless (Nel, 2014), as was the case during the pandemic.

Our self-determination was also under threat during the pandemic. The self-determination theory emphasises three psychological needs. They are competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In a group MI study by Rudstam (2023) outcomes included feelings of safety in the group, an increased ability to defend themselves and set boundaries, and there was an experience of heightened energy and creativity.

Clients' personal experiences with receptive music therapy methods have been researched in various other qualitative studies as well. Choi and Lee (2014) focused on clients' perceptions and understanding of the different sections of the GIM session, while Zanders (2008) interviewed clients and asked them to describe what they experienced in each section of their sessions. Summer (2011) asked clients how they experienced and understood the music that was used in their sessions, and Tsiris (2017) used an international survey to ascertain how music therapists connected spiritually with music. However, none of the above-mentioned studies was conducted in South Africa.

A South African study which concluded that music was helpful with coping during the COVID-19 pandemic (Van der Merwe et al., 2021) was qualitative, but the music was not related to MI sessions. MI, being one of many adaptations of GIM, has not been researched in South Africa, as there is only one qualified MI therapist in the country. This study was thus the first of its kind.

Readers that will benefit from this study include music teachers and scholars interested in music and life satisfaction, and music therapists. Music teachers and scholars attentive to the relationship between music and contentment will be afforded new insights into a therapeutic method that can contribute to their identifying and building of personal inner resources, which is one of the purposes of MI sessions. These skills are essential to help with coping during a pandemic. Music therapists, especially those practising in South

Africa, will be introduced to the MI method as part of receptive music therapy strategies. In turn, their clients and patients will have another option in therapy sessions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this pluralistic qualitative research study was to understand the meaning participants ascribed to lived experiences of MI sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question

What is the meaning that participants ascribe to their lived experiences of MI sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Procedural sub-questions for the five articles

This article format thesis explored the meaning that various participants ascribed to MI sessions from various perspectives. The exploration was led by the following questions that formed the basis of five journal articles:

Article 1: How does the scholarly literature describe clients' experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions?

Research Approach: Integrative Literature Review

Article 2: What meaning does a music therapist ascribe to her lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) training during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Approach: Autoethnography

Article 3: What is the meaning that three music therapists ascribe to their experiences of choosing the music during MI sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research approach: Trioethnography

Article 4: What is the meaning that five music teachers ascribe to their lived experiences of individual MI sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Research approach: IPA

Article 5: What is the meaning that five music teachers ascribe to their lived experiences of group MI sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Research approach: an intrinsic case study

Research design

This study was shaped by a qualitative research design, which means that I wanted to explore how participants understand a certain problem or phenomenon and explore to what extent current theory can explain their lived experiences. This was done through inductive processes and interpretation of the data received from the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the experiences of each music therapist and each music teacher was unique, as they construct their meaning from their own realities at a specific point in time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, the researcher reported various perspectives (Bruscia, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016). For this very reason, I decided to use a pluralistic qualitative research approach that included an integrative literature review, an autoethnography, a trioethnography, an interpretative phenomenological analysis and an intrinsic case study.

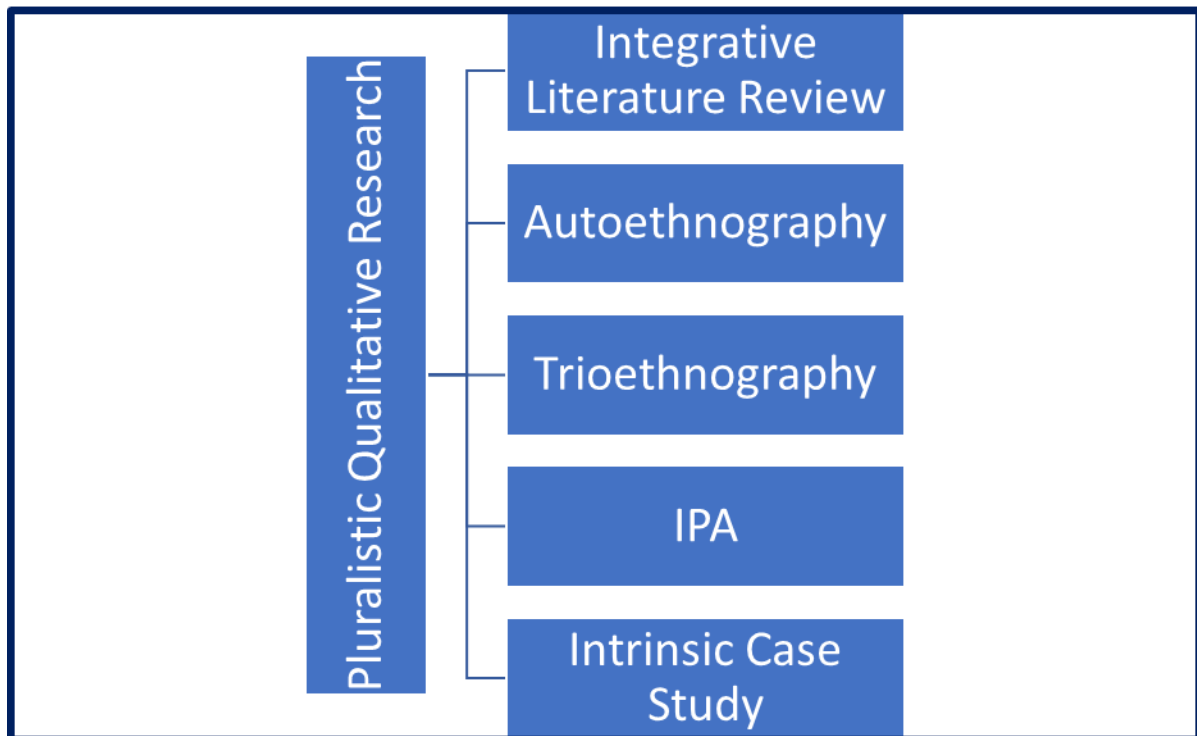
The complexity of qualitative research lies in the fact that the researcher's interpretation also plays a part in the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I was very aware that my engagement as a researcher, therapist and participant could jeopardise the process's credibility, which needed to be managed with reflexivity (Parker, 2005). Ansdell and Pavlicevic (2001) alert the qualitative researcher to the fact that subjectivity must be managed in a reflexive way by first describing and then interpreting. Furthermore, reflexive subjectivity can be seen as a resource rather than a problem. Finlay (2002) explains that

reflexivity can assist with examining the presence and perspective of the researcher.

Reflexivity can also encourage rich insights into personal responses. Furthermore, it allows for self-aware scrutinising of the methods, processes and outcomes.

Research approaches: Integrative literature review, autoethnography, trioethnography, interpretative phenomenological analysis and an intrinsic case study

This pluralistic qualitative research study consists of five articles, each using a different qualitative approach (Figure 1). An integrative literature review explored available scholarly literature around MI sessions within the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM). An autoethnography follows the integrative literature review, in which the researcher investigated her own involvement with the phenomenon (Hunt, 2013). The third article is a trioethnography in which three MI therapist-in-training explored the importance of choosing the right music to make the most meaning in the moment. This chapter gave the author insight into her own experiences of choosing music for an MI session, as well as how to accompany a client when choosing music. The fourth and fifth articles are on the meaning music teachers who had COVID-19, ascribed to their lived experiences of MI sessions. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was chosen for the fourth article, as I wanted to understand how participants make sense of their lived experiences of this specific phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). The fifth article is a qualitative case study that looked at participants' lived experiences of the same phenomenon, but in a group setting.

Figure 1*Research approaches*

Using various approaches deepened the understanding of the phenomenon, namely the MI sessions. In pluralistic qualitative research, it is understood that there are many ways to explore one phenomenon, and through using various approaches, diverse insights were gained (Frost & Bailey-Rodriguez, 2020). Engaging with the phenomenon from various perspectives further ensured a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Frost & Bailey-Rodriguez, 2020; Smith et al., 2009).

The goal of an integrative literature review is to integrate existing knowledge about a topic or phenomenon (Dhollande et al., 2021; Matney, 2018; Torraco, 2005). It summarises existing literature to understand a specific phenomenon in the best possible way, and comprehensively. It is particularly beneficial for further research if a new emerging topic is conceptualised, reviewed, evaluated, and synthesised holistically (Torraco, 2005).

Autoethnography entails the meticulous description of personal experience to better understand a cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011). It explores the multiple layers that can

connect the personal and the cultural (Muncey, 2010). Chang (2016) argues that the individual is always part of a culture, and conversely, that any culture needs the individual.

Autoethnography fits well with IPA, particularly when the concept of bracketing is taken into consideration. Bracketing means separating and setting aside some of the perceptions or assumptions that one has as a researcher and seeing the data for what it is (Smith et al., 2009). In this study, the autoethnography served as bracketing within the IPA as it made me aware of my own preconceptions. However, it is important to revisit the 'bracketed' material in a reflective way, and as such, work cyclically to ensure that one also listens to the participant attentively (Finlay, 2002). The autoethnography assisted with this kind of deep reflection.

Autoethnography is particularly fitting if the researcher has decided upon a certain phenomenon to be researched based on personal experience (Ellis et al., 2011). Very often, self-inquiries lead to a deeper inquiry in the form of an IPA for a better understanding of the phenomenon (Young, 2012). In an autoethnography, it is important that the content is of value to other participants and readers from a cultural point of view (Ellis et al., 2011).

To broaden insights after the autoethnography, a trioethnography gave a more objective and critical look at the phenomenon of choosing the music for an MI session. Trioethnography uses the same research principles as the duoethnography. The duoethnography research method requires different people to scrutinise the meanings they ascribe to a phenomenon in dialogue for the purpose of generating new meaning and perceptions (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). In a trioethnography there are three participants, therefore bias in the research can be less (Sawyer & Norris, 2015). Similar to the autoethnography, the trioethnography needs to be of value to a broader audience (Kinnear & Ruggunan, 2019).

Like the ethnographies, IPA also gives an account of lived experiences. Using these methods will address the phenomenon of the meaning various participants ascribed to the

MI sessions from multiple angles. Examples of studies where autoethnography and IPA were used in combination include a study by a dance-movement therapist and her peers around their experiences of their bodily dimensions (Gross-Cohen & Eisikovits, 2018). Another study using this combination had mindfulness as the relevant phenomenon, and the author examined her own mindfulness teaching experiences with those of other mindfulness teachers (Albrecht, 2018).

IPA is a well-known and widely used qualitative approach in psychology research (Smith, 2011). Central to IPA are three theoretical perspectives: phenomenology, idiography, and hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology has at its core the thoughtful reflection on the perceptions and feelings of the participant about a particular experience or occurrence (Bruscia, 2016; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Van Manen, 2007). Heidegger philosophised that phenomenology is the understanding of the individual's living with and experiencing of the world. Thus, phenomenology acknowledges the subjectivity of the experience or description of each individual (Jackson, 2016). The interpretation that emerges from each participant's interview is unique, as individuals make sense of their experiences differently. I wanted to ascertain how music teachers, after having been tested positive for COVID-19, experienced and made sense of MI sessions.

Idiography refers to this focus on the particular, which means the details are important, and the focus is on a deep analysis of a specific person, group or context (Ashworth, 2015). For this reason, a systematic and thorough analysis of how an individual experiences a phenomenon is a prerequisite (Smith et al., 2009). Data analysis was undertaken by coding data through interpretation, establishing categories and patterns (Jackson, 2016), and identifying themes through convergence and divergence, starting with one case, and when the analysis is done, moving to the next case (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics entails the interpretation of human experience (Finlay, 2011) and acknowledges the reflexive involvement of the researcher. The researcher interprets the interpretation or sense-making of the participant. This double hermeneutic, where someone

is trying to make sense of someone else's sense-making of a lived experience (Smith et al., 2009), lies at the heart of IPA. Deep and rich understanding is possible when the researcher's own ideas about the phenomenon and the participant's ideas are in conversation (Lee & McFerran, 2015). Finlay (2011) also refers to the hermeneutic circle, which is the constant reiterative movement of interpretation between the whole and the parts. The hermeneutic circle is a dynamic interpretative process that Finlay (2011) describes as non-linear and even mysterious.

The last article is an intrinsic case study. A case study seeks to describe and analyse a bounded system in depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The richly descriptive study made use of an inductive strategy to investigate the phenomenon, MI sessions, within a real-life context (Yin, 2014).

Participants

For the autoethnographic part of the study, the researcher was the only participant. Because I was completing my MI therapist training during COVID-19, my experience of MI as a method contributed to my understanding of the other participants' meaning-making.

For the trioethnography, the researcher together with two music therapists, who trained with me during COVID-19, participated. The collaboration was ideal since the three researchers were thoroughly involved with each other during the interview process, especially around choosing of music. This further contributed to my understanding of other participants' experiences of choosing music for their sessions.

For the IPA and the case study, participants were invited through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling means that only people who have first-hand experience of the phenomenon – in this case, MI – will be invited to participate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Wheeler, 2016). A small sample group is necessary since detail and depth are expected from an IPA (Smith, 2004) and the intrinsic case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

For the integrative literature review, literature was included according to the following criteria:

- (a) Peer-reviewed articles, including case studies, with a focus on MI, published since 1999;
- (b) Grey literature, including dissertations and theses, as well as conference papers from 2000 to 2021 with a focus on MI;
- (c) Articles published in English and German.

Articles not written in one of the languages mentioned above or that were not peer-reviewed were excluded from the review.

Two music therapists who trained with me in MI during COVID-19 were invited to engage in the form of a trioethnography, focusing on choosing music, as this aspect was what we explored during our intervention groups. Therefore, the inclusion criteria were that they had to have done the MI training with me during COVID-19

Five music teachers from South Africa who tested positive for COVID-19 but who had fully recovered were invited to participate in this study. Qualified music teachers of a range of ages, gender and ethnicity, were invited to participate. All had to be teaching in their private capacity, which implied a loss of income during the pandemic. Therefore, this group of teachers benefited from the MI sessions in terms of feeling supported on a psychological and emotional level.

Music teachers employed at schools and thus still received a salary throughout their time of illness were excluded. Music teachers who have been asymptomatic and have not been ill were also not suitable to participate in the research. No music teacher who was still recovering from COVID-19 or was older than 65 was included as a participant in the research study.

Recruiting of participants

An invitation to collaborate in a trioethnography was sent to two music therapists who were in the same MI training and intervention group with me.

An invitation to self-employed music teachers who tested positive for COVID-19 was placed on a social media platform, namely Facebook. Interested participants would then be invited via a WhatsApp message or a voice call in which they would be asked if they were willing and available to participate in the study. There was no reaction from the Facebook post, and the researcher then asked old colleagues if they knew of anybody who would suit the inclusion criteria. This way of finding participants is called 'snowballing'. In this sampling strategy, people who know of other people who could fit the inclusion criteria approach them and tell them about the research project (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher had not been involved in teaching for eight years, so no old colleagues are in a dependent relationship with the researcher. All expectations of participants, particularly as far as the time it would take, were clearly communicated. After they agreed, they were sent an email explaining the study in detail. A consent form was attached to the email. Participants were invited to sign and return to the signed consent forms to the researcher.

Music and Imagery sessions

Seven MI sessions were conducted with each participant: three sessions of approximately 90 minutes as a group and four individual sessions of at least one hour each. During these sessions, they chose music and drew images while listening. The purpose is to slow down in the moment and focus on their inner resources whilst listening and drawing (Summer, 2015). Because of the COVID-19 regulations at the time of the study, individual sessions of participants who lived far from the researcher and all group sessions were conducted online. Participants who live close to the researcher, had individual sessions in person with all COVID-19 protocols being observed. Sanitiser was used, and masks were worn whilst a safe distance of 2 metres was observed. Sessions were offered to the

participants at no cost. Any expenses that were incurred on participants, such as data, paper and pastels for those participating online, and fuel for those who participated live, were paid by the researcher, but no compensation was offered.

Sessions were between 60 and 90 minutes, and the researcher ensured proper breaks after 30 minutes. Online sessions were also conducted with breaks at appropriate times. The researcher also reminded the participants to make sure that they were comfortable before the session started. When sessions took place in person, snacks and coffee, tea or water were provided.

The role of the researcher

This research study involved my participation in the roles of participant in the autoethnography and participant and researcher in the trioethnography. In the IPA and case study, I was in the role of researcher and therapist. An important requirement in these multiple roles is to take professional and ethical responsibility for the clinical relationship with participants in my role as a therapist as well as in my role as a researcher (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001). I am a registered music therapist and the only qualified MI therapist in South Africa. Therefore, I have the necessary experience to conduct these sessions and make sense of the data collected afterwards. Before becoming a music therapist, I taught music as a subject for 22 years. My experience as a music teacher and my compassion as a therapist allowed me to enter the lived world of the participants with sensitivity, empathy, and respect. It also assisted me in making meaning of the data (Bruscia, 2016) and influenced my interpretation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). My own reflexivity was of the utmost importance under these circumstances, and I kept notes of my own values, responses and interpretation whilst analysing the data (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, I reflected on my own experience during my training as MI therapist through autoethnography. The training took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the process of listening to the participants and when the data were processed, I – as in a clinical session between therapist and client – was just ‘there’ and ‘stayed open’ (Bruscia, 1995). By keeping an open mind as far as possible, doing ongoing self-reflection whilst examining the data from various perspectives helped to ensure that the data were processed in an ethical manner (Kelly, 2006).

According to Muncey (2010), the autoethnographer needs to show their own vulnerability whilst reflecting critically on the experiences of others being narrated to them, as they become both insider and outsider in the research project. Although there is a perception that research should be objective and neutral, it is increasingly recognised that this is not necessarily possible.

As a registered music therapist, I am bound to the ethical standards of confidentiality of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (2021) and am trained to protect my clients’ identities and information. This sensitivity was employed throughout the research project, including the autoethnography. I was aware that I was telling my own story whilst reflecting on dialogues with others and their stories (Mertens, 2009).

Data collection

For the integrative literature review, relevant peer-reviewed academic articles, including case studies with a clear methodological structure, as well as conference presentations and dissertations, were retrieved using various databases. Particular search terms were employed (Solli et al., 2013). The databases that were explored for this study were APA PsycArticles; EbscoHost; eBook open collection; E-journals; ERIC; JSTOR; Open Dissertations; RILM; Scopus, and Web of Science. For this study, the search terms were Music and Imagery OR MI OR MI sessions AND experienc*. Both peer-reviewed and grey literature, e.g. unpublished Masters dissertations and Doctoral Theses in MI, were included in the search to limit bias and to ensure the inclusion of all relevant literature (McKinney &

Honig, 2017). National and international scientific journals, academic books, the internet and other research data sources, such as conference presentations, were also considered.

Data collection for the autoethnography included notes from my training, which helped with my recollection and critical reflection. The music that was used and the drawings that I produced during that time all formed part of the data that were utilised in the writing of the autoethnography (Pensoneau-Conway et al., 2017). Self-observational data (exploring specific issues and actual thoughts and behaviour regarding the purpose of the study), self-reflective data (emotional responses and self-evaluation) and external data (information from others about the researcher) were also utilised (Chang, 2016). Creativity is a part of autoethnography, and music and pictures were added to the data to ensure that various viewpoints were included in the account (Muncey, 2010).

For the trioethnography, the three participants compared notes. We also included our drawings and listened to and reflected on the chosen music again. Our transcribed discussions about our experiences during the intervention process further enriched our data.

In IPA, detailed and rich data are normally collected through in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule containing questions guided the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). Data were collected after the sessions through semi-structured interviews. One in-depth interview was conducted with each participant. Notes were taken during the live, in-depth interviews, and online interviews were recorded and transcribed later. However, other types of data can be used in an IPA, including images (Bartoli, 2020). Since drawing images is an integral part of MI sessions (Summer, 2015), these drawings were used to reflect on experiences felt during sessions (Van Manen, 2016) together with the open-ended questions. Observations by the researcher whilst the drawing took place also became part of the discussion (Smith et al., 2009).

A focus group with the whole group was held online in the intrinsic case study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The focus group was recorded for later transcription. However,

participants had the option to send private messages to the researcher, and they could choose to have their cameras switched off. They also chose to use fictitious names, even during the focus group. Although it is sometimes difficult to share experiences in a group (Flowers et al., 2001), shared experiences contribute to the depth and richness of the data collected (Flowers et al., 2000).

Data analysis

The quality of the retrieved literature for the integrative literature review was evaluated through quality review as it is applicable to this review (Matney, 2018). Harden et al. (2004) proposed that to ensure the quality of included studies, the theoretical framework and methodology should be considered carefully. Furthermore, to ensure the reliability and validity of data analysis, one should consider whether the aims and goals, the context and the sample group are all clearly stated, and that sufficient original data should be included for a mediation between evidence and interpretation. The mixed-method appraisal tool (MMAT) developed by Pluye et al. (2009) was used as scoring system.

The information collected from the chosen literature was summarised according to themes that were relevant to the research question. The identifying and summarising of themes happened reflexively, first from the perspective of the participant(s) in each original study, and also according to the perspective of the researcher or therapist of each original study (Solli et al., 2013). Lastly, a meaningful interpretation followed, including contextual and practical information to assist in answering the research question and open up possibilities for further research and implementation of MI sessions (Matney, 2018; Torraco, 2005).

The autoethnographic data needed to be analysed and interpreted in such a way that it is meaningful for the context of the study, its participants and its readers (Chang, 2016). I followed the three-step method for analysis and interpretation proposed by Chang (2016). Step one is to 'fracture' and 'connect' data. This means that first, the data were broken up

into smaller parts, similar to 'coding', and then connected in an organised way, similar to 'categorising'. Step two involves 'zooming in and out'. To zoom in meant that attention had to be given to small details, whilst to zoom out meant that the bigger picture had to be kept in mind. These two steps, according to Chang (2016), assist in finding the balance between analysis and interpretation. In step three, finding the balance between science and art is important when the three I's are at play: insight, intuition and impression (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This more creative step ensured a holistic and comprehensive view within the specific cultural context (Chang, 2016).

In the trioethnography, the same research method as in duoethnography was utilised (Lozano et al., 2021). Nine specific tenets are to be considered (Breault, 2016). The first three tenets include: currere, polyvocal and dialogic voices, and the disruption of the metanarrative. This meant the telling of a story had to take the past, present and future into consideration, using more than one voice to tell the story, and examining the truth from various perspectives. The fourth and fifth tenets are difference and openness. There needed to be obvious differences between participants, and they needed to be open to these differences in order to create a transformed narrative (Norris & Sawyer, 2016). This ensured that the story was trustworthy and accessible to a reader audience. These are the sixth and seventh tenets (Kinnear & Ruggunan, 2019). The eighth tenet is about the ethical stance, which is about a willingness to learn, grow and change, which is only possible where there is an inherent trust (tenet nine) between participants (Ellis, 2007).

For an IPA, a rigorous six-step analysis as designed by Smith et al. (2009) was conducted to analyse the data. Step one to step four was repeated with each participant's data set.

Step one entails immersing oneself in reading and re-reading the collected data. This step included checking if the transcription was accurate and ensuring that the participant remained the focus. The visual material from MI sessions was kept in addition to the notes. Step two includes making initial notes methodically, ensuring that descriptive, linguistic and

conceptual notes are separated, interpreted analytically, and reviewed a number of times. In this case, the images were taken into account where they were associated with the comments of participants (Bartoli, 2020). Data were coded during this step. In step three, themes that emerged were identified by applying the codes that emerged during step two. In step four, connections between emergent themes were identified and tabled. Through abstraction, the researcher looked for patterns and clustered similar themes together under a heading, which is called the superordinate theme. Since certain themes looked like they contradict others, polarisation was also taken into account during this step. This meant looking at differences rather than similarities. Contextualisation – considering important life events of the participant which helped shape the narrative – was kept in mind, as well as how often certain themes occurred. The function of themes – what the specific theme means in the life of the participant – within the data was yet another important consideration. Step four shows that qualitative researchers consider as many perspectives and factors as possible to ensure that the complexity of the data is properly taken into account (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Step five is a repeat of steps one to four, starting with the next participant's data. In step six, patterns across the five cases were identified, noting how these patterns were similar or different. Superordinate themes emerged from this cross-case analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Data were collected and analysed by the researcher, and no third party, other than the two promoters, were involved or had access to them. The researcher was trained in qualitative data analysis by MASARA. The ATLAS.ti computer software programme was used to assist in organising the data. ATLAS.ti is a helpful tool to visually recognise themes and categories, as it helps with noticing relationships between data entities (Frieze, 2019). The promoter and assistant promoter critically reviewed the coding process. Data are stored on the cloud-storage platform Nextcloud, as a password-protected document for seven years.

Data from the focus group were analysed rigorously, and thematic analysis was done in the six steps according to Braun and Clarke (2021). Step one consists of reading the data, and in step two the quotations are coded. Step three entails categorising the codes and themes were identified in step four and refined in step five. Writing up the findings was the last step.

Trustworthiness

Ansdell and Pavlicevic (2001) argue that if the research question is relevant, well-founded and legitimate, it will enhance the study's credibility. In the light of the pandemic and the relatively unknown method of MI in South Africa, the research question is valid. The findings were credible since various data sources were used.

For the integrative literature review, existing data that were relevant to the research question were utilised. The research studies that were used in the review were of a very high standard, because when these studies become accessible to other practitioners and researchers, the authors' expertise, experience, and proficiency should be recognised (Vella-Brodrick, 2014).

For the autoethnography and the trioethnography, data drawn from the researchers' experiences, which were relevant to the study and would resonate with the reader, were used (Ellis et al., 2011). For the IPA, data were collected from interviews with each participant, and for the case study, data from a focus group interview were utilised. The images that participants created during MI sessions also formed part of the data. These various data sources strengthened the validity of this research (Kelly, 2006).

Creswell (2014) and Creswell and Poth (2016) suggest eight strategies from three different perspectives to validate qualitative research. I endeavoured to apply all of these strategies. First, various sources of data, as well as different research approaches, were used. Second, from the researcher's point of view, being aware of my own bias and remaining reflexive was most important. This self-reflection is evident in the

autoethnography. Third, negative case analysis – the emergence of data or themes that seem not to fit in with the regular patterns – was taken into account and acknowledged. Fourth, member checking was applied, as participants' feedback was asked, and they got an opportunity to look at the thick descriptions the researcher had made. This gave the data extra weight and credibility. Fifth, I collaborated with each participant and gave them opportunities to interpret their data. In the sixth place, I remained involved over a long period of time. Seventh, I made sure to produce rich, thick descriptions, and lastly, my promoters, who are familiar with the research project, music therapy and my clinical work, ensured the integrity and authenticity of the research through constant supervision and discussion.

Ethics

Four principles are described in the Department of Health's ethical guidelines (2015). These were applied in order to ensure that the research is ethically sound. Firstly, the right to autonomy of all research participants and respect for their dignity was non-negotiable. Secondly, no harm or wrong (e.g. deception) resulted from taking part in the research. Thirdly, the research process benefited the participants. Finally, the principle of justice meant that participants were treated fairly and equally throughout the process and that the researcher kept their best interests at heart.

As far as the integrative literature review is concerned, how this knowledge was being put into practice needed to be carefully administered. Even though in this case, only existing data was used, it was important to remember that people were involved in creating the data, and people will be involved when further reading or research takes place (Levin & Buckett, 2011)

It is important to note that especially qualitative research projects affect everybody involved. These experiences can be positive (e.g. insight, self-awareness and hope) and negative (e.g. anxiety, discomfort and superficiality) (Van Manen, 2016). For this reason, engaging with participants and the data ethically was non-negotiable. The following

principles were adhered to: all participants had a right to autonomy, and they were treated with respect. Their dignity was not compromised (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In the trioethnography, case material was reported with pseudonyms. Although it is clear that the material is one of the three authors', no-one will know who is who. For the IPA, data from interviews were anonymised. Similarly, for the intrinsic case study, the focus group was anonymised. Before the sessions and focus group interview, participants had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. Only these names were used in the research process. In the group sessions as well as in the focus group interview, it was made clear that only group members and the researcher would know members' identities (even if they use fictitious names) and their data. The group members' own integrity when dealing with the content of the group sessions determined the level of confidentiality that would be maintained.

As far as non-maleficence is concerned, the researcher treated data with the participants' best interests at heart. I ensured that no harmful or uncomfortable findings in terms of a participant's experience were exposed in the results. To ensure this, I considered the whole person when dealing with data and remained sensitive to what is best for each participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Although MI sessions focus on resource-building and upliftment of the participant, there was still a possibility that difficult memories and uncomfortable emotions could appear, which could lead to anxiety or stress. If sensitive material emerged during the sessions, I would have referred such a participant to another receptive music therapist for further therapy. However, this was not necessary.

Participants in the trioethnography benefited from the research as a second opportunity to discuss and grow through the process was created. IPA and case study participants benefited directly from the research as they received therapeutic sessions at no cost. These sessions seemed to have had a positive effect on their experience of having been tested positive for COVID-19 as they had a platform to deal with these experiences. Throughout the process, I sought supervision from my clinical supervisor, Suzannah Scott-Moncrieff, with whom I meet regularly as a professional clinician.

I sent consent forms to all participants stating exactly what the research entailed and what the collected data were used for. The information included in the consent form also stated that participants have a right to remain anonymous and withdraw at any stage during the process. Lastly, they were invited to give feedback after the data were analysed (Smith et al., 2009). Before I started with this research project, I had approval from the BASSREC ethics committee of the North-West University (Ethics number: NWU-00959-22-A7).

Chapter division

- Chapter 1: Introduction to the study
- Chapter 2: The meaning participants ascribe to lived experiences of MI sessions:
An integrative literature review
- Chapter 3: The meaning of MI training for a music therapist during the COVID-19
pandemic: An autoethnography
- Chapter 4: The meaning three music therapists ascribe to the process of
choosing music during an MI session: A trioethnography
- Chapter 5: Five music teachers' lived experiences of MI sessions: An IPA
- Chapter 6: Five music teachers' lived experiences of group MI sessions after the
pandemic: An intrinsic case study
- Chapter 7: Discussion

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Chapter 2: Research article 1

Clients' experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions: An integrative literature review (<https://approaches.gr/jerling-a20231210/>)

Abstract

Music and Imagery (MI), which forms part of the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM), is a receptive music therapy method developed by Lisa Summer as an adaptation of the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM). Training in MI started around 2005, and it is therefore a relatively new phenomenon in music therapy practice and research. MI includes and favours the use of clients' preferred music during therapy.

An integrative literature review was conducted to investigate how clients experienced MI sessions. Initially, 108 studies were identified through a comprehensive electronic search, including dissertations and presentations as well as personal correspondence with the developer of MI. Nineteen studies met the inclusion criteria with a total of 189 participants, ranging from one to 76 participants per study. Participants' own descriptions of their experiences and researchers' interpretations of participants' feedback were examined in the six-phase data analysis process as described by Braun and Clarke (2021).

Six themes were identified: Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences; Emotional experiences; Strengths, acceptance and self-awareness; Affect regulation; Trust and feeling protected; and Connectedness. Upon reflection, the researchers found that these themes could all be connected. Music generated emotional experiences, which could assist with affect regulation, as well as the recognition of personal strengths, acceptance and self-awareness, and feelings of trust and protection ultimately formed part of a sense of connectedness.

Keywords: Music and Imagery (MI); therapy; experiences; perspectives; thematic analysis; integrative literature review

Introduction

Music and Imagery (MI) can be broadly described as listening to music and “imaging” with no verbal interference by the therapist. The client’s experience is discussed after the listening (Grocke & Moe, 2015). Imaging can happen during sessions in a relaxed state with closed eyes (Cohen, 2015; Noer, 2015; Reher, 2015). Another subtype of MI involves the client listening to music with a specific supportive focus or image which is narrated by the therapist during the listening process. Meadows (2015) employed this MI method in cancer care before or during chemotherapy. Various MI approaches are accredited adaptations of the original Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (European Association for Music and Imagery, [EAMI], 2023). Some examples of MI approaches include Resource-oriented Music Imagination (RoMI), developed by Frohne-Hageman (EAMI, 2023), and Music and Care: Music Imagery Method, developed by Papanikolaou (EAMI, 2023).

The MI method, which forms part of the continuum model, as developed by Summer (1999), was the main focus of this study. The Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM) includes two methods, namely MI, developed around 1980 (Summer, 1999), and the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM), which was developed by Helen Bonny in the 1970s (Bonny, 2001). Wolberg (1977) introduced three levels in his psychotherapy practice, from simple to complex, thus on a continuum. Wolberg’s continuum was introduced in the training of both BMGIM and MI to enhance the systemisation of the methods (Summer, 2015). The three levels as applied in music therapy, of which MI is an important part, can be defined as follows: the first is a supportive level, with the objective of accessing inner strength; the second is the re-educative level, where the aim is to confront the client’s issue and gain insight; and the third is the reconstructive level, where the purpose is to access the unconscious for the client to reorganise meaning (Wheeler, 1983). MI can be used on this continuum from a supportive level through re-education to the

reconstructive level (Montgomery, 2012). Both methods (MI and BMGIM) are client-centred (Summer, 2020).

MI uses one piece of music, preferably chosen by the client, which is repeated whilst the client draws their experiences while listening. In MI, the repetition of the music assists with deepening of the image and experience (Summer, 2020). BMGIM uses a particular pre-selected music program that allows the client to visualise or imagine whilst listening in an altered state of consciousness with closed eyes. In BMGIM, through interactive verbal dialogue guided by a GIM-trained music therapist, many images can unfold and deepen during the music listening (Bonny, 2001).

The purpose of this integrative literature review was to explore clients' experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions. To establish the value of specific therapy techniques or methods, it is important to consider the users' experiences of them (Solli et al., 2013). Torraco (2005) notes the value of an integrative literature review when a relatively new phenomenon is reviewed. Since MI as a therapeutic method is fairly new and has only been seen in research since 2017 (Summer, 2020), this review attempted to identify gaps in the scholarly literature.

There has, to date, been no integrative review in the literature focusing on clients' experiences of MI. However, a meta-synthesis that focused on clients' experiences of a variety of other music therapy interventions was published by Solli et al. in 2013. Their review focused on a range of music therapy interventions and the clients were from a specific context, namely a mental health care environment.

Some of the most important outcomes that emerged in a systematic review of the BMGIM and its adaptations (Jerling & Heyns, 2020) were general well-being, mood states, resilience and self-efficacy. However, as this review focused only on specific positive psychology constructs, there is room for exploring other themes. Although most research studies included in the systematic review by Jerling and Heyns (2020) were situated in

medical settings, they also included clients from other contexts, including healthy adults, music therapy students and workers on sick leave experiencing stress. The focus of Jerling and Heyns' systematic review was on BMGIM, although it also included some modifications and group MI; however, none of these studies focused on MI.

The present review focused only on clients' experiences of MI sessions, excluding the original BMGIM method and all other receptive music therapy techniques. The contexts of clients or patients in this study were not limited to mental health care facilities. Healthy clients were also included to shed light on the practice of MI and its value for enhancing general well-being.

Background

Music and Imagery (MI)

For clarity, the structure of an MI session will be outlined below (Summer, 2015).

(1) Prelude: The purpose of introducing a session is to find a focus point, or establish an intention for the client. The question to be answered in the prelude is: What is the issue at hand, or what resource needs to be explored during the session? For clarity, an example of a focus to be explored during the session could be an internal resource of *bravery*.

(2) Transition: After establishing a focus, the client and therapist collaboratively select suitable music to explore this resource on a deeper level during the music listening experience. Various short music extracts may be explored and listened to in this process of finding the most appropriate music. Suggestions for possible suitable music can come from either the therapist's or the client's music playlists. The music options are discussed and the client selects the music that they feel will fit the focus of the session best. The transition stage is followed by a short induction, which gives the client an opportunity to relax into the moment and return to the focus or intention.

(3) Music experience: The selected music is played whilst the client expresses themselves through imagery, most often through drawing. Imagery can also take the form of movement or clay work (S. Scott-Moncrieff, personal communication, 23 July, 2022) and even sand play (Kang, 2017). The music is repeated until the client's image is complete.

(4) Postlude: During the concluding part of the session, the drawing serves as a helpful point of reference in the discussion of the client's process. Talking about the image leads the client to a better understanding and integration of their resource and clearer insight on the re-educative level.

The strategy of inquiry: Integrative review

An integrative literature review aims at its core to integrate knowledge about a relatively new topic or phenomenon (Dhollande et al., 2021; Matney, 2018; Torraco, 2005). This review summarises the current literature on this emerging topic of MI holistically to best understand, conceptualise and synthesise what is available (Torraco, 2005). This integrative literature review can be utilised to manage and inform future research (Hanson-Abromeit & Moore, 2014).

The integrative review allows for the inclusion of studies with various methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies in a systematic search. The inclusion of studies with different methodologies could potentially lead to bias, inaccuracy, and a lack of rigour due to data extracted from a large range of literature (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). However, including several methodologies ensures that various perspectives are represented in the review (Pluye & Hong, 2013), which would ensure comprehensiveness. Including grey literature such as theses, dissertations and conference presentations in an integrative review is recommended by Oermann and Knafl (2021).

Case studies are often omitted when literature is reviewed because generalisation from such studies is not always feasible, and they may lack scientific rigour (Crowe et al., 2011). However, case study research is widely recognised and published in the field of

music therapy (O'Callaghan et al., 2013). Yin (2003) argues that the case study method is appropriate when the research question is either descriptive or exploratory, or when the phenomenon is strictly context-bound, and when evaluation is at stake. We, therefore, decided to include case studies in the review for the following reasons: 1) case studies were in the majority; 2) the research question is exploratory and our focus was on clients exploring their experience of the phenomenon; and 3) the phenomenon is valid in the real-world context as MI is a therapeutic method.

The protocol for this review included five steps, outlined below. These steps are recommended by Whitemore and Knafl (2005) to help ensure the rigour of an integrative review.

Step 1: Defining a clear purpose

This review intended to trace all evidence of clients' experiences of MI sessions. Therefore, the purpose of this integrative literature review is to explore clients' lived experiences of MI sessions, as well as their therapists' interpretation of their experiences.

Step 2: Finding all relevant literature

MI as a therapeutic method was developed in the 1980s but was presented as a method of practice only in 1999 (Montgomery, 2012; Summer, 1999). All available literature published since 1999 focusing on MI was included in this review. Like the method employed by Fidler and Miksza (2020), the search did not limit inclusion according to sample characteristics, theoretical frameworks or dependent measures. This ensured the inclusion of all the available literature on experiences of MI, which limited bias in the selection (McKinney & Honig, 2017; Oermann & Knafl, 2021). Given our language proficiency, the published languages included in the selection were English and German. It was necessary to ensure that the appropriate search terms were used to identify all relevant studies (Torraco, 2005). The databases that were explored were APA PsycArticles, EbscoHost,

eBook open collection, E-journals, ERIC, JSTOR, Open Dissertations, RILM, Scopus, and Web of Science.

The search terms were: experienc* *AND* Music and Imagery *OR* MI *OR* MI sessions. The original search produced only eight studies. When the abstracts of these articles were read, it became clear that Music and Imagery can be described as part of the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM) or as a separate, different adaptation of GIM. For this reason, the search term “Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (OR CMGIM)” was added. “*NOT* BMGIM” and “*NOT* Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music” were also added to the search terms since all BMGIM literature was excluded. MI was specifically developed as an adaptation of BMGIM and is clearly differentiated from BMGIM (Meadows et al., 2015). Backward and forward searching was also employed, which means that a chosen article’s reference list was used to find more relevant articles, as suggested by Finfgeld-Connett (2018).

Lisa Summer, who developed MI as a method, sent a list of resources after we contacted her personally via email (S. Summer personal communication, 24 April, 2021; 31 July, 2021). Another source for research material was the Association for Music and Imagery (AMI) website, since their journal articles (*Journal of the Association for Music and Imagery*) are available only to members. The search included the members’ resource page of EAMI, which includes all dissertations from the University of Aalborg in Denmark. Lastly, the search included the proceedings from the Second International CMGIM symposium, hosted by the Korean Music Therapy Education Association, and held online in October 2021. Abstracts were read, and the authors of the papers who met the inclusion criteria of this study were emailed with a request for their complete symposium presentations.

Step 3: Assessment of the quality of the literature

Both researchers assessed the quality of the studies included, as suggested by Dhollande et al. (2021). The studies were rated as high or low according to their

methodological or theoretical rigour. The following two measures were applied for all studies to assess their value:

- 1) Is the research method fitting to answer the research question?
- 2) Is the research question addressed in the collected data?

If the answer to both these questions was “yes”, the mixed-methods appraisal tool (MMAT) developed by Pluye et al. (2009) was employed as this allowed us to evaluate the studies’ outcomes. This scoring system was developed for mixed-methods research and mixed-studies reviews (Table 1).

Table 1

The MMAT scoring system (Pluye et al., 2009) used for this review

Type of study	Methodological quality criteria	Present /Not Yes/No
Qualitative	Qualitative objective or question Appropriate qualitative approach/design/method Description of the context Description of participants & justification of sampling Description of qualitative data collection and analysis Discussion of researchers’ reflexivity	
Quantitative	Appropriate sampling and sample Justification of measurements (validity and standards) Control of confounding variables	
Mixed Methods	Justification of the mixed-method design Combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection-analysis techniques or procedures Integration of qualitative and quantitative data or results	

We decided to retain certain studies regardless of their quality score, such as symposium presentations with much less data than full articles. However, less weight was

given to studies with a lower score (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Only studies on which consensus was achieved were included.

Studies included

The literature searches produced 108 articles, theses, dissertations and conference contributions. After duplicate resources were removed, 72 studies remained. These studies were screened by reading only the abstracts. Despite excluding BMGIM in the search terms, many still referred to BMGIM, and 23 articles were removed for this reason. After having read the articles in full, 30 more studies were excluded as the main focus was not on clients' experiences. The remaining 19 articles, dissertations and presentations were read and reread, and this time the quality assessment criteria were applied. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flowchart (Page et al., 2021) (Figure 1) is included to summarise this process.

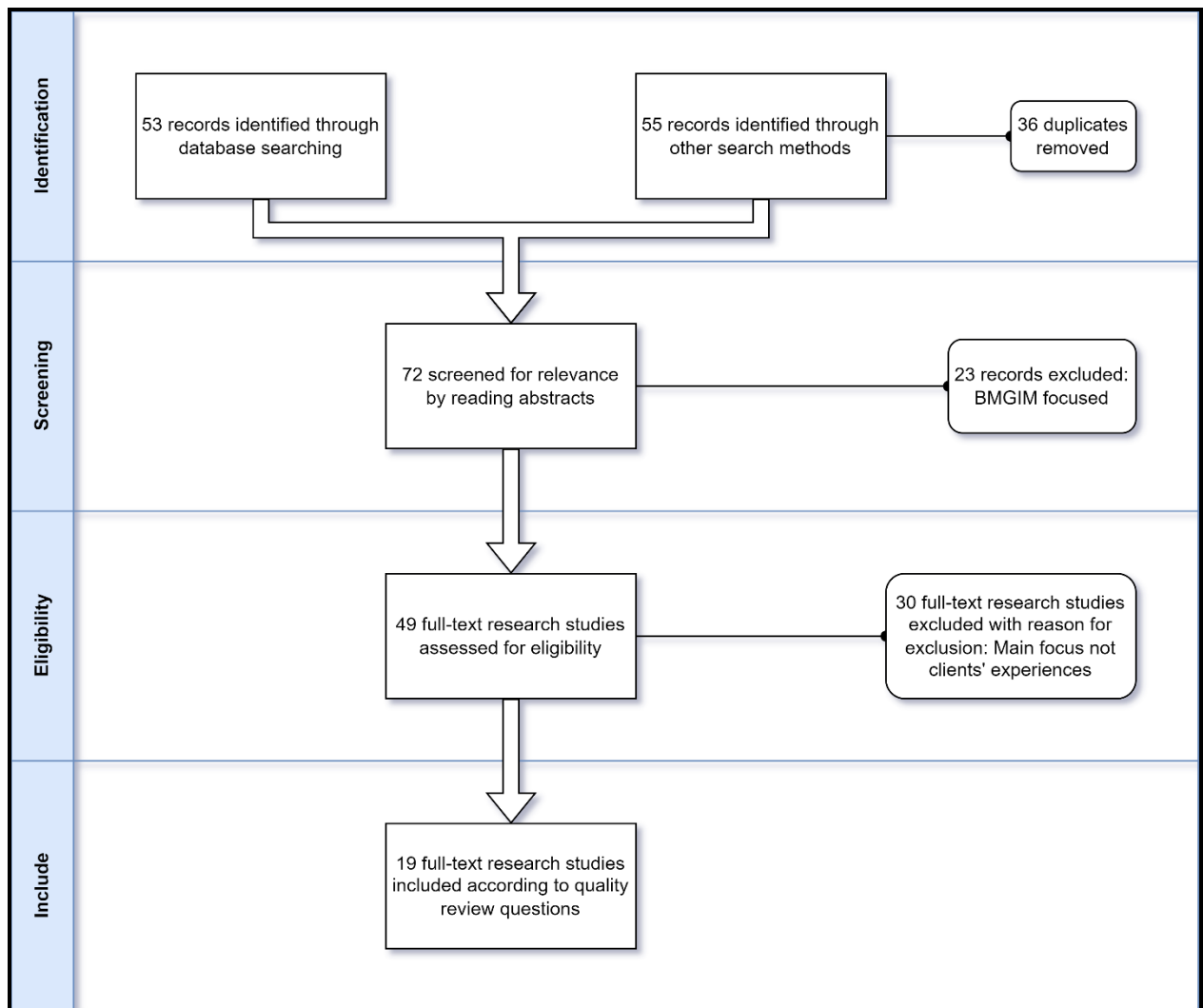
Figure 1*Prisma flow chart for this study*

Table 2 includes the titles, authors and dates of the literature included in this review, as well as the research design, the MI method used, and the population group for each study. Two MI studies that are not part of the continuum model were also included. The reason for the inclusion was two-fold: (a) they all employed the same three levels (supportive, re-educative and reconstructive) as the continuum model, and (b) all these studies focused on clients' experiences.

Table 2*Detailed list of studies included in this review*

Author and year	Title	Study design	MI method	Population
Angulo et al. (2021)	Selecting the best music for the moment: How do we choose?	Qualitative study: Tri-ethnography	CMGIM	Three female MI therapy trainees in supervision
Dimiceli-Mitran (2020)	Focused Music and Imagery (FMI): Pathway through the psyche; Supportive and re-educative case examples	Case study	Focused Music and Imagery (FMI): MI session with talk-over during music listening to enhance the client's focus on the chosen topic. The same levels as those in the continuum model are employed.	Three clients (one male and two female) looking for ways to cope with their situation(s)
Hearns (2010)	Journey beyond abuse: Healing through Music and Imagery	Case study	One woman's (suffering from domestic violence) case is addressed through supportive MI in a group process	Group session, number of participants is not specified
Herold (2021)	Musik als gefährtin im alltag – ein therapieprozess mit rezeptiver musiktherapie basierend auf modifikationen der methode Guided Imagery and Music (GIM)	Case study	CMGIM	One woman suffering from PTSD

Author and year	Title	Study design	MI method	Population
Kang (2017)	Supportive Music and Imagery with sandplay for child witnesses of domestic violence: A pilot study report	Quantitative study: Single subject design; Pilot study	CMGIM, but with sandplay instead of drawing	Three children (two boys and one girl) who witnessed domestic violence
Karastatira (2021)	Supportive MI in a secondary school for children with emotional and behavioural issues	Qualitative study: Pilot project	CMGIM	Three adolescent clients (one boy, two girls)
Kim (2020)	Qualitative inquiry on peer group Music and Imagery experiences	Qualitative study: IPA	CMGIM	Four female MI therapy trainees
Kim, Young Shil (2021)	Music Therapy interns' experiences of mindfulness-oriented Music and Imagery (Mo-MI): A grounded theory research	Qualitative study: Grounded Theory study	Comparison CMGIM MI and Mindfulness oriented MI experiences	Eleven Music Therapy interns
Kim, Young Sook (2021)	Drama of attachment trauma recovery using CMGIM	Case study	CMGIM	One female client with traumatic attachment experiences

Author and year	Title	Study design	MI method	Population
Liu (2021)	Clients' progress in Continuum Model of GIM: Based on Q-methodology	Qualitative study: Q-methodology	CMGIM	27 clients; 18 female and 9 male
Meadows et al. (2015)	Measuring Supportive Music and Imagery interventions: The development of the Music Therapy Self-Rating Scale	Quantitative study: Exploratory factor analysis	Supportive MI sessions, employing the same three levels as the continuum model. Directive guiding while listening to the music; and rating the effect	76 adult cancer patients receiving chemotherapy
Paik-Maier (2010)	Supportive Music and Imagery method	Case study	CMGIM	Six female therapists and trainees of the MI method
Paik-Maier (2013)	Music and Imagery self-experience in the clinical supervision of trainees Guided Imagery and Music	Case study	CMGIM	Six female MI therapists and clients (3 each)
Paik-Maier (2017)	An exploratory study of the processes of Supportive Music and Imagery therapy conducted in Korea	Case study	CMGIM	Twelve female therapists and trainees involved in MI training and supervision

Author and year	Title	Study design	MI method	Population
Park (2021)	Case study of Supportive Music and Imagery for enhancing self-worth	Case study	CMGIM	Two individual female clients
Story (2018)	Guided Imagery and Music with military women and trauma: A continuum approach to music and healing	Mixed method study: Randomised Control Trial	CMGIM	Five women who suffered from MST
Story and Beck (2017)	Guided Imagery and Music with female military veterans: An intervention development study	Qualitative study: Intervention development study	CMGIM	Five women who suffered from MST
Summer (2011)	Music Therapy and depression: Uncovering resources in Music and Imagery	Case study	CMGIM	One male client suffering from depression
Yun (2021)	A case study on the experience of self-acceptance through Supportive Music and Imagery	Case study	CMGIM	One individual female client

Step 4: Data analysis

We used ATLAS.ti 22 in this integrative literature review to assist with organising and analysing the selected literature. We used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to develop, analyse and interpret patterns across a data set. This analysis consists of six phases.

In phase 1, we read through the selected literature once again to familiarise ourselves with the data. The coding process started simultaneously with the second reading. In phase 2, quotations from clients who participated in the studies were coded and re-coded in line with the purpose of this study, namely, to ascertain clients' experiences. Authors' descriptions of their clients' experiences were also included. Just over 100 different codes were created across the 19 documents, and the next step was categorising them. Categories included 1) Affect regulation, 2) Becoming aware of character strengths, 3) Experiencing challenging emotions, 4) Experiencing challenges leading to transformation, 5) Connectedness, 6) Feeling protected, 7) Positive emotions, 8) Self-awareness, 9) Positive transformational music experiences, 10) Acceptance, and 11) Trust.

Phase 3 involved generating the initial themes. This process included colour coding and renaming the categories and consolidating them into themes. In phase 4, the themes were reviewed and developed to arrive at a final summary that satisfied both researchers. Phase 5 included the defining, refining and naming the themes. Table 3 includes the codes, categories and themes. We reached consensus on the following themes:

- 1) Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences
- 2) Emotional experiences
- 3) Strengths, acceptance, and self-awareness
- 4) Affect regulation
- 5) Trust and feeling protected
- 6) Connectedness

Table 3*Themes, categories and codes*

Themes	Categories	Codes
Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences	1) Positive transformational music experiences 2) Experiencing challenges leading to transformation	a different way to communicate; liberating/freeing; empowering/strengthening disturbing; fleeting; overwhelming
Emotional experiences	1) Experiencing challenging emotions 2) Positive emotions	anger; feeling depressed; anxiety; fearfulness; frustration; loneliness; sadness; uncertainty; feeling disconnected; negative feelings emotionally focused; calmness; confidence; feeling encouraged; feeling excited; joyfulness; freedom; feeling motivated; positive memories
Strengths, acceptance, and self-awareness	1) Becoming aware of character strengths 2) Acceptance 3) Self-awareness	courage; curiosity; faith; forgiveness; zest; love; patience; perspective; resilience self-acceptance; insight; self-appreciation self-knowledge; self-care; self-worth
Affect regulation	1) Release 2) Increase	Aggression release; Music slows down the body; less psychological distress; release of tension Music is energising; enjoyment

Themes	Categories	Codes
Trust and feeling protected	1) Feeling protected 2) Trust	groundedness; holding; supported; safety self; others; music; process Also: feeling unprotected; a need for support
Connectedness	1) Connectedness 2) Insight	God; nature; relationships; spiritual; self better insight of self; better insight of others

Step 5: Reporting and interpreting the findings

Phase 6 entailed writing up the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Each theme that was developed was described in detail in this phase. The interpretation of the findings will follow in the discussion section. A list of relevant quotations that are not discussed in detail in the findings is provided in Table 4.

Findings

Table 4

A summary of quotations found in the data

Theme	Quotation	Publication
Theme 1 Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences	"Now I can even love my inner judge, and this empowers me"!	Angulo et al. (2021, Slide15)
	"Evie felt a sense of release and allowance from her FMI experience".	Dimiceli-Mitran (2020, p. 49)
	"He stated that in the music, he had a feeling of knowing he has the power to give himself a great life and that he had not felt truly powerful recently because he needs his creativity to feel whole".	Dimiceli-Mitran (2020, p. 45, 46)
	"I see myself growing and expanding".	Paik-Maier (2017, p. 95)
	"It felt as if the music was saying wake up, wake up... saplings are coming out..."	Paik-Maier (2017, p. 123)
Theme 2 Emotional experiences	"When a string instrument comes out, that sound makes me free and fly more. Up above the sky is my own playground, a new self, playing freely in the playground".	Park (2021, Slide 7)
	"I am so angry with myself"!	Angulo et al. (2021, Slide 9)
	"Just a little at a time, things get a little brighter in our life until we're out here, and that's kind of where I feel like I am".	Hearns (2010, p. 51)

Theme	Quotation	Publication
Theme 3 Strengths, acceptance & self-awareness	"In this room she feels herself better... she has a great calm and radiates confidence just like the eyes of the grazing horses which she had observed".	Herold (2021, p. 68)
	"...feeling sad and overwhelmed..."	Karastatira (2021, Slide 23)
	"It brought in some tension as well as a parallel process to the feelings she was examining between confidence and anxiety".	Story (2018, p. 119)
	"Like a coming home kind of joy, you know, like you've been away for a long time and now you know you are where you need to be".	Story (2018, p. 127)
	"In the process of music selection, it is not only transference on the client's part that occurs. When a therapist offers music in transition, they may be influenced by their ghosts, desires to rescue the client or any other kind of countertransference".	Angulo et al. (2021, Slide 17)
	"Focus on the present moment, enjoy the present moment, and love to appreciate life".	Liu (2021, p. 19)
	"May noted that she could organize her thoughts while she was drawing. She explained that the image in the inner circle represented her mind, and the outer blackness represented her worries and complex problems. In the circle, May was rowing, going upward against the stream. May could not see what was ahead of her as there was thick fog around. It was hard for her to proceed, but with a paddle, like a steering wheel, May felt that she could keep going and 'reach a good, better place'. May later added: 'Depending on how I use the paddle the direction changes. I could accept fate as it is but with a paddle I could steer in the direction I want to go'".	Paik-Maier (2017, p. 175)
	"He described himself changing in his everyday life, finding focus, presence, openness, acceptance, hope, availability, relaxation, and contentment".	Summer (2011, p. 491)
	"The various levels of sensations, emotions and thoughts experienced in MI serve as a channel through which one's inner world and reality connect to, and these experiences induce the inner state claimed by mindfulness, that is, the orientation of awareness, acceptance and distance".	Young Shil Kim (2021, Slide 24)

Theme	Quotation	Publication
Theme 4 Affect regulation	“Music helped me to express my explosive anger, yet it also helped to restrain my feelings. After repeating this for several times, the intensity of my anger had decreased”.	Paik-Maier (2013, p. 9).
	“Kim described the experience as ‘fully satisfying, I am communing with the piano as if we are one...the piano responds at the end of my fingers...I feel so happy from it’”.	Paik-Maier (2017, p. 115)
	“So it represented energy to me, rather than the quiet meditative part. And I keep this part mostly hidden. People don’t usually see that because I’m not sure what to do with it. Where do I put it”?	Story (2018, p. 111)
	“While contemplating imagery, participants [became] aware of inner experience clearly and objectively”.	Young Shil Kim (2021, Slide 26)
Theme 5 Trust and feeling protected	“The choosing of the music has an essential function in the session’s progress because each piece of music has elements that can contribute to the change in the client. It may be originated by the tempo, the orchestration, a new instrument or a different dynamic”.	Angulo et al. (2021, Slide 17)
	“She says the picture has three parts: In the middle is a tree which stretches out its branches like arms and gives protection and security. From the spiral on the right, she says that a path emerged during the painting which she knows from a piece of forest, and which leads her again and again to surprising views. And on the left in the picture is a cave, a protection from the outside. I ask where it would be best for her in the picture now. She says, in the cave. It is warm and gives security. She also invites us to marvel at the cave because there are glow-worms inside. It is like a completely different world. I ask if she can also perceive this warm feeling in her body. Ms. A. points to the chest area. ‘It is warm there and feels very light and free’”.	Herold (2021, p. 66)
	“Jade responded that whenever she felt a difficulty, this warm image would help her, as imagery from previous sessions had. Jade said that she was optimistic about what future awaited her”.	Paik-Maier (2017, p. 144)
	“Each time she was emotionally engaged, being tearful, smiling, or laughing while listening to music and working on her positive/supportive experiences”.	Paik-Maier (2013, p. 3)
	“She gained some insight into how she approaches trust as well as how previous experiences have impacted her ability to trust others and, most importantly, herself”.	Story (2018, p. 128)

Theme	Quotation	Publication
Theme 6 Connectedness	“Reflecting together after some time gives another deep and valuable dimension of the process. We communicated our experience as clients, therapists and witnesses to share our findings and thus grow as therapists”.	Angulo et al. (2021, Slide 16)
	“She is cautious yet is ready to lower her defences (fence of the playground) to welcome people selectively in her playground. She now is in charge of regulating, defending her psychological space”.	Paik-Maier (2010, p. 10)
	“My imagery was as follows: A blue sky, an endlessly wide field in Africa, I stand on it”.	Paik-Maier (2013, p. 10)
	“Sue felt that such a connection made her feel not lonely, but secure and free”.	Paik-Maier (2017, p. 95)
	“She had felt God’s ‘abundant’ presence”.	Paik-Maier (2017, p. 183)
	“Music that reminds me of a meadow; everywhere I step is a meadow”.	Park (2021, Slide 15)
	“The first session connected her to an image of her grandmother as a positive resource from her childhood that she continued to use throughout the session series”.	Story (2018, p. 115)

Theme 1: Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences

Several clients experienced music as a catalyst for transformational experiences, which included confronting challenging experiences. We identified transformational music experiences in 17 of 19 studies included in the review. Music was described by the clients as affording a different way to communicate, as liberating and empowering.

Hearns (2010) described her client's experience as "transpersonal and transformative in nature" (p. 55) after the client said that "it's what's inside of me that's kind of coming out to me showing [me who I am]" (p. 54). Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences because of its power to stimulate a different way of communication was mentioned in several examples. A client described the music as communicating to her in the following way: "it led me to an awesome experience of getting in touch with my thoughts, feelings and emotions through music" (Paik-Maier, 2010, p. 14). Story (2018) also described how her clients experienced music as an alternative and transforming method of communication. She mentioned that a client who suffered from PTSD reacted as follows during a music listening experience: "(S)he had her hand pushing out in front of her in a motion of 'stop'. She associated it with saying no to her attacker and also to the current negativity she was feeling in her life" (p. 112). Another client mentioned how a "brief mandala drawing allowed her to draw the anger on the page" (Story, 2018, p. 116).

Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences was noted in quotations involving clients experiencing the music as liberating, for example: "My body flows" (Meadows et al., 2015, p. 373). In Dimiceli-Mitran's (2020) study, a client who was diagnosed in adulthood as being on the autistic spectrum said: "I want to release this boy again" (p. 46), and another client from this same study experienced "a feeling of lightheartedness, good company and nature" (p. 50). Freedom and beauty in the music were described by one of Liu's (2021) clients: "Sometimes music touches my heart. As if it's taking me on some amazing and adventurous journey" (p. 19).

Transformation can be facilitated by clients feeling empowered and can be defined as “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights” (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). Herold (2021) quoted a comment made in the context of the client having started a new job after feeling insecure and intimidated during the difficult process of looking for work. After the MI experience, the client “felt very light ...It felt very familiar and light” (p. 69).

Challenging experiences can certainly also lead to transformation. In this theme—where the music is the catalyst for transformational experiences, challenging music experiences were also evident. Hearn (2010) described one client’s difficulty: “she said it was challenging for her to stay focused during the music listening experience” (p. 51), whilst Summer (2011, p. 489) described a client experiencing the imagery during the music listening process as “fleeting”, “disturbing” and “fragmented” (p. 489). Angulo et al. (2021), Paik-Maier (2017), Story and Beck (2017) and Story (2018) all described clients who found the music-listening experiences overwhelming. Responses such as “unable to engage” (Story, 2018, p. 116), “anxious”, “complicated”, “flooding” (Paik-Maier, 2017, p. 130, 131), “heavy” and “exhausted” (Paik-Maier, 2017, p. 141), and “inhibited” (Story & Beck, 2017, p. 98) were indicated. In the case of Angulo et al. (2021, slide 6), the client’s journey was one of refusal at first, up to the point where the music had a “profound effect”, leading to “change” for the client.

Theme 2: Emotional experiences

Examples of both positive and challenging emotional experiences were included in the literature. Challenging emotional experiences were reported in 12 of the studies. These included anger, confusion and sadness (See Table 4). Frustration also became evident during music listening when Kang’s (2017) client played aggressively with the figures in the sand tray. She said: “I’m really delighted to massacre things like a villain” (p. 75).

Feelings of fear and uncertainty were also expressed: “What if I cannot do it because I am afraid of it?” (Paik-Maier, 2017, p. 130). Angulo et al. (2021) mentioned an example of a client realising that she had to face her inner critic even though this would create a feeling of uncertainty in the moment: “But I need the victim to stay, instead of running away” (slide 12). Paik-Maier (2017) noted that her client “expressed many ambivalent feelings” (p. 144). Yun (2021) also mentioned her client feeling disconnected as she “expressed having negative feelings of inadequacy and segmentation” (slide 6).

During MI sessions, some clients also noted that feelings of depression emerged: “Then I was faced with the abyss of depression which I have tried to escape from while breathing at a slow pace” (Paik-Maier, 2013, p. 14). Loneliness is another difficult emotion that arose in some cases, for example when a client asked the therapist to “sing [the] popular song ‘A Firefly’ whose lyrics are about parting and loneliness” (Kang, 2017, p. 75).

On the other hand, emotions that are experienced as positive and uplifting were also reported in 13 studies. Summer (2011) described how her client became more focused: “Kyle expressed that he had felt ‘focused’, ‘involved’ and ‘creative’ while he was drawing” (p. 490). Meadows et al. (2015, p. 373) noted that their clients felt “refreshed”.

Other positive emotions that were expressed during MI sessions include “excitement” and “joy” (Karastatira, 2021). Dimiceli-Mitran (2020) noted that a client felt encouraged by the process: “he felt opened, affirmed, heard, and relieved to sit with his feelings” (p. 45). Five authors also reported that the music stirred positive memories (Dimiceli-Mitran, 2020; Yun, 2021; Paik-Maier, 2010, 2013, 2017; Story, 2018; Summer, 2011).

Theme 3: Strengths, acceptance, and self-awareness

This theme incorporates three concepts which build on each other in a symbiotic relationship. It was found that these three concepts – strengths, acceptance and self-awareness – feed from and into each other. All the included studies included codes from at least one of these concepts.

The various character strengths that the clients became aware of and started to understand as a result of their experiences during the MI sessions were coded. Strengths that were mentioned in quotations included courage and confidence: “I feel ‘Yes, I can do it!’” (Paik-Maier, 2017, p. 130). A much earlier study by Paik-Maier (2010) included this comment: “As I experienced my inner positive imageries, I began to unfold my crumpled (creased) mind, found my strength and became confident” (p. 13).

Faith as a strength was also represented: “She connected the flowers in her drawing to faith and wanted to see flowers as a visual reminder of faith during the coming week” (Story, 2018, p. 123). Paik-Maier (2017) wrote how her client experienced her faith in the MI process: “She explained that she felt supported by the oceans like she felt supported by God” (p. 78). Forgiveness also emerged as a character strength: “Mary shared that she was working on forgiveness and being able to stop blaming others” (Story, 2018, p. 116). Love and appreciation of beauty were mentioned as positive attributes: “Focus on the present moment, enjoy the present moment, and love to appreciate life. I can feel the happiness and beauty around” (Liu, 2021, p. 19).

Two authors noted that their clients appreciated their curiosity as a strength: “It stimulates my curiosity which leads me to meet many different fruits inside me” (Park, 2021, slide 9), and “She was curious about the image and felt energised by it” (Story, 2018, p. 112). The following comment demonstrated how a client became more patient: “Just a little at a time, things get a little brighter in our life until we’re out of here” (Hearns, 2010, p. 51). Gaining a sense of perspective was a strength that a client developed during MI sessions: “I have learned to use imagery as a way to ground myself. I can see these images, and it just takes me to a different place” (Story & Beck, 2017, p. 98).

Lastly, resilience was evident in several studies, for example: “He stated the flame symbolizes his resilience, but it is barely above water, a tiny pilot light. He said, ‘Life deals you the hand, and you have to prioritize other things.’ He doesn’t regret it” (Dimiceli-Mitran, 2020, p. 47).

Becoming aware of these strengths is the beginning of acceptance, as clients realise a marked change in self-concept. Acceptance was noted as a theme in Story and Beck's (2017) study: "a new and useful experience and acceptance of a previously marginalized aspect of self" (p. 101). Summer (2011) explained what happened to her client: "The second re-educative step occurred when he was willing to accept, on a new level, the reality of his feelings" (p. 493).

Awareness was also acutely heightened while the music played and the client drew. One client mentioned that drawing mandalas allowed her to "really connect with things that I didn't know were there. That's how I would define this experience" (Hearns, 2010, p. 57). Story and Beck (2017) highlighted the significance of self-awareness: "The imagery [facilitated change through] identification of positive inner resources and a new experience of 'self' in the music" (p. 96). A last example here is from Story (2018): "Listening together to music [that] she had brought [along to the session], she identified herself in an image as 'somebody who takes more risks than I have in my life...'" (p. 112).

Theme 4: Affect regulation

In this theme, affect regulation, the following five categories appeared in 16 of the 19 studies: the release of physical tension, the release of anger, the release of psychological tension, slowing down of the body, and energising the body.

In the category of physical tension being released, we noted a client's comment in Meadows et al. (2015, p. 373) about being "less uptight". Karastatira (2021), observing one of the young clients, commented that "[it] feels good in her body. [She] can take [a] deep breath, the self-hug" (slide 12).

Anger release was also noted in a session with a young client: "[H]e said: 'I'll break [the animal figures]' and attempted to do so while pretending to cut them with a knife" (Kang, 2017, p. 75). Adults could also describe their release of anger (Paik-Maier, 2013), and reduced psychological distress was a theme in Young Shil Kim's (2021) study. (See Table 4)

Various comments referred to the slowing down of the body. Clients referred to “Body stabilization (Calming down)” (Young Sook Shil, 2021, slide 13) and “The music held my emotion, waiting for me patiently and not rushing me” (Paik-Maier, 2013, p. 15). However, there were more references to energising the body: “I have fire for life” (Hearns, 2010, p. 54) is one example. One of the clients reported that they “enjoy the present moment” (Liu, 2021, p. 19). Lastly, when a client heard a specific piece of music, she exclaimed: “This is what I need. It is like the pulse of this dark side of myself” (Angulo et al., 2021, slide 13).

Theme 5: Trust and feeling protected

Trust was a notion present in 16 studies; it included categories such as trusting oneself, trusting others and, significantly, trusting the music. “I am the conductor, I’m at the centre, and I lead the sounds, waves, all of them and everyone follows me. (I) feel thrilled about music perfectly following my direction” (Park, 2021, slide 14). This comment showed how, when the client trusted the music, it helped the client also to trust themselves. Comments that focused on trusting others were included in a group study: “Experiences of group support by sense of kinship...trust towards the group...” (Kim, 2020, p. 107). Paik-Maier referred to the fact that the therapist must also trust the client: “I trusted the power the clients have within” (Paik-Maier, 2013, p. 15).

There was also a category that entailed trusting the music in this type of therapeutic method: Kim (2020) mentioned: “Successful music experiences...trusting the music” (p. 107), and Angulo et al. (2021) said: “the music fits better” (slide 14). This comment refers to the choice of music during an MI session and the significance of how suitable music helps the client trust the process. Music also made clients feel safe, even when different emotions were present. Paik-Maier (2010) also mentioned in one example: “This [the music] was a safe and peaceful place to meet a girl who lived happily and freely” (p. 8), whilst Story and Beck (2017) spoke about music which “allows an experience of safety and trust” (p. 94).

Another category under this theme is the feeling of groundedness: “So it was a nice process for me to learn...I’ve learned to use imagery as a way to ground myself” (Story & Beck, 2017, p. 98). A feeling of being grounded was associated with specific physical spaces: “The room feels much calmer” (Meadows et al., 2015, p. 373). Park’s (2021) client felt connected to nature with a “feeling of being connected and joined as one with [an] endless plain [grassland]” (slide 11). This kind of groundedness is similar to feeling supported and contained by either the music or the imagery or both: “It reminds me of coming to a place of home. It definitely feels like I’d want to go there” (Story, 2018, p. 127). Similarly, the comment: “Comfortable; being at home” (Karastatira, 2021, slide 6) indicated a feeling of safety and protection.

Being immersed in the music and the imagery was also experienced by clients as feeling safe and protected: “With the pace of his drawing slowed down, his arms began moving every once in a while, with the rhythm of the music. Listening deeply, he allowed the beauty of the music to shape what he was drawing” (Summer, 2011, p. 491).

Some codes around feeling protected also referred to a lack of support or groundedness. A need for support was noted by Kang (2017, p. 76): “Participant Cera seemed to express a need for love”, and Yun (2021) mentioned: “In the drawing someone was carrying heavy luggage, too heavy for anyone, in the middle of a desert hit by a sandstorm” (slide 13).

Theme 6: Connectedness

Codes that allude to connectedness appeared in all 19 studies. Connection to God was noted by Meadows et al. (2015): “I feel connected to God” (p. 373). Paik-Maier (2017) also observed a connection between her client and God: “She had felt God’s ‘abundant’ presence” (p. 183).

Connectedness to nature also appeared in a number of studies, one example being: “These are her experiences during the excursions, running in the open air, the sounds of

windmills...” (Herold, 2021, p. 68). Another was: “These birds are sleeping warmly while embracing each other” (Kang 2017, p. 76). Like Kang, whose clients were children, Karastatira (2021) also worked with young people and noted the following: “A rose in the mirror, playing outside, feeling ‘worth it’” (slide 10).

Connection to self was observed both physically, with a heightened body awareness, and emotionally. An emotional connection was observed in the following examples: “[She] asked herself: Perhaps she may have been avoiding feelings, not that she couldn’t feel them or empathize with others” (Yun, 2021, slide 19) and: “But I’m trying so hard to [believe] in myself” (Hearns, 2010, p. 54).

Connectedness to others came to the fore in several examples: “I can accept the difficulties and obstacles I have experienced in the past, or the people and things that once made me sad. These will no longer bother me” (Liu, 2021, p. 19). Paik-Maier’s (2010) client experienced a more gradual process of connecting with others: “She is cautious yet is ready to lower her defences (fence of the playground) to welcome people selectively in her playground. She now is in charge of regulating, defending her psychological space” (p. 10).

Codes dealing with connection with others, specifically in the sense of understanding others, were also found in the literature. Young Sook Kim (2021) found that a direct consequence of the therapeutic work was a better understanding of others. A client in this case, felt free from guilt, understanding their mother as a woman. Two emotional and significant comments came from separate studies: “I’m not alone. There will be conflicts, but there will always be that support there” (Story & Beck, 2017, p. 98), and “[H]e reported that he experienced – for the first time in his life that he ever remembered – really feeling what he knew were normal feelings of compassion for another person” (Summer, 2011, p. 491). Strong insights about better understanding among group members were evident in comments such as: “Allowing individuality; embracing diversity” (Kim, 2020, p. 107) and

Young Shil Kim (2021) reported connection in the following way: “To help open-minded[ness] in group, to help reduce defence in group” (slide 25).

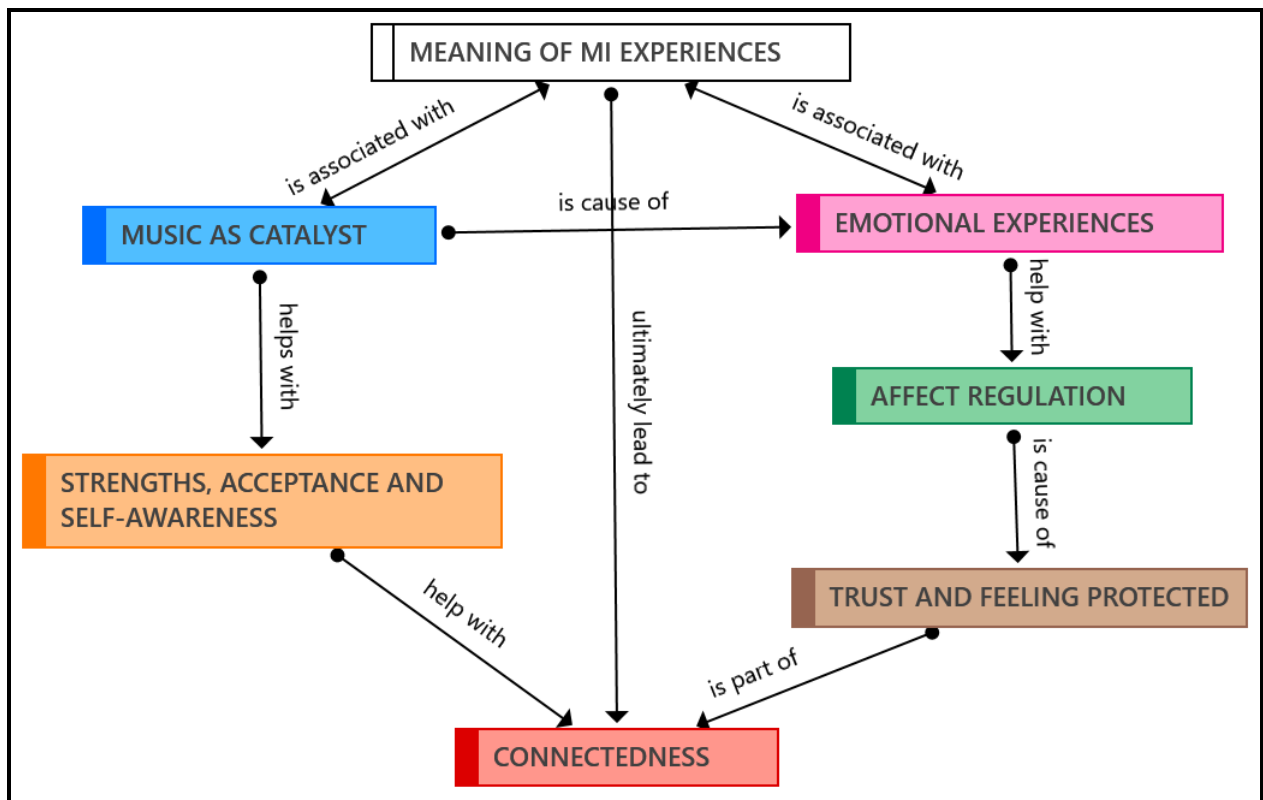
Discussion

We explored the experiences of clients during MI sessions. The findings indicate that clients experienced music as a meaningful catalyst for emotional experiences, and for experiences of acceptance, awareness and finding their strengths, affect regulation, trust and feeling protected, and connectedness. Both positive and challenging emotions were represented in the data. Data referring to strengths, acceptance and self-awareness as well as affect regulation included both positive and difficult experiences during sessions. So-called negative experiences are potentially highly significant in therapy and should not be neglected or overlooked.

Based on the reviewed material, our interpretation is that MI experiences are associated with music as a catalyst for both transformational and emotional experiences. Music is also the catalyst for identifying strengths and developing acceptance and self-awareness. Acceptance, self-awareness and acknowledgement of one's strengths also help to promote meaningful experiences of connectedness. In theme two it became clear that positive emotional experiences help with affect regulation, which in turn creates trust and feeling protected. Our interpretation of the data is that when experiences of trust and feeling protected are acknowledged, they also become part of a sense of connectedness. The first theme in our study, ‘Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences’ produced rich and varied codes which could be linked to the other themes. See Figure 2.

Figure 2

MI themes and how they relate to each other



Guided Imagery and Music in various adaptations has previously been explored as a well-being intervention. The overall results looked positive, with concepts such as hope, resilience, spiritual well-being and self-efficacy identified in the data (Jerling & Heyns, 2020). Literature that argues for the positive role of music in improving clients' well-being in various healthcare settings includes work by Bonny (2002), Bruscia (2015) and Jensen and Bonde (2018).

Reflecting on the themes in this study and comparing them with similar studies (Hess, 2004; Merriam & Grenier, 2019) revealed interesting relationships. In Solli and colleagues' (2013) meta-synthesis of music therapy service users' experiences, for example, there were four themes that helped us to think through our findings: 1) having a good time; 2) being together; 3) feeling; and 4) being someone.

The theme of “having a good time” (Solli et al., 2013) could be compared to aspects of the theme “affect regulation” in our study, which highlighted the enjoyment and the energising element of music. Happiness can be defined as affect balance, experiencing more positive than negative emotions (Catapano et al., 2022), depending on whether basic needs are satisfied (Baumeister et al., 2013). Positive emotions or feeling good contribute to emotional well-being (Keyes, 2002). Happiness is associated with hedonia: “seeking pleasure and comfort” (Huta & Ryan, 2010, p. 735). Happy experiences are associated with ease (Dwyer et al., 2017) and being carefree (Baumeister et al., 2013). Fredrickson (2013) gives examples of positive emotions: love, appreciation of beauty, inspiration, amusement, pride, hope, interests, serenity, gratitude, and joy. Positive emotions and happiness are often fleeting, pleasant and experienced in the moment (Baumeister et al., 2013).

The three categories that Solli et al. (2013) mention under the theme of “being someone”, are identity, mastery and regaining music. Regarding identity and mastery, our study alludes to the concepts of self-trust, self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-insight and self-knowledge during the coding process and theme development. Furthermore, our study refers to music not only as a stimulus for different ways of communicating but also that music is strengthening and empowering. These notions can all be related to the sense of “being someone”.

“Feeling” is the third theme in the study by Solli et al. (2013). This directly correlates with our study’s theme of “emotional experiences”. The categories under the “feeling” theme in Solli et al. (2013) are awareness, expression and regulation of emotions. They specifically refer to difficult emotions such as anger. Our study also includes both challenging and positive emotions, and the release of aggression is mentioned under the “affect regulation” theme.

“Being together” (Solli et al., 2013) and our “trust and feeling protected” theme had the following aspects in common: a sense of belonging, feeling supported and trusting

others. Our theme “connectedness” can also be compared to the category of social participation in the study by Solli et al. (2013). By comparing results from the thematic analysis in these studies, it is clear that clients’ experiences in various music therapy interventions are similar.

The main differences between their study and ours are the method and the focus. Whilst our study is an integrative literature review, the study by Solli et al. (2013) is a meta-synthesis. The purpose of an integrative literature review is to synthesise various kinds of data on a relatively new phenomenon (Matney, 2017). Empirical and theoretical papers can be included, and grey material such as unpublished conference papers, dissertations and theses were also included. The goal of a meta-synthesis, on the other hand, is to synthesise evidence of the effectiveness of complex interventions and suggest how to implement them (Booth et al., 2018). Unpublished material was excluded from the study by Solli et al. (2013).

The second difference is focus. Both studies focused on client experiences. However, the focus of our study was on exploring clients’ experiences of MI, as part of the continuum model only. Solli et al. (2013) explored clients’ experiences of various music therapy interventions, focusing on post-session reflections. Only adult clients were included, whilst in our study children and adults were included.

A third noteworthy difference between the two studies is our distinction between “emotional experiences” (theme 2) and “affect regulation” (theme 4), whereas Solli et al. (2013) only address “feeling” as a theme. In our study, we felt it important to distinguish between emotional experiences and affect regulation. Affect regulation refers to controlling or adjusting the physiological or visible reaction that accompanies an emotional experience (Fonagy et al., 2002). Burns et al. (2018) reported that the awareness of the body increased substantially on the music therapy self-report scale in their study, adding that the effect size was larger for music and imagery than for music listening. Because affect refers to the physiological response to emotions, according to Folz et al. (2022), it was important to include how clients experienced their bodies and body sensations in this theme. Our study

also found examples of sensing the body and slowing down breathing (Scott-Moncrieff et al., 2015) in order to slow down and deepen the imaging experience (Montgomery, 2012).

Bae (2011) measured positive and negative affect in music therapy students using the PANAS (Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule) scale before and after two different music therapy interventions. One intervention was Group MI and the other was a drumming group. In the Group MI sessions there was a slight difference in student's positive affect score after the intervention. In the studies we reviewed, it seemed that affect regulation (Theme 4) is an important experience during an MI session. Reduced psychological distress was a theme in a study by Sun and Wang (2021). They found SMI (Supportive Music and Imagery) to be very effective in cases of psychological distress. Bae (2011) measured the affect states before and after sessions, whilst in the studies reviewed above, the data collection occurred during sessions.

The studies included in this review clearly indicated that the choice of music can accomplish a wide range of affect regulatory effects on the client in the session, and the music can, therefore, be adapted to suit the immediate needs of the client. MI is designed on the continuum from supportive to re-educating and reconstructing. On the supportive level, the comments "feeling less uptight" (Meadows, 2015, p.191) and "the music held my emotion" (Paik-Maier, 2013, p.15) allude to how music can regulate affect. Affect regulation on a more re-educative level was seen in studies where greater objective awareness of an inner experience was noticed. Young Shil Kim's (2021) clients reported emotional and sensory experiences whilst focusing on their body sensations during music listening. A good example of how MI can be used on the reconstructive level was found in the case where the choice of music played an important role in reaching a transformative goal. Angulo et al. (2021) reported how the client felt the change in the body with transformative results.

Supportive MI, the first level of the continuum, is also known as resource-oriented MI or RO-MI (Story & Beck, 2017). The primary purpose of this level of MI is to identify and develop inner resources (Summer, 2002). In our analysis we found quite a number of inner

resources emerging during supportive MI. Comparing this to the Virtues In Action (VIA) classification of Park et al. (2004), many of the concepts were included in the theme of “strengths”.

The VIA character strength classification survey, developed by Park et al. (2004), lists 24 strengths. These strengths are categorised under six virtues, namely, wisdom, courage, humanity, temperance, justice, and transcendence. Of the 24 strengths that are included in the VIA, the following 19 were identified in the MI literature reviewed here: open-mindedness, curiosity, creativity, perspective, courage, perseverance, integrity, love, social intelligence, teamwork, self-regulation, prudence, forgiveness, humility, appreciation of beauty, hope, gratitude, playfulness and spirituality. All six virtues are represented in these 19 character strengths, which came to the fore due to MI sessions.

We agree with Scott-Moncrieff et al. (2015), who state that acceptance is necessary to overcome issues of trauma, hurt and pain, and live a healthy and fulfilled life. According to the broaden-and-build theory developed by Fredrickson (2001), experiencing positive emotions can broaden our thoughts, which in turn can influence our behaviour, inspiring us to try some new things. This will lead to building personal resources or strengths, which can lead to increased health and well-being. We are of the opinion that MI sessions can contribute to clients experiencing positive emotions and, as a result, opportunities for healing, growth and general well-being are created.

Strengths and limitations

A limitation of this integrative literature review is that, because MI which is part of the continuum model, is a relatively young method, there were not many studies available. The quality of the included studies varied substantially. Seven of the included studies were symposium presentations, and due to the time limit of a presentation, less depth could be explored, which meant that these included studies weighed less than the full articles and

theses. Member-checking was not mentioned in any of the included studies, and this could consequently be seen as an unintentional limitation of our study.

Yet, this is the first purposeful review of its kind. The presentations that were included, were from a symposium which purely focused on the continuum model, making the content of the presentations very suitable for our purpose. Furthermore, since this literature review focuses on one specific MI method, the study becomes more consistent as all the client descriptions stem from the same type of intervention. We used clients' own words from their lived experiences in the thematic analysis, but we also included quotations by therapists on how they interpreted their clients' experiences in cases where we did not have access to clients' direct words. This double hermeneutic, with the therapist making sense of the client's sense-making of a lived experience (Smith et al., 2009), deepens the understanding of the participants' experiences (Lee & McFerran, 2015). Another factor that strengthens this study is that the two authors collaborated on the inclusion of the studies for review, as well as the thematic analysis. This enhances the validity of this review.

Future research

There is still a significant need and great opportunity for more research on the CMGIM model as well as the other types and variations of MI. All the studies included in this review were focused on Asia, Western countries and the USA. MI uses clients' preferred music in the therapy sessions (Scott-Moncrieff, 2021), and therefore, it would be beneficial to extend studies of this nature to other cultures. Future research in this field should include comparisons between clients' experiences, while another possible point of focus could be on broadening the settings and contexts where this method could be beneficial. The musical identities of clients should also be considered in research. The MI method has the potential to help in areas where healing and personal growth are needed.

Conclusion

This integrative literature review contributes to the body of research on MI as part of the CMGIM model. We derived six themes, namely (1) Music as a catalyst for transformational experiences; (2) Emotional experiences; (3) Strengths, acceptance and self-awareness; (4) Affect regulation; (5) Trust and feeling protected; and (6) Connectedness. Data showed that clients in various settings and ages attribute meaning to their lived experiences in MI sessions. Clients' re-connection with themselves during MI sessions can be viewed as meaningful and constructive. The unique feature of this MI method, namely, using client-preferred music, is an important aspect to consider in therapy. There is, therefore, every reason to undertake further exploration of MI as a therapeutic method, both in practice and from a theoretical perspective.

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Chapter 3: Research article 2

My journey of personal transformation: An autoethnographic perspective on the meaning I ascribe to my lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) training during the COVID-19 pandemic (<https://doi.org/103390/rel15010046>)

Abstract

Is it possible to experience healing and growth when you grieve? How and where do you find meaning again? During the COVID-19 pandemic many people were looking for answers to these questions. This autoethnography explores how I experienced personal transformation through the method of Music and Imagery (MI) therapy in the midst of the pandemic and huge personal loss. This transformation also impacted my faith in Christ. Through documenting my journey using music listening, artwork, journaling, memories and peers' feedback, I realised just how possible it was to grow and find healing in trying times. I pieced all the information together like a jigsaw puzzle until I could see the complete picture.

Keywords: Autoethnography; dying in isolation; post-traumatic growth, Music and Imagery training

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people struggled on various levels. Anxiety, depression, and PTSD increased (Chen et al. 2021); Pietrabissa and Simpson (2020) also described heightened states of depression, loneliness, and grief after the death of a loved one during COVID-19. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO 2022), over 6.5 million people had died as a result of this virus infection by mid-October 2022. Dying in isolation has been discussed in research studies, both from the patient's point of view and that of the loved ones. Capozzo (2020) argues that, even in a pandemic, it is not acceptable to have to die alone, and that fear and anxiety are heightened if one is alone while being sick, hospitalised, or dying. The negative impact of isolation on the patient, hospital staff, and family members was demonstrated by Ann-Yi et al. (2021),

who found that patients regarded the well-being of their loved ones as the second most important priority for their well-being. In a survey by Carson et al. (2021) which focused on the impact of losing a loved one during the pandemic, findings indicated that post-traumatic stress increased dramatically, while post-traumatic growth was very low.

In writing this autoethnography, I hoped to understand my own experience of dealing with the profound grief and disappointment of losing a loved one during the pandemic. During this process, I became aware of a renewed connection to God as my refuge and Saviour. Becoming vulnerable on an emotional level was part of this writing, but only to gain deeper insight into and interpret the significance of the experience (Freeman 2018). I hope that readers of this autoethnography, which attempts to convey a deeper view of my experience, will come to better understand life in general, as we experience it communally (Hamdan 2012), especially as this pandemic still has a global influence on our well-being.

Music therapy is reflexive in nature as the therapist needs to understand the client's perspective to do the best for the client in clinical practice (Devlin 2018). Receptive music therapy has at its core active listening to music (Wigram et al. 2002). When one listens to music, there can be various ways to respond, including verbal response, drawing, or movement. Listening can also be experienced in silence. (Grocke and Wigram 2007). The music choice is dependent on what kind of experience the client seeks as clients' responses to the music listening can be physical, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, and/or spiritual (Bruscia 2013). In Music and Imagery (MI) the client listens to music while drawing. Only one piece of music is used and repeated until the drawing is completed. Focusing on one image ensures containment and a deep emotional experience for the client. The drawing can also serve as a helpful tool for discussing the experience after listening (Summer 2015).

The importance of the lived experiences as part of the research paradigm, according to Muncey (2010) is to ensure that the focus is on which experiences are meaningful. Muncey also argues that these kinds of cathartic meaningful lived experiences should be described in narrative form. Listening to music as a lived experience can have a profound transformational effect, even when and maybe especially when difficult situations, such as

loss, are being explored. The lived experiences of people while listening to music are described by Gabrielsson (2011) as especially strong.

I had enrolled to do a specialised MI course in Scotland to enhance my music therapy practice work—the ticket for my flight was already bought. However, because of the pandemic travel restrictions, the training had to be done online. At the same time, my oldest brother was in the hospital with a brain tumour, and he could not be visited. In this autoethnography I will try to describe my experience of this MI training, while at the same time not being able to make any contact with my dying brother. The question that I wanted to answer for myself was: What meaning can I ascribe to my experiences of MI training while dealing with a personal struggle during the COVID-19 pandemic? In my case, MI became a tool to deal with my pain. In dealing with my loss, I found myself asking questions about religion and faith, including my own Christianity. At the same time, I was wondering about the thousands of other people in a similar situation who might not be so fortunate to have coping skills or tools.

2. Procedures

I chose a personal narrative autoethnography to answer the research question. With the autoethnographic approach I could recount specific events and experiences and analyse their significance within a broader context (Ellis and Bochner 2000). For the Music and Imagery (MI) training, I had to take the role of client. Therefore, it was quite natural for me to write from the first-person's perspective. Bearing in mind that meaning is not static or tangible, I needed to do a lot of introspection for my narrative to make sense to and resonate with the reader (Kim 2015). Sensory information contributes to the reliability of one's memories, so I made use of various methods during this investigation to ensure the reliability of my account (Muncey 2005).

First, I made use of photographs that gave me some perspective on the background of my relationship with my brother, Henry. I obtained permission from everybody on the photographs before I included them in this article. Second, I drew on the content, both

artwork and music, that I used during the training, which included the months of supervision after the coursework. All the images that are included in this script, are my drawings. Third, I attempted to give an account of my memories which were diarised during that time. Fourth, I asked my peers to share their memories about how they perceived my experiences during the training. They all gave their informed consent to participate in this study. Their feedback was coded and the themes that emerged are included in this narrative.

I engaged with the autoethnographic narrative in the way that I would assemble a jigsaw puzzle. I felt like the pieces of my story had to be solved like a puzzle for me and others to understand it. I divided my story puzzle into four stages. Stage one, constructing the frame or border of the jigsaw puzzle, is the background to my 'story'. In stage two I took a very close look at my experiences during the MI training. This was like sorting and grouping the puzzle pieces after having turned them all picture-side up. Stage three was filling in the centre noticing how the picture unfolds and kept working until it was complete. Stage four of the exercise was to get an objective look at the picture as a whole and reflect. Only then could I start to make sense of it all.

These four stages coincide well with the three-step method suggested by Chang (2016) to engage with the autoethnographic data. The first step, fracturing and connecting, meant that I had to categorise the data, after which the separate elements were connected again to make sense in the wider context. In this case, the connection point is the effect of COVID-19 on well-being. In the second step, zooming in and zooming out, I looked at the data in detail before putting the pieces back into the 'bigger picture' again similar to assembling a puzzle, trying to fit all the pieces. Chang (2016) describes the third step as a creative step that ensures a holistic view within the context. This step is referred to as insight, intuition, and impression by Creswell and Poth (2016). The puzzle was completed. I stepped back, looked at the whole, included the themes derived from my peers' feedback, reflected and followed my intuition, and used my insight to share impressions that were meaningful to me and also to a broader readership.

3. My journey

3.1 Background: Photographs and their story

Everybody faces a blank piece of paper, no matter what they've written or painted or composed before. I can't imagine approaching every single project without doubt.

Stephen Sondheim

In this photo (Figure 1), Henry is on the left with me on his arm with all our siblings. This picture already portrays the bond there was between us. It is clear in the photo, in the way he holds me and holding my other foot, that he cared for his little sister. I am the sixth of seven children and Henry, my oldest brother, was 17 years my senior. From a very young age, our relationship was established through music. We both studied music. I remember very well how I ran home from school to join him when he started his music teaching career at a high school in the afternoons. I was a bridesmaid at his wedding (Figure 2). This was a highlight in my young life, as it was the first time that I played such an 'important part' at a wedding! Getting my hair done and wearing the long dress was particularly special. To this day, I still have my mini wedding album, which my mother put together for me at the time.

Figure 1

My siblings and I



When I was asked to carry his first-born son to the pulpit for his baptism (Figure 3) three years later, I felt noticed by my brother. It was only weeks after my grandmother had

passed away and having this responsibility to hold a new life in my arms, was significant, and it certainly strengthened our bond.

Figure 2

Henry's wedding day



Figure 3

I am holding Henry's son



We were brought up in a Christian home, and our bond in faith and music was strong. Our father passed away when I was 15, and because Henry was already married by then I was unaware of his intentions. He tried to fulfill the role of father to my youngest brother and me.

In 1983, I went to university, and the following year Henry was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Due to the big age gap, I was not involved in his life much at that stage and had no idea how this diagnosis impacted him. My only memories are of him in and out of institutions for years. In 2004 we fetched him from an institution when our mother passed away. Everybody was nervous and unsure about how he would behave at the funeral. It was 20 years since the diagnosis and his condition remained unchanged.

Henry got divorced at that time and after that managed to live independently in a flat. From around 2007 I became more involved in his life again. He was lonely, and as he was very creative, I bought him paint, brushes, and some canvasses.

He started painting again, and his images were all about nature. I thought that the themes of his paintings brought him peace and tranquillity (Figure 4).

Figure 4

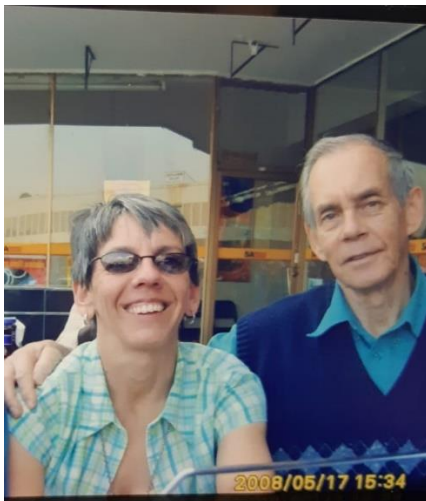
One of Henry's paintings



Although we were living on opposite sides of the country, I visited him as often as I could. We took long walks and shared ice-creams and lunches. Figure 5 is an example of one of our walks to an ice-cream shop and just enjoying each other's company.

Figure 5

Spending precious time together



.We also made music together and he became the main inspiration for me to continue my studies. I qualified as a music therapist in 2013 and the same year we celebrated his 65th birthday. One year later, on my sister's 65th birthday, Henry and I had a long conversation about him continuing his studies (Figure 6). It was another significant moment in our

relationship, as now I felt that he was treating me as an adult, an equal, and not his little sister anymore. He shared a deep disappointment with me.

Figure 6

Deep in conversation



He wanted to pursue a new career in theology and was disappointed at having been turned down, firstly because of his age, but also because of his diagnosis. I tried to convince him that he could feel fulfilled by writing articles, or a book, or some music. Little did I know then that this conversation would lead to Henry composing his “Six Sandglass Youth Songs”. I decided to enrol for a MA degree in Positive Psychology and I completed my studies in 2018, and Henry published his book of songs (Figure 7). My focus was on the exploration of Guided Imagery and Music as a well-being intervention, and Henry described his motivation for writing the songs as the impact of shortcomings in worship dogma.

Figure 7

Henry's book and my degree certificate



Henry was diagnosed with a brain tumour in February 2017 and three operations followed. I made every effort to visit him in the hospital each time (Figure 8). We sang together. We were reminded of the Dutch songs that our mother used to sing to us. It was possible to lift the heavy spirit of being sick through music, laughing, and praying together and there was also an opportunity for me to connect with his sons around his bed (Figure 9). Each time the doctors claimed success, but every time the tumour grew back rapidly. He had 41 radiation sessions between February and June 2018.

Figures 8 & 9

Visiting Henry in hospital after surgery (with his sons)



We gathered as a family for his 70th birthday in November 2018 and on this occasion, he gave me and each of my sisters a precious bracelet (Figure 10). The inscription is from

Scripture: Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. This gesture of giving presents to your siblings on your birthday stayed with me. Also, the significance of the gift. It was simple and inexpensive, yet the message that it carried, that we were believers and that our faith in God was still binding us together, felt important. I believe it was yet another way for Henry to try and fulfil the role of my absent father, being the carer. He wanted to make sure that we would be fine without him. I believe also wanted us to know that he was fine.

Figure 10

My inscribed bracelet



On the day of his birthday celebrations, he was still playing the old family pump organ at his home (Figure 11). He played The Little Drummer Boy with the melody in the left hand, and I can recall the squeaking pedals as he was pumping away. Although it was such a simple tune, the playing gave him so much pleasure and is one of my fondest memories. I wondered in hindsight whether he chose this specific song because of its simple message. Did he relate to the poor boy? Or the fact that God expects nothing of us except our faith?

Figure 11

Henry playing the organ



On that day, we did not know that it would be the last time that all the siblings would be together. We spent time around a good meal and took a lot of photos. I recall how I asked my brothers to gather around me with my selfie stick (Figure 12). These memories will be treasured as part of my life journey.

Figure 12

A shared moment at Henry's 70th birthday



The last operation was performed May in 2020. This was in the depth of the pandemic, yet the surgery was unavoidable as my brother's health was deteriorating fast. He was in ICU for 30 days, and he passed away on 4 June 2020. Although we could not visit him, his son had him listen to all our voice messages and prayers for him. He did not react, but I believe that he could hear and understand. I thought back to his birthday and the bracelets.

Could it have been that he knew it might be one of his last gifts to us? The inscription on each bracelet could also have been a message from him. Did he hope that we would stay faithful and trust in God?

At his funeral, which was postponed for weeks due to the pandemic, I chose to throw seven spades full of ground into the grave (Figure 13). One spade for each sibling, but also to remember the symbolism of seven being the perfect number according to Scripture.

Figure 13

Paying my last respects



3.2 Fracturing and Connecting: Personal notes during MI training

Music, because of its specific and far-reaching metaphorical powers, can name the unnameable and communicate the unknowable.

Leonard Bernstein

3.2.1. Day 1

My first picture during the course (Figure 14), using the music: *Ave Maria* by Astor Piazzolla ([1984] 2014), written for oboe and piano. I chose the recording by Andrea Ridilla and Fernanda Canaud (<https://youtu.be/Pe2FxyiALdM>. URL accessed 1 June 2020).

Figure 14

Praying hands supported by many other hands



MI is a therapeutic method where music and imagery are used together to give insight into a specific problem/issue. The MI method was developed by Lisa Summer who was also our trainer. MI therapy is part of a continuum model where the first step is to support clients who need help in finding and developing their internal resources (Summer 2002), or personal strengths, such as patience, gratitude, leadership, etc. (Peterson and Seligman 2004). In turn, these resources can be applied in the re-educating of the client around their problem or issue. Lastly, it can lead to transformation for the client (Summer 2015).

In an MI session, the problem or issue is established first between the therapist and the client. Then a piece of meaningful and suitable music is collaboratively selected. It should be music that suits the issue, for example, if the client needs to improve patience, the music must have qualities that will enhance patience. The client then draws a picture while listening to the chosen music. The music is repeated until the image is completed, after which the process is discussed (Scott-Moncrieff et al. 2020).

As an introduction to our course, we were asked how we all were. I had to share that my brother was in ICU and that I was preoccupied with the fact that I could not visit him because

of COVID-19 restrictions. Also, the fact that Henry was unexpectedly deteriorating was worrying. Being in the group of MI students and facilitators reassured me that I was not completely alone. I was surrounded by people who cared and understood. Their presence and the music connected me with an amazing tenderness. The hands I drew represent both giving and receiving support. I labelled this mandala: trusting in that balance.

The content of the first learning session included the following:

1. Don't avoid
2. Get close to yourself
3. Don't try to be too smart
4. Listen to others

One of my colleagues said something that resonated with me: You are in pain because you are alive. Since this was coming from an observing friend, I realised that this was a common truth and that there are many others out there also feeling pain. At the same time, it gave me hope, as I was certainly alive.

3.2.2. Day 2

On our second day of the course, we were given practical examples of how to engage in a full MI session where re-educative work needed to be done. The pre-talk (establishing the issue), transition (choosing of music), induction (preparing the client for the listening), and active listening and drawing were demonstrated after which we had to practise this after being asked to:

1. Be open, be curious
2. Accept whatever the music brings
3. Challenge yourself to be genuinely authentic
4. Don't try to solve
5. Try to see whatever is there clearer

In this instance, we all listened to music that our facilitator chose from Schumann's ([1849] 1993) *5 Stücke im Volkston*, Op. 102: No. 2 "Langsam". The rendition by Maria

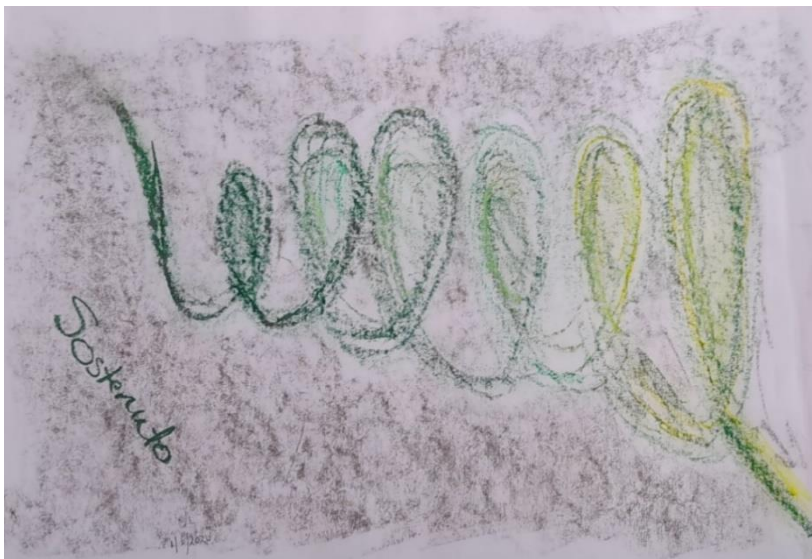
Kliegel, recorded in 1993, was used.

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/2mEBL8vZSSrohpMETYkyVb?si=56f4bd31e02c4927>. URL accessed 2 June 2020).

Reflecting on the process of making this drawing (Figure 15) while listening to the music, these were my thoughts: I feel a little stuck but there is some acceptance about the universality of it. It is not only me feeling this, but everybody is stuck in COVID-19. Also, there is a sense of letting go of the tension that the music and the circumstances have provoked. Yet, it's not gone; it's not fixed; it's not solved; it is there; it is real and it is even growing! I called this picture: *Sostenuto* (a musical term meaning 'sustained').

Figure 15

Sostenuto



3.2.3. Day 3

In our first dyad, where two students worked together as client and therapist, my focus as a client was on the need to allow myself to be vulnerable and to grieve. I grew up in a social culture of always being grateful and not giving in to more challenging emotions such as sadness. In the Christian faith, this is linked to the message found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18: “Always be joyful. Always keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus” (*The Living Bible* 1971, p.

188). I realised that I felt frustrated because honest emotions were ‘not allowed’, ever. I remembered a similar feeling when my father died. We had to be grateful because his suffering had ended and were not allowed to cry for our loss. I realised how warped this belief was. Yet, Scripture tells us that even Jesus cried for the loss of His friend (John 11:35, *The Living Bible* 1971, p. 91)! I might have understood it incorrectly, but now, I felt at last, that I had the opportunity to dig into these two conflicting concepts: on the one hand, feeling vulnerable and on the other hand needing to be strong and grateful. I thus chose a concerto, as it is a dialogue between an instrument (lonely and “vulnerable”) and an orchestra (strong). The music I chose was Boccherini’s ([1760]2017) Cello concerto in B-Flat Major: Adagio. We listened to the recording by Jacqueline du Pré from the album *The Heart of the Cello*. (<https://open.spotify.com/track/5lWrKno3WGaPLg8hwGuzQ0?si=db5e4d02f9504a46>. URL accessed 3 June 2020).

In the concerto the long melodic lines, predictable, stable, cello solo, and the string orchestra supporting it with a clear metre throughout kept me safe. Although there is no piano in the music I selected, I started by drawing a piano as it is the first instrument that both my brother and I learned to play as young children. But then I felt that I had to let out some of my frustration in terms of feeling sad for him. Hence I drew the black triangles. In the end, even this feeling was quite contained, therefore I added the green half-circle with some new growth. I labelled this picture: Comfortable with the uncomfortable (Figure 16).

Figure 16

Comfortable with the uncomfortable



This realisation was, contrary to what I expected, quite strengthening and it gave me hope amidst feeling confused about my own emotions. For me, this picture meant being more genuine about my real feelings.

One of the main purposes of MI is to use music that matches closely the feeling associated with the 'issue'. One needs to demand the emotional honesty of oneself and wait with an attitude of expectancy; a state of total receptivity. It is more important to discover that it feels great letting go of control in favour of finding a solution: Give oneself over to the music to get closer to oneself. I could get back into myself with great relief, understanding emotions, also repressed feelings, and expressing them on paper. This meant that nothing had changed, except that when I reflected on the experience, it felt much softer or kinder. It is lighter because there was a discharge of something negative. There is a new openness within you that can be filled with something positive. The difficult issue feels less overwhelming and is more tolerable. I started to enjoy accepting my inner complexity without trying to simplify it. This is in line with the concept that Romanyshyn (2021) describes as "(r)e-search with soul in mind, re-search that proceeds in-depth and from the depth, is about finding what has been lost, forgotten, neglected, marginalized, or otherwise left behind" (p. 13). In this way, we get to know ourselves and can realise who we are in our life worlds.

Through interacting with the group and facilitators, I learnt that it was important to find the tension within myself. One must own it, name it, and stay with it. One must move through the difficulty to integrate it into one's wider experience.

3.2.4. Day 4

My brother died on this day.

Therapy is about illuminating struggle. The support of my study group was exceptional. They took a minute to send me personal messages on Zoom: This is what I got from them:

I'm sending you so much love and support. I hope you can feel it.

Sending love! It means so much that you are here today with us. Thank you, I'm here for you always.

I'm sending you my wishes to go through this time and appreciate you are here today.

I am sending you my love and my feeling of being there for you, very close! You know that my dear!

It is good that you are here.

I'm sorry for your loss. Sending you love and support to hold you through this challenging time so amazed at your strength to be here with us today. Thank you for your presence and courage.

I felt your pain in my heart so deeply! I can feel your brother is with my twin brother and my sister. I love you!

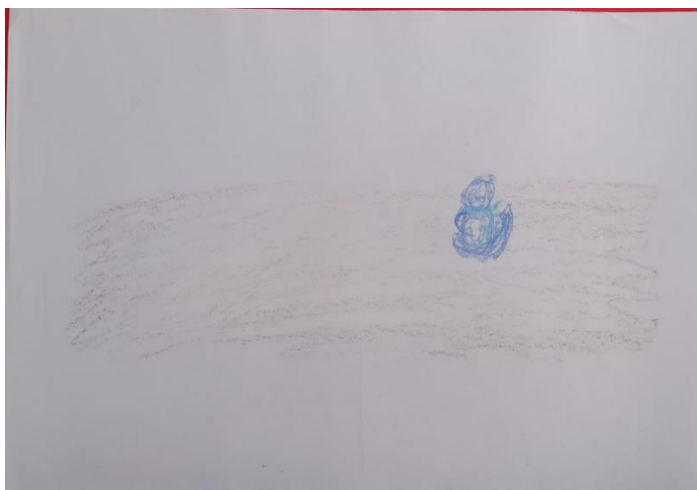
In my session on that day, I chose the original Joshua Bell version of Anna's theme from the soundtrack of the motion picture *The Red Violin*. The composer is John Corigliano (1998). This choice helped me to own and accept my sadness because of the loss of my brother. I felt so alone and this is clear in the image (Figure 17). I realised that I need to take responsibility for my feelings and not try and negate them.

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/275rJuuD6y2ogk5HDGDjp3?si=0c9dd83d91304849>.

URL accessed 4 June 2020).

Figure 17

Alone in the snow



I gained deep insight into my sadness. The fact was that I felt so isolated. The music conveyed this sense of being isolated and it felt like an allowance to grieve. The music was like a hand on my shoulder. I can compare this feeling of the music being there for me with Gabrielsson's (2011) description of being "embraced by the music" (p. 100). The music helped me being alone by accompanying me. Gabrielsson (2011) also speaks about "identifying with the music" (p. 102). In this case, I felt like the music was identifying with me. Bonny (2010), the inspiration behind the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM) explained how she wanted clients to have emotional experiences while listening to music which would bring healing. This is what I encountered.

3.2.5. Day 5

This was the last day of doing course work and I cannot say that I was not relieved. There was so much support for me and an insight into my grief, but I felt that I now needed time on my own. Although our last exercise was a group drawing, each participant selected their music. I chose Bottesini's ([1870] 2020) Elegy in D major No. 1 for double bass and piano, played by Robert Oppelt, recorded in 2020.

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/1ytPiOSoKrKYcWOM7830iO?si=74a6165d3da94c7a>. URL accessed 5 June 2020).

There is something very sad and melancholy about this music. The form is predictable and safe. Yet there is some movement in the melody line which helps the listener not to get stuck. I felt similar in the drawing process to when I drew the 'Sostenuto' picture (Day 2). However, I wanted to use colours to represent the awesome people who were with me in my isolated pain over the past few days. I labelled this image: Left up in the air because this was exactly how I felt at that moment (Figure 18).

Figure 18*Left up in the air*

These mixed emotions of feeling isolated and left up in the air, yet safe and surrounded by people who cared, made me realise how clients who come for therapy might feel. The need to feel heard and to experience empathy. This is a universal need, as Edwards (2010) claims that, although we are individuals, being human also means that we are subjective and social beings.

3.3. *Zooming in and Zooming out*

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.

Albert Einstein

As part of qualifying as an MI therapist, one is expected to do a lot of personal MI sessions. Many of these sessions are supervised. These sessions were particularly helpful in my grieving process.

The advanced level of MI therapy is also called re-educative MI. The purpose of re-educative MI is to gain insight into, and a new perspective on, an existing internal issue such as anger, anxiety, guilt, or sadness. The purpose is not to 'fix' the matter, but to better understand or to deal with something that had previously been too overwhelming, and ultimately to become more honest about it personally on an emotional level (Scott-Moncrieff et al. 2020).

During this difficult time for me, personal MI sessions had a significant impact on my emotions and functioning. I called two of these sessions “Deep pain”, as I struggled to accept the fact that I could not say goodbye to Henry. The mere thought that I did not know whether he knew we cared and would have wanted to be near him was extremely painful. I needed at least two sessions to process these feelings.

It was difficult to find the right music. I realised that this feeling had very deep, almost primordial, roots, which led me to look for mythical or archetypal symbols and sounds. Finding images, symbols, myths, and stories that can open the heart, is part of the role of art, literature, and depth psychology (Paris 2016). According to Jung ([1959] 1991), archetypes represent the real roots of our consciousness. They are the links with our past. It would seem to me that the trauma played quite a part here, and I was trying, subconsciously, to protect myself. Kalsched (1996) talks about archetypal defences: “The psyche seemed to be making use of ‘historical layers’ of the unconscious to give form to otherwise unbearable suffering” (p. 77).

I found the best music for this in the old Sami tradition of Scandinavia, music that had a shamanic, healing, and understanding tone. The music that I chose was ‘Gula Gula’ from the album of the same name. This unique music is from the Sami tradition and is authentically performed by Mari Boine (2001).

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/2f2njgO8zpacGTBpLUg18t?si=cd8de68c53ae4dc1>. URL accessed 10 June 2020).

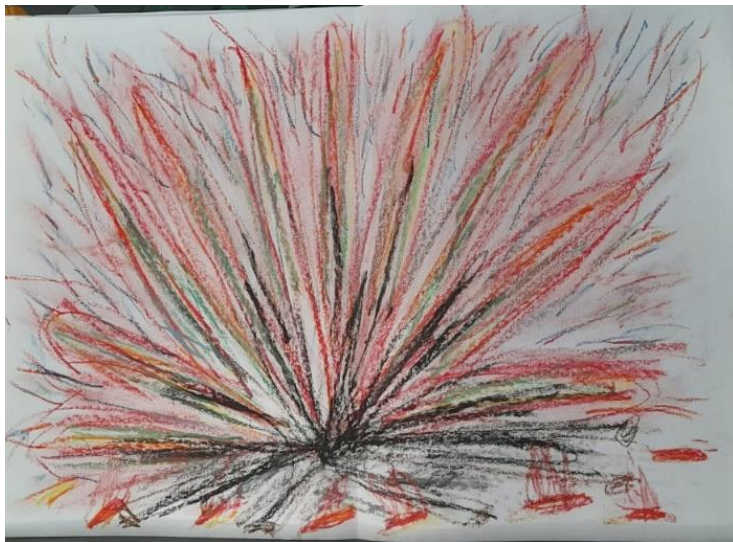
In this song, her voice has an almost moaning quality, yet an empathetic ‘I feel with you, I feel for you’ is also present. The music gave me a chance to cry deeply without feeling guilty, and I felt it was okay to feel weak. In the first session, I just worked with my raw emotions and visualised the pain in my mind. I gave myself permission to cry and cry until it literally felt better.

In a follow-up session, I chose the same music, and this time, I felt that I could draw. I already had material processed in my mind, and words like ‘cold’, ‘rooted’, ‘unrefined’, and ‘honest’ stayed with me from the previous session. I felt terribly alone and was crying again. I

thought of the colours blue and water. This reminded me of the snowman session (Day 4) just after I have heard the news, but these cold colours did not seem to work. The ancient feel of the music evoked an atmosphere of sitting at a fire for me (Figure 19).

Figure 19

Pain burning like fire



I started with the black, but soon the flames were big and bright, with sparks in the foreground, each spark starting a possible new fire. During the process, the burning fire was simulating the burning pain, and it felt like it could go on forever. Yet the small, new fires also symbolised new possibilities and different dimensions. The important message for me was that there was life! Life after death. This was a very reassuring message in the midst of my sadness.

During this time, I asked my friends who did the course with me if they would send me feedback on how they experienced my reactions after receiving the news. I analysed their feedback and coded and themed it in ATLAS.ti.23. The three themes that emerged were Empathy, Respect and the Influence of the pandemic.

Empathy, according to Dos Santos (2022) is an ability to regulate emotional responses which are flexible enough to move between another's and one's own perspectives. The importance of self-empathy is also empathised by Dos Santos (2022) as "it improves our

capacity to be empathic towards others” (p. 8). This was clearly seen in the first theme, which included deep shock and a genuine need to support me. This was linked to understanding from those who had similar experiences. Some of the quotations in this theme include: “I remember your news and I really felt for you. I recall feeling shocked. I lost my brother suddenly and felt I had lost part of myself with his passing”; “My first feeling was one of empathy and grief for your loss. It was hard to conceive what you must have been feeling”, and “I remember you were in tears sharing the drawing you have made. It was all snow with just a few strokes. It was a freezing drawing. I remember thinking: That’s frozen pain!”. Another touching comment was “I felt a huge urgency to be with you and caring for you, supporting you, because that is what a person needs in a grieving moment”.

The second theme was about the respect many of my colleagues felt after I decided to finish the course. After the course, a substantive load of homework in the form of practising the method follows. These comments from my friends motivated me to do the personal and supervised MI sessions. One such comment was: “I do remember being amazed that you had been able to turn up for the seminar when you must have been in turmoil inside after hearing such strongly emotional news, and I knew that it would bring a very strong challenge to the dyad experience”. Another comment that meant a lot to me, and I kept going back to it was: “I was surprised that you had decided to attend the training that day. It was hard to conceive what you must have been feeling”. When reflecting on this theme of respect, I understood that it was also a significant part of my culture to always respect others. In this instance, I would never have dropped out of the course out of respect for others as well as for myself.

The third clear theme was the impact of the pandemic, and how it struck everyone harder when this news was brought into the group and the training: “I believe that the many complications during the pandemic affected my level of engagement with the training” was one of those comments that made me realise I was not alone in this difficult situation. Another comment was: “It was a first for me, to be in our group, online, with you across the other side of the world.... To witness your sudden experience of loss and grief in this way

was unreal". One of the group members reacted as follows: "I felt frustrated, and we [two group members] decided to make a video call to you to stay with you. You needed it and you deserved it". The memory of this call stayed with me and carried me through every difficult session I had during my time of grief. I realised just how fortunate and blessed I was to have such support!

3.4. *Insight, Intuition, and Impressions*

Pain will leave once it has finished teaching you.

Bruce Lee

After traumatic events, many people may also experience positive psychological change, which is referred to as post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). Post-traumatic growth refers to a transformational change, which can be seen in one or more of five distinct domains: first, personal strengths; second, new possibilities can be seen in a changed perception of the self; third, relating to others is different; fourth, new appreciation for life; five, spiritual growth becomes clear in a changed philosophy of life (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2014). Although Carson et al. (2021) reported that post-traumatic growth was observed in very low numbers in their survey during the pandemic, this was certainly not the case with me. When I completed the Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996), significant changes were evident in the domains of personal strengths, appreciation of life, and spiritual growth.

Some of my personal MI sessions can be described as examples of transformative growth in these three areas. Hearn (2010) describes how their client's experience in MI work was transformative and transformational when the client explained how they saw themselves differently. A client who felt that their journey was difficult and that they were stuck was described by Angulo et al. (2021). In this case, the music in the MI session had such a powerful effect that it ultimately led to change for the client. A sense of growth and expansion was also experienced by a client of Paik-Maier's (2017).

Two of my sessions, which I will be focusing on below, were connected, with the first of the two being the catalyst for change. The transformation that I experienced during and because of these two sessions became clear.

Although the tears have subsided, the sadness remained acute, and I struggled with moving forward. I felt a little bit as if I were trapped in a maze and going around in circles (Figure 20). This feeling of 'going round in circles' brought to mind the song 'The windmills of my mind', composed by Michel Legrand ([1968] 2015). When I listened to the song, it also reminded me of the snowman session, as well as the session with the fire burning.

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/7waSF4UCc7xkc6x87zoc2L?si=74b679271cdc4a6b>.

URL accessed 3 July 2020).

The English lyrics of the first verse by Alan and Marilyn Bergman are as follows:

Like a circle in a spiral

Like a wheel within a wheel

Never ending or beginning

On an ever-spinning reel

Like a snowball down a mountain

Or a carnival balloon

Like a carousel that's burning

Running rings around the moon

My supervisor then suggested that I used an instrumental version of the song, so that my images could be explored. I chose the George Scaroulis version (2015). It also contains a cello, which is the instrument that always feels like it can contain me.

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/1KT9l65yYWP1loOid5sVYe?si=24c12f7c13ab4f04>. URL

accessed 10 July 2020).

Figure 20*Labyrinth*

Although my image is a maze, with different broken lines and various branches from the core, I called it 'labyrinth'. This shift happened during the process of listening and drawing. Similar experiences had been described by Summer (2011) where their client expressed how finding focus, acceptance, contentment, and hope happened while drawing during an MI session. Another example is Liu's (2021) client describing the process as if they were taken on an adventure. A labyrinth is a continuous path which leads to the centre, as long as there is forward movement. The autumn leaves to the left turning green on the right-hand side of the image is another sign of subconscious movement. This was a direct precursor for the next session when I used Nils Frahm's (2021) music 'Because this must be' from the album *Graz*.

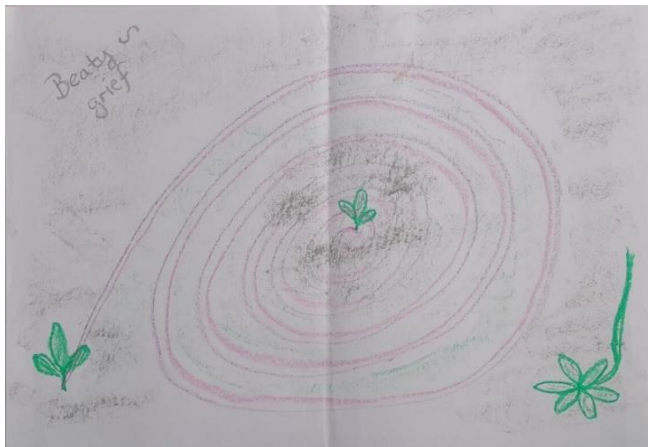
(<https://open.spotify.com/track/4CJUL27qGiX5MfHFcFpr38?si=d8a3652fec784cd1>. URL accessed 20 July 2020).

The music also goes 'in circles', but there is an atmosphere of empathy and a soothing quality to it. It was perfect for my 'real' labyrinth, and my motions during the listening and drawing process changed from the turmoil of a whirlwind to acceptance (Figure 21). I started to understand the real symbolic meaning of entering and exiting a labyrinth: taking whatever felt heavy and unbearable to the centre, and leaving it there to return without it, feeling

lighter and accepting what cannot be changed. Labyrinths are ancient symbols, which want to lead from the visible to an invisible or divine dimension. The ultimate goal is to reach the centre, which will make the way back lighter and completely new (Ronnberg and Martin 2010). A labyrinth takes up as little as possible space with as long and difficult as possible a path. This complicated path is symbolic of the difficulty of the journey towards the centre or end goal (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996).

Figure 21

Beauty in grief



I experienced a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation of life during this session. Gratitude for life was also an experience described by various clients, especially after the realisation of the impact of COVID-19, by various clients during MI in a study by Jerling (2023). My personal strength was recognised not only by myself but also by people close to me including my supervisor: “I was struck by the thought of how well-resourced you must be”.

These personal MI sessions and the way in which I experienced the music and my own emotions, led me to realise that I have grown on a spiritual level as well. Spiritual experiences during MI sessions were noted by Paik-Maier (2017) when the client expressed their awareness of God’s presence, as well as Creagh and Dimiceli-Mitran (2018) who’s client experienced themselves as being clothed in shimmering attire by a beautiful figure during the music listening. My relationship with God has deepened as I was accepting the

loss of my brother and realising that there was so much hope for a future, even after my life on earth. I noticed this already in the session which I labelled 'Pain burning like fire' (Figure 19) when I discovered that, for me at least, there was life after death. This realisation came almost as a surprise to me since I have been holding on to that inner conflict that I experienced and explored on day 3 of our course. How could God expect us to ALWAYS be joyful and grateful, even when we are feeling so much pain? In spite of this conundrum, I now realised that "the myth of redemption is so ingrained in our collective psyche" (Paris 2016, p. 150) that I want to be perfect too. Through this journey of loss and finding peace, I finally realised that God does not expect me to be perfect. He only expects me to keep growing: Romans 12:2 "Be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think" (*The Living Bible* 1971, p. 141).

My transformation became clear when I was preparing for a session using MI as a method to explore 'the hero within oneself' with a group of clients who are all suffering from PTSD.

In my search for music, I came across Jennifer Thomas's (2018) 'Rise of the Phoenix' from her album *The fire within*. The phoenix is a mythical bird, who built its nest from frankincense and myrrh in preparation for its death. But the heat of its own body set the twigs alight, and the bird was reborn (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996). I sat down and while listening to this music made this drawing (Figure 22).

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/6RifxKDKsigAuYkzjxQA0u?si=35cad8170298403c>. URL accessed 20 August 2020).

Figure 22*Transformation*

The introduction to this music created a pulling feeling within me, and when the piano started, it felt as if I could fly. After one minute the music changed and it was clear to me that there was a struggle, but this was resolved, again taking me higher and higher. I was soaring. Similarly, during Mi sessions, Meadows' (2015) client described their body as flowing; a sense of release was described by a client of Dimiceli-Mitran's (2020). There is a lightness in the second half of the music, which I drew in the sun. The music, for me, portrayed the cycle of life with its ups and downs, but my faith helped me to realise that the journey is worth all these ups and downs, as it ends well. Gabrielsson (2011) describes people's "visions of heaven, paradise (and) eternity" (p. 191), "spiritual peace, (a) holy atmosphere and Christian community" (p. 194), "music that conveys a religious message and contact with divinity" (p. 196) and even "meeting the divine, God" (p. 201), all while experiencing music.

4. Conclusion

After working through the loss of my brother in such difficult circumstances, I believe that I look at life differently; I feel that I have more compassion for others as well as for myself. Carson et al. (2021) hypothesised that more mature aged people who lost a loved

one during the pandemic would be more resilient as they have a greater repertoire of coping skills. For me, having this therapeutic tool, Music and Imagery, was certainly very helpful in my post-traumatic growth. In almost all the personal MI sessions I have described, I found myself immersed in the music. At times I stopped drawing and closed my eyes to just 'be in the music'. This reminded me of Helen Bonny's (2002) own description of trembling and shaking because her experience while playing the violin was that of exquisite beauty where the music just took over.

In a collaborative autoethnography, Rodd and Cohen (2022) described how music (in their case group singing) is instrumental for reconnecting with each other. Furthermore, they experienced how the music profoundly facilitated prisoners' transcendental experiences and reconnection to and growth in their spirituality.

They concluded that "music will continue to flourish in environments where it is most needed" (Rodd and Cohen 2022, p. 8). For me, this was also true for my journey.

Wong et al. (2021) also discuss the transformative power of suffering. Research during the pandemic showed that flourishing, transformation and innovation are possible in a time of great sorrow and grief. Examples include personal transformation, discovering inner resources such as faith, courage and creativity, and finding new meaning in life (Wong et al., 2021). I can relate to all these ideas, and felt that the objective for writing this autoethnography was reached. I had an answer to my question: the meaning I ascribed to my experiences during the training was clear: Although this experience does not take away the pain of the loss, it motivates me to trust in God, to move forward, and to take care of my well-being and that of others. Growth during difficult times is certainly possible.

I realise how privileged I was to have this profoundly powerful tool of Music and Imagery. Using music from my playlist in a therapeutic setting was refreshing and I was surprised at how I came to choose some pieces, as well as unexpected physiological and emotional responses! I am curious to explore more unknown music, as well as working with

clients and their music. I felt so empowered and liberated. I strongly believe that this can be the case for all of us.

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Chapter 4: Research article 3

Selecting the best music for the moment in a Music and Imagery session: How do we experience the choosing? A trioethnography (<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010046>)

Abstract

Music and Imagery (MI) is a receptive music therapy method within the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music developed by Lisa Summer. In receptive music therapy clients listen to music for therapeutic purposes. The unique part of the MI method is that the client's own music can be used.

Three qualified music therapists from two countries trained together in the MI method and were grouped together for supervision. Moving away from the traditional therapist-client dyad model, we worked as a trio, with the third person in our trio actively witnessing the session and sharing her perspectives and reflections during the post-session discussion.

This article focuses on discussing our experiences in selecting music for our individual processes, since this selection is the new concept in the MI method, called the transition. To report our experiences, we chose to use trioethnography. Each author told her own story, whilst the others took part actively in a small intervision group as critics, friends and colleagues. In this way we acknowledged each other's processes as clients, therapists and witnesses.

Our experience of using intervision to explore the new concept of transition (choosing music) and reporting on that process using trioethnography was very positive. It became clear that intervision can be meaningful for all music therapists in clinical settings, and that trioethnography should be further explored as a research approach.

Keywords: Music and Imagery (MI); supervision; intervision; transition; trioethnography

No man ever steps in the same river twice,
for it's not the same river
and he's not the same man.

Heraclitus (Kleinman, 2013)

Introduction

In this research study, we will explore the central aspect of an MI session, transition, as it is unique to this method. This exploration is from the perspective of the role of client, therapist and witness. We chose trioethnography as the research method.

Music and Imagery (MI) as a receptive method of music therapy is relatively new to research, going back to 2017 (Summer, 2020) and it is therefore important to explore. The MI method that is discussed in this research study was developed by Lisa Summer and later became part of the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM). The supportive level of MI started developing in the 1980s. The supportive level involves the client finding resources within themselves. This level is followed by the re-educative level, the goal of which is to acquire insight for both therapist and client into the client's established issue (Summer, 2015). This level was added in 1988. Although this model was presented for the first time in 1999 (Summer, 1999), the first training in the continuum model started only in 2005 (Summer, 2020).

The Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM) was originally intended to be a deep therapeutic process involving the client in an altered state of consciousness (Bonny, 2001). The ultimate goal was to arrive at a reconstructive outcome, whilst the supportive and re-educative levels of MI have a more short-term and directive approach (Paik-Maier, 2010). The third level of MI, where the unconscious is accessed, also known as the reconstructive level, employs transformation-oriented imagery with reconstruction/transcendence as the final goal (Summer, 2015; Montgomery, 2012). Summer's (2011) first published MI case study alluded to the client's emotional connection to the music, including their feelings of empowerment, and she reported that music was the beginning of this transformation. Herold (2021) and Story and Beck (2017) all mention their clients' emotional connection to the music.

The main difference between BMGIM and MI is that in BMGIM the client listens to a pre-selected programme of music in an altered state of consciousness. During the listening process, the client is invited to spontaneously visualise to the music. This 'visualisation journey' is guided by a trained guide (Bonny, 2001). After the journey, one or more significant moments are drawn as a mandala and then used for the discussion, which is linked to the client's reality and needs (Bruscia, 2015).

MI uses one piece of music that is repeated, and the client draws whilst listening to the music. Music can be suggested by the therapist or the client. For this reason, the playlists (or music pool) of both client and therapist can be used to find the best music for the

moment. Summer (2015) explains that the client should be encouraged and helped to discover music that is most suitable for their chosen focus. The client's relationship with music is to be taken into account and music of any genre can be used.

The part of the session where the music is chosen is called the transition. The transition is the one section of an MI session that is not part of the original BMGIM session process. After the prelude (the pretalk), where a specific focus point for the session is agreed upon between the therapist and client, the transition is the section where the best music to enhance that focus is collaboratively explored and identified (Paik-Maier, 2010) by playing a short excerpt of all suggested pieces of music. In MI music is thus selected in the moment. Once the client decides on the 'best' piece of music for the focus of the session, that piece of music is played while the client is drawing. The piece of music is repeated until the client indicates that their image is complete (Summer, 2015).

The importance of choosing the music became clear to us through our intervision sessions. Intervision is the structured meeting between a small group of professional peers, where the purpose is to maintain and/or improve the standard of professional functioning or practising in a specific field through questioning, discussing, advising and supporting one another (De Meer & Rombout, 2003). This is in line with the supervision principle that a relationship of collaboration and equality underpins successful and productive supervision (Henderson et al., 2014). Schön (1982) emphasises the importance of being a self-reflecting practitioner. The intervision method helped us to equip ourselves better as trainees and self-reflecting practitioners. During the intervision process, we worked together as therapist, client and witness, taking turns in each role. The findings that will be presented are based on examples from our intervision sessions.

Background

MI and BMGIM are the two methods that together form the Continuum Model of GIM (CMGIM) (Summer, 2020). However, Lawes (2022) alludes to the fact that MI training can be undertaken separately from BMGIM training. The authors were three members of the first group of GIM fellows, already trained in the BMGIM method, to be trained as MI therapists by Lisa Summer in London.

The foundation of MI training lies in the continuum structure of Wolberg's (1977) psychotherapy levels: supportive, re-educative and reconstructive. Our level 1 training (Supportive Music and Imagery) took place in 2019. Unfortunately, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the advanced level of the training had to take place online in 2020. An important requirement for obtaining the qualification is conducting a series of MI sessions on the re-

educative level with clients and writing session reports. Ten hours of group supervision is another non-negotiable prerequisite for qualification (Scott-Moncrieff et al., 2020).

Our intervention group consisted of the three authors, two of whom live in Spain and one in South Africa. After the training, we needed to find novel ways to learn and gain practical experience that would be suitably deep for supervision purposes to finally qualify as MI therapists. Because of the complexities arising from being situated in different countries, our supervisor encouraged us three trainees to work together as a trio, although sessions are normally conducted in dyads (therapist and client) (Scott-Moncrieff et al., 2020).

Procedure

Duoethnography refers to a research method in which two people in dialogue question and examine the meanings they ascribe to a social issue or phenomenon in order to generate new meaning and perceptions (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Trioethnography applies the same method as duoethnography, but in this case three researchers of different backgrounds and perspectives share their stories with the purpose of creating a better understanding of the phenomenon (Lozano et al., 2021). Following the example of an article written in the trioethnography format by Rogers-Shaw, Carr-Chellman and Choi (2021), we realised this was the best method for our research. We are three researchers working and learning together with a high regard for each other as professionals as well as students. Similar to a duoethnography, where the collaboration between researchers is intended to share personal experiences, whilst also being free to critique and ask questions with openness and respect for each other (Sawyer & Norris, 2015), we realised that it could be effectively executed with the three of us. Sawyer and Norris (2015) also refer to trioethnography as an expansion of the duoethnography method to ensure greater objectivity in the research. Only in this way can we contribute and add value to a specific cultural and social context.

No research method should be too prescriptive, according to Norris et al. (2016) and Breault (2016). However, duoethnography has developed as a research method with nine distinguishable tenets (Breault, 2016; Norris & Sawyer, 2016). These tenets include:

1. Currere (Pinar, 1994), the first tenet, refers to the telling of our story looking back (regressive), looking forward (progressive), analysing (interpreting) and synthesising (integration) (Agosto et al., 2015). Currere is “an act of self-interrogation” (Norris & Sawyer, 2016, p. 13) with the aim to be transformed, and, in duoethnography, this takes place in the presence of another person.

2. The second tenet is polyvocal and dialogic (Breault, 2016; Kinnear & Ruggunan, 2019; Norris & Sawyer, 2016). It means that various voices are heard, and more than one story becomes integrated into one.
3. The third tenet entails disruption of metanarratives (Kinnear & Ruggunan, 2019; Norris & Sawyer, 2016). This is linked to the second tenet, as the truth is looked at from different points of view.
4. Difference (Norris & Sawyer, 2016) between authors needs to emerge and be made clear in this research method. This is the fourth tenet.
5. An expectation of openness is the fifth tenet: there needs to be space for dialogic exchange and regenerative transformation.
6. Trustworthiness. This sixth tenet claims that trustworthiness is found in self-reflexivity and the willingness to become vulnerable in front of the other researchers (Kinnear & Ruggunan, 2019).
7. The seventh tenet is witnessing by other readers. Writing should be accessible: "Readers (can) witness the researchers trying to make sense of and transform their recalled experiences" (Norris and Sawyer, 2016, p. 16).
8. The eighth tenet refers to ethical stances. Ethical stances shift to one of wanting to learn and change the self instead of the other, also opening up possibilities for readers to make their own meaning. To remain vulnerable and as trustworthy as possible, it is important that identities are protected. For the purpose of the case discussions in this article, we each chose a pseudonym. The reader will still know that these are the authors' personal sessions but will not be able to know who was client or therapist or witness in each case discussion. Chang (2016) argues that, because perfect protection of privacy would not be possible the authors must "model an honest and conscious effort to adhere to the ethical code of research" (p. 63).
9. Lastly, the ninth tenet is mutual trust. Mutual trust between co-authors is a prerequisite for this research method. Authors are constructing a new narrative or contextual truth through combining our stories (tenets 2 and 3), and therefore mutual trust is non-negotiable. Since we are all practising therapists, we understand the importance of trust. We have worked together as a team throughout our training. This was an important requirement and consideration in writing this article, especially where we discussed our cases.

The three authors, all experienced female music therapists, were the participants in this research study. Data were collected from six of our sessions together.¹ The data

¹ A small section of this study, using data from only two sessions, was presented at the 2nd International Symposium on the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music which was held online in October 2021 (Angulo et al., 2021).

analysis was done using the method of trioethnography. We compared notes and discussed our memories in the light of the nine tenets that are implicit in this research method. For the purpose of the study, we chose pseudonyms for recording the data from sessions.

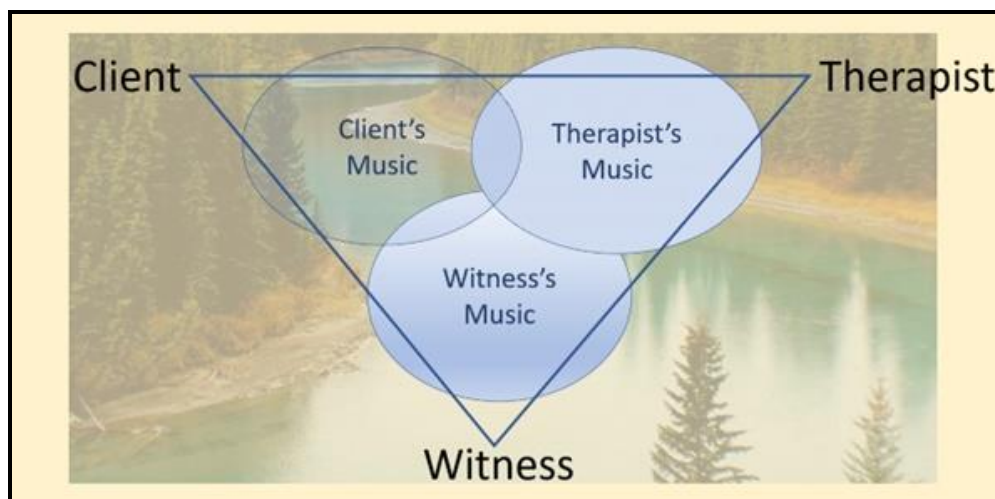
Findings

Our separate stories

The data for our findings were gathered from the transition section in six different sessions, two of each of the three authors. In each case one of the authors was in the role of client. We decided to use the image of a river as a metaphor for the music selection.² It is an organic process in which the musical backgrounds of the three participants are in interaction. They flow like a river enabling changes in the client. In a dyadic session, this influence also appears between the client's and therapist's music.

Figure 1

Music backgrounds interacting as a flowing river



Note: Photograph by Pixabay (2016).

Case example 1: Mathilda³ as client

In Mathilda's first session, with Megara³ as therapist and Olivia³ as witness, the issue to be addressed was Mathilda's struggle with boundaries. Megara gave Mathilda enough time to explore where in her body she felt this discomfort with her boundaries. Mathilda explained that she felt a hot pain in her chest.

² All the music (except Flesh and Bone's 'Dirge') can be heard on a Spotify playlist created for this study (Petrajerling, 2022).

³ These are the three participants' pseudonyms.

Only two pieces of music were necessary for Mathilda to decide what she needed most. Both pieces came from Megara's pool of music. The first piece was Stokowski's symphonic arrangement of 'Come sweet death', BWV478 (Bach, 1736/2005). The second piece of music Mathilda decided to use was 'Sun' from the album *Planetarium* (Stevens et al., 2017b). The reference to the hot pain was the clue for Megara to suggest this piece of music. The two pieces of music were so different that the choice seemed easy. Mathilda needed the 'space' which was more prominent in the second piece. She explained later how 'Chronos' became 'Kairos' during the process of drawing. Chronos is the Greek word for chronological time, or real time, while Kairos refers to an opportune moment for action (Pinilis, 2011).

Mathilda said she allowed the flow of the music to set her free and let go of control, not realising how good that would feel. It was unexpected. She could let go of everything in her chest and labelled her drawing: 'Dissolution of hot pain' (Figure 2).

Figure 2

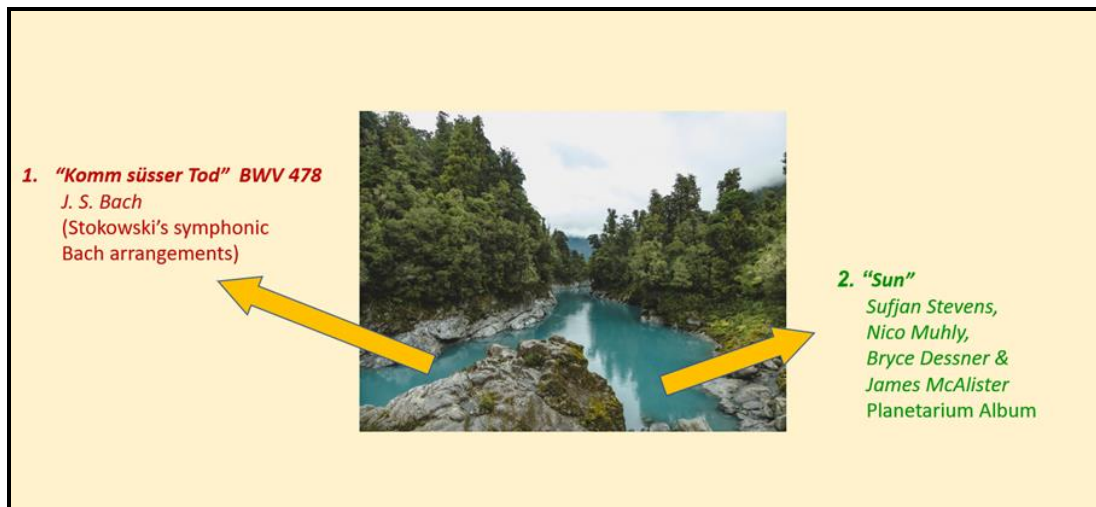
Mathilda's image 'Dissolution of hot pain'



In terms of our river metaphor, Mathilda's process of choosing music looks like Figure 3, where there is simply a fork in the river, and the choice is obvious.

Figure 3

A fork in the river with a definite decision of which way to go



Note: Photograph by Lastovich (2017).

In Mathilda's follow-up session, Olivia was the therapist and Megara took the role of the witness. There was a clear link between the two sessions: Mathilda's finds it very difficult to say "No!".

In trying to find the right music, Olivia asked Mathilda where she felt the heaviness of saying "No!" in her body. Mathilda said that it was in her hips: "I want to run from a situation, and I can't. It feels, rigid, stuck, blocked." The next question was if there should be a dialogue between instruments.

Mathilda replied that there should be two main instruments, one sounding low, bass or bassoon, and another high, like metal:

One with a low register that would resist and could represent the strength of the "No!" And another higher or more resonant one that would mean the predominance of the "Yes". In such music, even if one voice triumphed or was more visible, it could not hide the presence of the 'resistant' instrument.

The first piece of music that was played was Boccherini's (1770/2017) 'Cello concerto in B flat major: Adagio', from Olivia's music pool. Mathilda said that the music evoked a feeling that "I should say no but I say yes, which brings a sensation of loneliness," and that came out in this music: "The music reflected the two registers. The notes at the beginning and the end represented the doubt, the resistance, and the difficulty of the situation I felt."

The second choice of music was from Mathilda's own music pool: The 'Presto' from Vivaldi's (1720/2010) concerto for bassoon and continuo in G minor. Mathilda felt that the fast tempo was very good. It fitted well with the stress, the pressure, the moment just before saying yes, and seeing the problem but not saying anything:

The consideration of others over myself. In my mind, because I know this piece, the music represents the stress and struggle between what I want to express and what I will say in the belief that it is 'the right thing to do'. Doubt and resistance are also very well represented by the *ritardando* and the suspension of tempo before returning to the furious attack. Also, the repetition of motives and the descending falls in the soloist's part illustrate this inner struggle well.

A third music option was taken from Olivia's pool: 'Thunderstruck' by 2CELLOS (2015). "This matches the stress plus the feeling of handling the situation in the wrong way, I feel angry because I ignore my needs. It's incredible how well each piece of music matches with some part from the issue".

In the end, Mathilda chose the Vivaldi from her own list:

It was only a way of exemplifying what I could identify with and representing what surfaced in the session's dialogue. I know this piece so well because I listen to it often in self-sessions. The surprise of the piece proposed by another inspires other facets that can be chosen, because they fit better to the situation perceived in the here and now of the session, or because they provoke curiosity about what might appear new or different (Figure 4). However, comparing the other two pieces of music made me hear mine differently and find it appropriate or the best match for the moment.

Figure 4

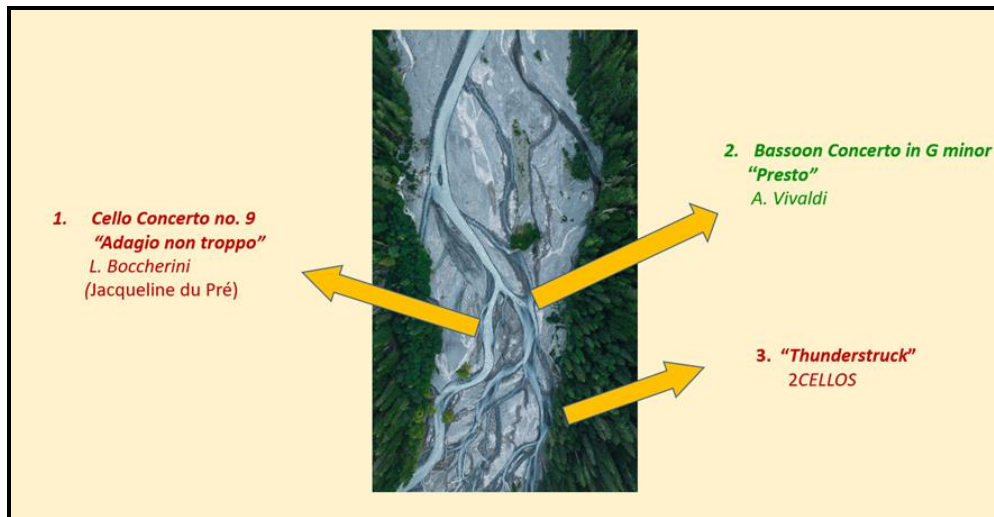
Mathilda's image 'I can see behind the mirror'



Returning to our river metaphor, this time the process of choosing the music would look like a river having many branches, and each of them could lead to a possible solution (Figure 5). The many possibilities could also possibly point to Mathilda's struggle with boundaries.

Figure 5

A river with different branches, each with its own possibilities



Note: Photograph by Kelly (2022).

Case example 2: Megara as client

In Megara's first session Olivia was in the role of the therapist and Mathilda the witness. The focus in this session was on the voice in Megara's head being so hard on her, saying things like "I am not a good therapist, I am an imposter." This issue was quite deep-seated, as "it reminded me (of the times) when my father looked down on me, always saying I was the worst cello student, or that I didn't deserve success."

For Megara the gender of the voice in the music was important; "because for me the 'bad' voice was a male voice." Megara wanted to start with the soundtrack music from the film 'Dracula – the beginning', by Wojciech Kilar (1992):

...Because he is a villain, a killer, and there are whispers in the music that it seems (as if) they are insulting him. I wanted to work with something extremely dark, and this music sounds to me very (much) like this heaviness, like dragging the feet on the ground. So, the focus was on my humiliation wound, because it is a self-punishing voice, and in fact there were some vulgarities mentioned, like feeling dirty and not worthy, but with a huge anger inside, that I do not let go (of), but it is reflected in the last part of the piece.

After listening to various extracts from 'Dracula-the beginning' (Kilar, 1992), Megara also noticed a female voice, and realised that "she is like a lament, we talked about, the polarity hate/love of myself, male/female, victim/perpetrator" She mentioned the music from *Phantom of the Opera* because "in there the roles are not so fixed, good versus evil. It is more optimistic, dark but also light, and the anger is not (held onto)."

Through attending to what Megara said, Olivia played short extracts from Mark Mancina's (2009) 'August's Rhapsody' from the soundtrack *August Rush*, as there are similar qualities. It is less dark, but with a balance between heavy and light, and also a female voice towards the end. However, Megara felt that this music was "too kind" and "too joyful" for her intention, and Mathilda, as witness, also stated that despite the similar qualities, it was "too far from what the client wanted."

A third piece of music was suggested by Olivia: the 'Finale' from Mahler's 6th Symphony (1904/2009). According to Megara, the sound of the French horn related well to the "evil feelings", but she said she needed "more unpleasantness" because she was "angrier than (the mood) this music (portrayed)", and "Mahler resonated very well with the darkness of Dracula, but I need the voices."

Mathilda felt that this music by Mahler was empowering, but the dialogue would be clearer in the second movement of Shostakovich's 10th symphony (1953/2010). This piece was from Mathilda's music pool, and she felt that there were two elements in the music that suited the client's focus. Megara mentioned that the Shostakovich matched the anger better, but again she needed the human voice. She needed the victim and the perpetrator to speak, and the victim NOT to run away. Mathilda also realised that the percussion represented the confrontation well. Olivia noticed that it now seemed that the client was ready for dialogue and that she could now tolerate the two opposite parts (perpetrator and victim) represented in the music.

The next (fifth) piece of music played, was the Andrew Lloyd Webber track 'Phantom of the Opera' (1986/1987), which was from Megara's own pool of music. She said: "It was a relief that we could listen to the "bad" male voice but the kind female one took a leading role and felt compassion for the other." This is what she needed: "The inner judge is seducing me like the Phantom and now I want to listen to him."

A sixth option was also selected from Olivia's music pool, namely the theme from *Game of Thrones* (Djawadi, 2011/2019), but the version chosen by Olivia was the flute arrangement by Wouter Kellerman (recorded in 2019), since the flute and the bass flute are

in dialogue. However, she soon realised that the timbre of the flute was not what the client wanted. Megara stated that she loved this piece, “but not for today.”

Ultimately, after having listened to six excerpts of music, the client chose the fifth piece (Phantom) to work with:

The empowerment (Figure 8) was because one part could forgive the other, and my chest was filled with love for myself while I was drawing, almost like a sexual act. Both voices united, there were both male and female at the same time, both strong and vulnerable, both good, the brown colour that in the beginning I felt disgust about, started to look beautiful for me...

The most important thing for me to discover was that the relationship between my inner parts is complex: The victim can feel compassion for the perpetrator, and the part that I was not accepting brought me an incredible strength. I really felt after the session I can love that part when the integration begins, and so, the real healing of the wound.

Figure 6

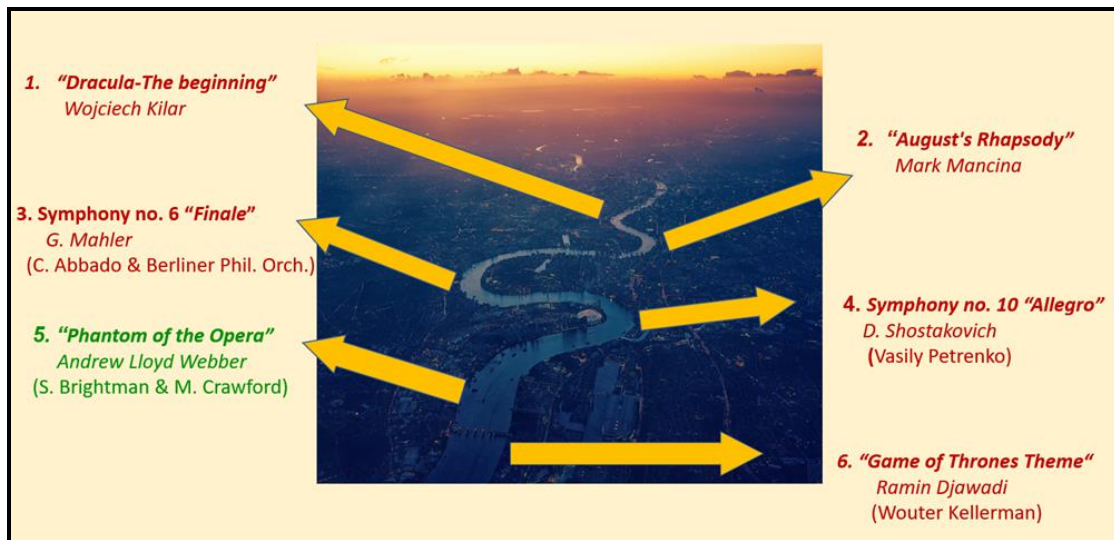
Megara's image 'Empowerment'



In terms of the metaphor of the river, Megara's process is linear (Figure 7). Each turn in the river represents a new choice of music, producing twists and turns in the client's mind, similar to the river's meandering. Each piece of music contributes to another possible choice with something that sound suitable for the focus. This is similar to each turn in the river that brings something else to the scenery. The client, who first suggested a piece of music from her own pool, finally chooses the fifth piece to accompany her on the journey.

Figure 7

A meandering river, taking its time through many turns



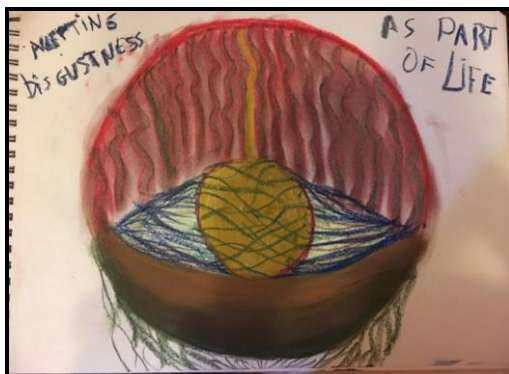
Note: Photograph by Plenio (2018).

During Megara's second session, when Mathilda and Olivia swapped roles, it was clear from the start that this was an extension of the previous session in terms of the focus. Megara had realised in the previous session that she needed to accept her own paradoxical inner parts, and for this reason she wanted head-on confrontational music.

The first piece of music that we listened to was from the original soundtrack of *Final Fantasy VII*. The score is by Nobuo Uematsu (1997). The track is called 'Those chosen by the planet.' This was from Megara's own music pool. Yet after listening to this, Megara immediately returned to the first piece of music that she suggested in her previous session: 'Dracula – the beginning', by Wojciech Kilar (1992). There was no need in this session to explore more music examples. Megara wanted to use the *Dracula*-theme.

Figure 8

Megara's image 'Accepting disgust as part of life'

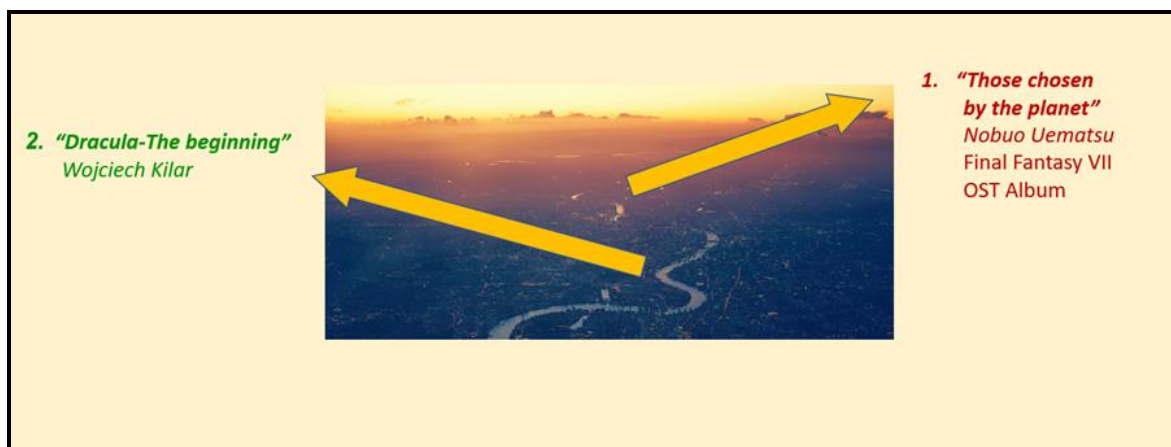


In her feedback Megara said: “It was an enlightening session, thanks to the earlier work. “The ‘aha’ moment was when I realised the difference between shame and disgust (Figure 8). The eye in the drawing represents the new awareness that this session provided.”

Figure 9 shows how the meandering river is present again in Megara’s session. Only this time, she knows, almost beforehand, that she wants the music that was not used in the previous session.

Figure 9

A ‘short walk’ along the meandering river



Note: Photograph by Plenio (2018).

Case example 3: Olivia as client

The focus for Olivia’s first session was easily established, as she was moving from one city to another. This was exciting and frightening at the same time. In this session Mathilda was in the role of therapist and Megara was witnessing the process. Olivia knew that the overwhelming feelings were not going to disappear, so she wanted to use the session to try and balance the competing perceptions: The fear of the unknown, but also the excitement of new opportunities.

This balance, or rather contradiction, had to be presented in the music. Four pieces of music, all from Mathilda’s music pool, were explored: The first suggestion was ‘Voyage of Destiny’ by Paul Mottram (2017b) from the album *Myriad*, as there is a forward moving drumbeat throughout the music, which is later echoed by repetitive patterns in the violins. Although the relevant qualities were present, the piece was “too light” for Olivia’s focus.

The second suggestion was the ‘Oxford Suite, Part 1’ from the Purple Electric Violin Concerto by Ed Alleyne-Johnson (1992). Olivia felt the big space between the voice parts

fitted with the tension she felt. There was a “pulling aspect” in the violin which resonated with her feeling of fear.

The third piece listened to, ‘Fireflies’, also from the album *Myriad* by Paul Mottram (2017a), and although the music also had qualities that matched the feeling of being overwhelmed, and Olivia liked how the bass became stronger, she felt that it started “almost too happy.” Much like the first excerpt, it did not have the heaviness that Olivia felt she needed.

A last suggestion was added: ‘Black energy’ (Stevens et al., 2017a) from the album *Planetarium*. This was heavy enough, but there was not enough contrast to depict the contrast Olivia was looking for.

The second piece, ‘Oxford Suite, Part 1’, was chosen for the process, as it certainly had enough of the tension that Olivia experienced, and the choice was easy for her: “I felt this piece was the right one from the start, but after comparing it with other pieces of music that also have qualities that can work, it reinforced my original gut feeling.” In her feedback Olivia said: “I am starting to understand (the) confusion, or at least where it comes from. I felt it in my stomach, but now it is more in the head.” The drawing (Figure 10) depicts how the music went (in) three directions, which made me imagine a genie lamp. It offers three wishes, in this case three possibilities: Denial, sadness and opportunity for growth.

Figure 10

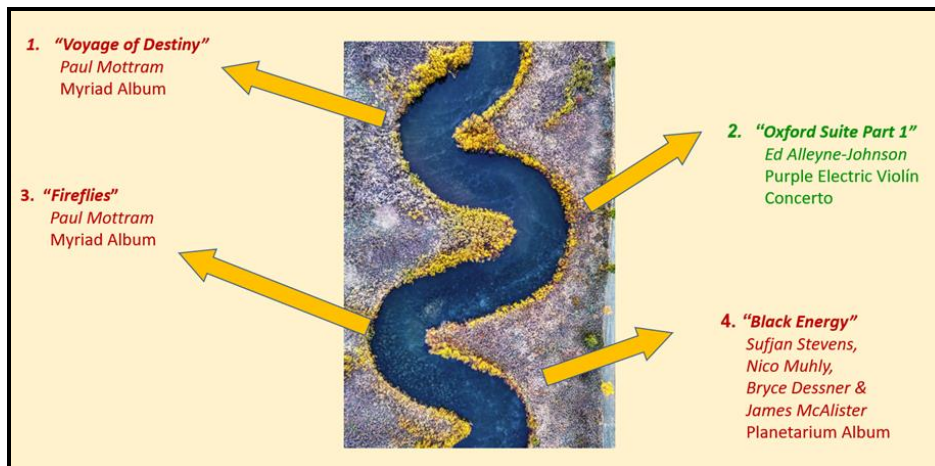
Olivia’s image ‘Clear confusion’



This same movement can be seen in the river metaphor (Figure 11). The river is flowing freely, and there are definite turns, symbolising the tension.

Figure 11

A meandering river with distinct turns



Note: Photograph by Fisk (2022).

In Olivia's second session, Megara was the therapist and Mathilda the witness. The focus of this session was Olivia's issue of managing frustration.

For Olivia, the music "should sound deep and dark in order to work with the frustration and anger." The first choice was from her own pool of music: 'Dirge' from the album *Pagan Saints* (Flesh and Bone, 1999). "It gives that low darkness that I am looking for" but, after listening to a short excerpt, she added: "It is good, but the energy needs to build throughout the piece."

The second piece of music was suggested by Megara: 'Magneto', by Henry Jackman (2011) from the soundtrack album *X-Men: First Class*, but it felt too energetic for Olivia. Megara then suggested a third piece: Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein's (2016a) 'The upside down' (Album: *Stranger Things* Volume 1). But that started too quietly and was too contained. "What I need, is to express how I really feel and not hold onto my old patterns, which include being quiet and contained, until I explode."

Olivia's next suggestion was 'Don Giovanni, a cenar teco m'invitasti', the aria from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* (1787/2012), as this also has a deep, dark voice, but in the moment of listening she said: "I (could) not relate to the particular kind of confrontation now, so it would not work today." As therapist, Megara suggested a fifth possibility: It was also by Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein (2016b), from the second volume of the *Stranger things* album. The title of the track was 'Time for 187'.

Listening to this piece had a profound effect on the client. Olivia, totally unexpectedly, started to cry: "This piece of music represents exactly how I feel - I want to RUN AWAY, and

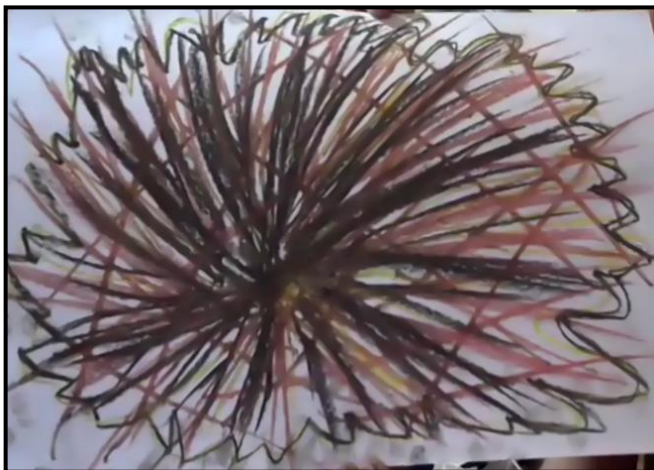
this running away is also a pattern that I need to break. I need to find the courage to voice my frustration and bear the consequences. Otherwise, I will never be happy or feel good enough." Thus, for that particular moment and intention, this music did not work, although it released another emotion in the client. Olivia decided to return to the second piece of music (Magnetotape), which was initially rejected because of its energy.

Olivia said in her reflection:

It was wonderful to be given the choice which music to use by the therapist, as two pieces were so well-suited, but the intention and the energy of the music were different. For me it was re-educative to let go of my anger in the drawing (Figure 12). I have never enjoyed breaking free and just go wild on the paper so much. This is certainly part of breaking free from the pattern.

Figure 12

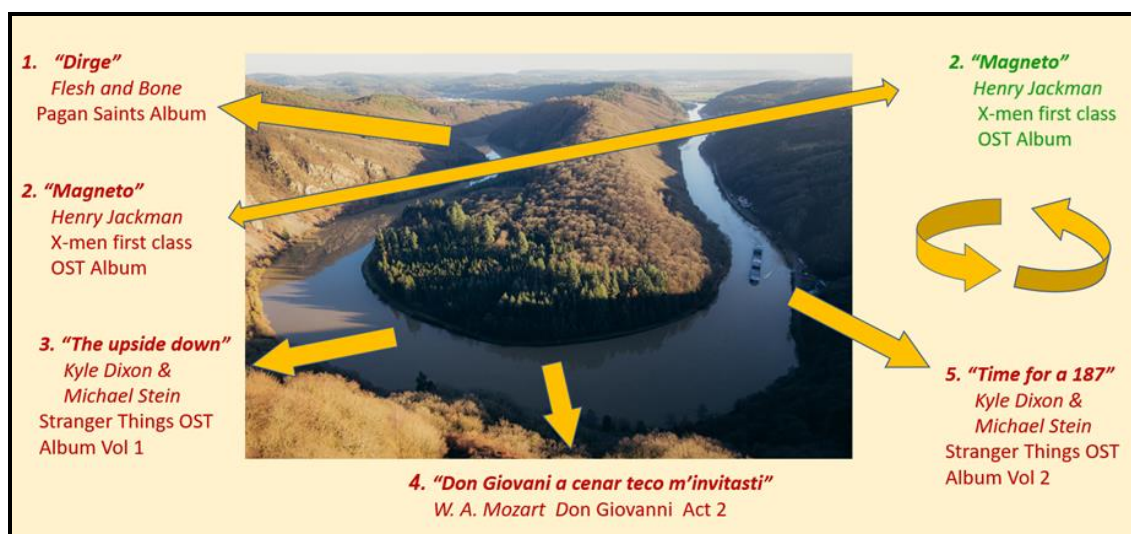
Olivia's image 'Breaking the pattern'



The image of the river (Figure 13) illustrates how the best piece for the moment was chosen. In the first session, the choice was easy, as the second piece was chosen after having listened to four. In the second session the piece that was initially 'rejected' or 'not found to be the best for the moment' is finally chosen after listening to other options.

Figure 13

Circular movement, returning to where we started



Note: Photograph by Becker (2020).

Discussion

Our integrated story

The data from these six sessions brought four important themes to light. Through the process of choosing the right music, emotional involvement emerged as a clear theme. Personal growth was also a strong theme and due to this growth, another theme was the development of strong character traits. The theme of trust could be seen in our trio working together during feedback, reflections and discussions.

Emotions that were acknowledged included the anger and self-doubt that Megara wanted to 'hear' in the music. Disappointment, doubt, confusion and even sadness were emotions evoked during music selection for Olivia, and selflessness and overwhelming and conflicting emotions were key elements in Mathilda's music choices during her sessions. Most of these emotions were stimulated by the music choices. When clients demand particular qualities in the music, they are reviewing and consolidating their focus on a deeper level of consciousness. Besides, if we are playing a piece of music from their pool, this serves as a second prelude, experiencing more emotions, and going beyond the rational thinking expressed in the first verbal prelude.

Personal growth became evident in the discussions after sessions. We all felt that we learned something about ourselves after having been through a session. By listening to the different options of music, a clearer picture of what one needs in one's own mind could be

formed. The different contexts and ages of the participants were clear in the music pieces suggested. The authors clearly have different preferences ranging from Baroque and Classical to more contemporary, as well as soundtracks and modern music. Music from almost all eras was played, and sometimes the client would choose something totally unfamiliar to them, although it was clear that there was 'safety' for them in the more familiar music. Also, returning to music that was initially found 'not right for the moment' directly points to the personal growth and openness. The input of the therapist and the feedback by the witness were equally important in promoting clearer insight for the client, which also led to personal growth.

This further led to the development of strong character traits: The need for adaptability, gratitude, open-mindedness, love, flexibility and problem-solving skills all became evident in the data. The act of choosing the music thus had an essential function in the session's progress, because each piece of music had elements that could contribute to the strengthening of the client. Any element in the music could play a role. The response may be initiated by the tempo, the orchestration, a new instrument, or a different dynamic.

We realised how essential the transition was in a session, especially if we are working at a re-educative level, because the 'rejected music' leads to change in the client. By 'rejected music' we mean the music that is played but not selected for the session. In our experience during intervision, it became clear that such music pieces played an important role in further sessions and should thus not be underestimated. It happened during our intervision sessions that music initially not chosen (or 'rejected') was ultimately the preferred piece, either later in the session, or in a follow-up session, or in a personal session. In all cases there were benefits for the client. Thus, music not 'suited' in the moment can facilitate future journeys and open up pathways for later sessions. This can only lead to growth and better insight. Therefore, the therapist should play the pieces of music long enough for these changes to occur, or for the correct choices to be made.

Trust was a theme that came up in our feedback sessions as we started to work on our trioethnography. An invaluable aspect of intervision was how we became absolutely aware of the privilege to be involved in each other's processes. We got to respect each other on a much deeper level in our various roles. We noticed the vulnerability in being the client, but also the therapist and the witness. We trusted each other. We trusted the witness to be there, even in silence, as an active observer when we were client or therapist. We also trusted the music, that it would bring what we needed, and we trusted each other's music suggestions. We knew that each one had the other one's best interests at heart.

Trioethnography as research approach

Trioethnography is a relatively new approach to research in the music therapy field, as is the concept of intervsiion. Whilst the question we wanted to answer is 'How do we experience the choosing of the right music?' we felt that some personal reflections on how we experienced using these methods (trioethnography and intervsiion) in answering the question would be helpful too.

We looked at ourselves, but also at each other as client, witness and therapist critically and created a new, combined story. The second tenet about being polyvocal and dialogic (Breault, 2016) is closely linked to the first tenet. In our case each contributor's views and opinions were included, even when these views differed. This challenged us in our process of growth, which is part of the disruption of the metanarrative. There were not only two, but three voices having enough space to be heard (Rogers-Shaw et al., 2021). Questioning our self-beliefs was facilitated by the process, as there were opportunities for various perspectives.

In our trioethnography, differences are made clear in the research process and an openness is expected in the method (Norris & Sawyer, 2016). Differences can be seen in our choices of music, our cultural backgrounds, the languages we speak and our varied ages. Participant 1 and Participant 2 are both Spanish speaking, whilst Participant 3 does not understand Spanish at all. This meant that Participant 1 and Participant 2 needed to speak English, despite their language bond, for Participant 3's sake. Frustration was experienced and noticed by all, and Participant 3 emphasised how privileged she felt. This largely contributed to our growth, as we could discuss these differences openly. Sometimes, Participant 1 and Participant 2 spoke Spanish whilst Participant 3 watched the body language. This led to our collaborative understanding that we might sometimes misunderstand or misinterpret our clients. We also realised how the music can build a bridge over the gaps that are created by differences. Most importantly, we noticed that we did not have to apologise for our differences, but that we could use them to grow.

Through our differences there was an openness for new insights and transformation to emerge. Story and Beck (2017) reported on experiencing self in the music as well as deeper self-connection and self-awareness that led to self-empowerment. On the emotional level, resource-oriented MI helped with affect regulation. These outcomes are all consistent with what we found in the current study.

We developed a bond in our personal relationship based on mutual confidence and genuine care for each other. This promoted a therapeutic relationship in which, as a client,

one could open up fearlessly; as a therapist, one could take care and gather information about the issue at hand, even in short processes; and as a witness, one could always give more objective feedback with absolute respect and empathy without being 'intrusively' part of the process.

We came out of the process knowing ourselves better, as we had to become vulnerable and self-reflective in each other's presence. This is what Kinnear and Ruggunan (2019) refer to when they speak about trustworthiness. We believe that this self-knowledge makes our writing more accessible to other readers. The eighth and ninth tenets of duoethnography have to do with an ethical stance. Ellis (2007) reminded us that when we write about ourselves, we also write about others, and that it was important to respect each other's privacy.

Realising that the honesty and vulnerability that were present in our discussions was a testament to our trust in each other. We became not only friendly researchers and practitioners, but also friends (Breault et al., 2016; Ellis, 2007). As far as the theme of trust is concerned, this can be found in the tenets of the trioethnography method. The first tenet of the method, namely Curerre, the telling of our stories by looking at them analytically and integratively (Agosto et al., 2015), was evident in our intervision process.

Reflections and Implications

An important aspect of the whole process is to leave a trace of it, not only for us, but also so that the experiences and the reflections that this process gave rise to can be useful for others. This can possibly have implications for further applications of MI as method, as well as for intervision as a different way of approaching supervision and for researchers who are interested in the trioethnographic method. For us it was important to present the experience almost a year after we had conducted the process during our MI re-educative training, as this compelled us to give an external communicative dimension to what had been our internally shared experiences.

Reflecting together after some time, in putting this trioethnography together, allowed us to articulate another deep and valuable dimension to the process. We communicated our experience as clients, therapists and witnesses. Through sharing our findings we grew as therapists.

The focus was on the process of music selection. Because of the unique situation that the music is collaboratively chosen by client and therapist, it is very possible during the transition that transferences can occur. This refers not only to transference on the client's

part, but when a therapist offers music during the transition, she may also be influenced by her ghosts and desires to rescue the client, or by any other kind of countertransference. The witness plays an important role, and adds value here, in recognising such transferences and making the therapist and/or client aware of them.

Most music therapists realise the importance of regular and valuable supervision. We found that intervision was a different kind of supervision. We had an opportunity for reflection in the company of another. This kind of inter-reflection helps with self-regulation and to trust oneself and others can be applied in a broader field of music therapy practices. In our intervision group we found the presence of the witness invaluable in pointing out transference and countertransference. Paik-Maier (2016) alludes to the fact that transference and countertransference should be acknowledged and worked through. Just as we realised the key role of the witness in our trioethnography, Paik-Maier (2013) emphasises the importance of supervision in such cases, and how this ensures personal growth on the side of the therapist.

We also noticed that sometimes the river looked similar in different sessions, for example, when there were only two pieces of music explored, whilst at other times, we needed another picture to use as metaphor where finding the right music was more complex. This made us aware of the importance of remaining open in all sessions, as there is no fixed pattern or recipe when it comes to choosing the music.

Being introduced to new music and using it for personal sessions can only be described as enriching. We have started using each other's music for personal MI work. This led to a deeper understanding of our client, and certainly contributed to our self-growth as therapists. In this way we can break our own patterns and evolve as individuals and therapists. This MI method gives opportunities for therapists to place their client's safety and pleasure right next to meeting their therapeutic needs by using their preferred music (Scott-Moncrieff, 2021). Through this process we have learned not only just how possible that is, but also how important.

Although we focused on the MI method within the CMGIM model, we strongly believe that other receptive music therapy methods and training can also benefit from exploring the process of choosing the music for a session. It could also be beneficial to discuss how music is chosen with the client. Similarly, the music that the client chooses can be reflected on in terms of how one arrives at the final choice and how that can impact the outcome of the session or process.

Conclusion

In finding the answer to the question 'How do we experience choosing the best music for the moment?' we used the data from our sessions. The method of selection for analysis was through application of the principles of trioethnography. The answer was clearly in creating the opportunity to listen to various possible pieces of music with an open mind, which proved to have positive outcomes. We have learned to be open-minded about music, allow our emotions to be involved and trust the process. The method of trioethnography also proved to be helpful for our personal growth, and even more for our growth as therapists. We found this to be an excellent way to train as therapists.

This kind of research can be extremely valuable, where the choosing of music includes the therapist inviting the client to select the music as well as expressing an openness to and insight into the client's preference. This can be applied to other receptive music therapy methods as well. Furthermore, we feel that an intervision group, where we could learn from each other without fear of judgement, can be very useful in the clinical practice of all music therapists. Lastly, applying the research method of trioethnography was complex. We are living far apart in two different countries, and we have completely different practices. It was difficult to find common time for this work. Not ever being able to sit around a table and discussing the research project live, as we were so far apart, certainly presented some challenges. Furthermore, as mentioned before, the fact that we could not communicate in our mother tongue brought about some frustrations for all of us. However, we felt that we have grown through the process and the method is completely valid and valuable, especially in the setting of music therapy research.

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Chapter 5: Research article 4

The meaning that five music teachers ascribe to their lived experiences of Music and Imagery sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic: An Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis (<http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea24si2.3>)

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic had, and still has, an influence on everybody's well-being, including that of music teachers. The search for meaning in life and purpose for music teachers became even more compelling throughout this trying time. This IPA explores the multiple meanings that five self-employed music teachers who were diagnosed with the coronavirus ascribed to their lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions. MI is a receptive music therapy method, which involves listening to music for therapeutic benefits. Five music teachers, who fitted the inclusion criteria, attended four individual MI sessions. Each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview after the sessions. The collected data were transcribed, analysed, and coded. Themes that emerged included emotional experiences, spiritual experiences, personal growth and empowerment. Findings indicate that meaning in life during a pandemic can be re-established through the application of MI sessions.

Keywords: Music and Imagery sessions (MI); Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); music teachers; lived experiences; COVID-19

Research Context

What is the meaning that music teachers, who were diagnosed with COVID-19, ascribe to their lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions? This was the driving question behind this study. MI is a creative and supportive therapy method and its effect on music teachers during a pandemic has not been researched before.

The impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the general well-being of people has been widely explored. Increased levels of stress (Khan et al., 2020), anxiety symptoms

(Sommer et al., 2021) and psychotic symptoms in response to confinement and limited interaction (Allé & Berntsen, 2021) were reported during COVID-19. Physical problems also occurred because of the pandemic. Sleeping patterns were interrupted (Altena et al., 2020), and problematic eating habits were also reported (Ammar et al., 2020).

Music teachers have often had difficulties with stress because of a lack of support, and despite this, they are expected to take on extra responsibilities such as public performances (Salvador et al., 2019). Burnout (Shaw, 2016) and experiences of being undervalued (Allen, 2014) have also been identified in research associated with the profession of being a music teacher. Past research has reported the experiences of music teachers feeling isolated and lonely (Burwell et al., 2017), resembling general circumstances during the pandemic.

The pandemic has exacerbated the conditions described in the preceding paragraph for music teachers. This was especially noticeable when music teachers were not able to teach face-to-face (Daubney & Fautley, 2021) due to the risk of the virus being spread with close contact between teacher and student (De Bruin, 2021). This continued even after schools were re-opened. Self-employed music teachers who were diagnosed with the virus had to cope with the added stress of not being able to teach at all, thus suffering not only a loss of income but also risk losing some of their students while they were physically ill or recuperating. Teachers need to be healthy, both physically and mentally, to do their job effectively (Roffey, 2012).

Music-making is described as an explorative activity that includes engaging with sound qualities and accessing emotions, memories and meaning. Høffding and Schiavio (2021) note that a strong uniting bond can be created between people “through their engagement in music-making” (p. 812). The positive influences that music has on people (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010) include enhancement of positive mood, reduction of stress and anxiety, and facilitating social bonding (Granot et al., 2021). Research has also shown music to be helpful in improving the quality of life across various populations (Jerling & Heyns,

2020). Music education is also recognized for its inspirational influence and ability to provide meaningful experiences for students (Cape, 2012). Such meaningful music experiences and engagement can have a positive influence on the expression of identity, relationships, and achievement of the students, even in later life (Cape, 2012).

A literature review, more specifically focused on artists and performers, showed that music-making contributed positively to self-care (Willis et al., 2019). Studies have shown that music also had a positive impact on COVID-19 pandemic-related health and well-being issues. A survey across 11 countries explored the positive self-connection and enjoyment cultivated through music during the pandemic (Granot et al., 2021). Eleven musicians took part in a South African study which showed that music helped them connect with others and cope in their own lives, and gave them hope (Van der Merwe et al., 2021).

Although music teachers in various settings have been involved in earlier research studies by Chong and Kim (2010), Furman and Steele (1982) and Gu and Hwang (2019), these studies focused on the students and not the teachers. Recently the focus in research has shifted to include the impact of the pandemic on music teachers. For example, the well-being of music teachers in Hong Kong was scrutinized by Cheng and Lam (2021). Findings included reports of stress, anxiety and fear being experienced by the 120 music teachers who participated in the study. The impact that teaching music online had on both students and music teachers in Australia was studied by Joseph and Lennox (2021). Although it was found that both students and music teachers were resilient, there was no question that the new situation was challenging for them, especially as far as personal connections were concerned. Similarly, music teachers admitted that useful new technological skills were acquired because of the need for online teaching, but at the same time they found it to be very time consuming, and needed support from their institutions (Biasutti et al., 2022). Another study which explored the adaptations that music teachers and their students had to make regarding their relationships during the pandemic (Antonini Philippe et al., 2020), also

highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships, especially within the dyad between one student and the teacher.

A vast array of research findings is available on how teachers could adapt to the new way of teaching music. Thorgersen and Mars (2021) discussed how music teachers collaborated online to solve educational problems, asking and answering questions, and sharing material. They even asked whether the pandemic might not be “the mother of invention” (p. 235). Regular check-ins with students, finding different ways to ensure connection between students, and reminding students how important their self-care was, were some of the ideas that Hall (2022) put forward.

However, during the pandemic, many music teachers were concerned about their future as music teachers (Overland, 2020). In a phenomenological study, first-year music teachers reported experiences of disconnection, a sense of missing out, feelings of being overwhelmed and a concern about their well-being as a result of the pandemic (Frey-Clark et al., 2023). Nevertheless, to my knowledge, no studies were conducted where the improvement of self-employed music teachers’ well-being and self-care were the focus of the research investigation, especially teachers who had lived through the pandemic. Earlier IPA studies have been conducted in music therapy (Young, 2012; Lee & McFerran, 2015; Venkatarangam, 2021), but none of them focused on the lived experiences of music teachers using the Music and Imagery (MI) therapy method.

Music and imagery (MI) forms part of the Continuum Model of Guided Music and Imagery method. The other method in this model is the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM) (Summer, 2020). Whilst the Bonny Method makes use of pre-selected music programs, consisting mostly of Western classical music (Bonny, 2001), an MI session focuses on one piece of music, which is repeated during the session. One unique aspect of this method is that the participant chooses the music collaboratively with the therapist, and the music can also be from the client’s own music pool or playlist (Summer, 2020).

The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that it is the first to explore the meaning that five music teachers in South Africa ascribe to their lived experiences of MI sessions. It is also the first time that the use and meaning of MI as a therapeutic intervention for music teachers during a pandemic have been investigated. This study can provide new insights into the experience of music teachers, music students and music therapists regarding the usefulness and value of MI sessions in difficult circumstances as well as for personal growth. Researchers who are interested in this field can also draw on the findings that emerged from this study in further research regarding music and well-being.

Method

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach which focuses on the meaning that participants ascribe to their lived experiences of a specific phenomenon (Smith et al., 2021). This is an appropriate approach for this study as I wanted to find out what the meaning was that each participant ascribed to their experiences of MI. IPA draws on three particular theoretical perspectives: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2021).

Phenomenology refers to the perceptions, feelings, thoughts and meaning-making of the participant regarding a lived experience (Wheeler & Bruschia, 2016). In this study I wanted to hear participants' experiences as they described them. Hermeneutics, particularly double hermeneutics, refers both to the participants' and the researcher's interpretation of the experience. This means that there is a cyclical involvement with the interpretation of the semi-structured interviews (Finlay, 2011) where the researcher makes sense of how the participants make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2021). Idiography refers to the uniqueness of each individual's experience (Smith et al., 2021). This was ensured in this study as each case was analysed separately before a cross-case analysis was conducted.

The music teachers in this study were invited to participate through purposive sampling. This means that volunteers who fit the criteria were invited to participate (Durrheim, 2006). In this case, music teachers in South Africa who were diagnosed with

COVID-19 and had suffered a loss of income as a result of their illness were recruited through a social media post, and through snowball sampling, where one interested person speaks to another about participating (Durrheim, 2006). However, one of the criteria was that potential participants had to be fully recovered and healthy enough to attend the MI sessions. Five participants who showed an interest in participating in this study were included. In IPA a small sample size is a prerequisite because this enhances the depth of the study (Smith, 2004).

The Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University in South Africa granted clearance for this study (Ethics number: NWU-00959-22-A7). Only after this study received ethical approval were the participants invited to take part. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants.

In this study I personally conducted the MI sessions, collected the data during the subsequent semi-structured in-depth interviews and took responsibility for the analysis. I was acutely aware of the responsibilities I bore as both researcher and therapist (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001). An awareness of my own bias was also important, and I had to remain reflexive about my dual role (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I constantly made notes in the margin about my own feelings and interpretations and discussed them in clinical supervision. Furthermore, having 22 years of experience as a music teacher, I knew that I could engage with the participants in a sympathetic, informed, and respectful way, and that this would assist with my own meaning-making of the data (Bruscia, 2016).

The most important data-collection strategy in IPA is semi-structured in-depth interviews (Smith et al., 2021). Images may also be included in the data (Bartoli, 2020). Drawing is an integral part of MI sessions (Summer, 2015), so participants' drawings were referred to during the interviews.

After a series of four one-to-one MI sessions, each of the five participants was interviewed in a relaxed conversational style. Open-ended questions were used to guide the conversation (Smith et al., 2021) with the purpose of evoking memories, descriptions,

thoughts and opinions, and values and feelings about their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Some of the questions were anchored in the observations I made during the sessions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The data from the five interviews were transcribed and entered into ATLAS.ti 23 together with the drawings that were created during the sessions. Data were read and re-read, then analysed and coded according to the first two steps of the IPA data analysis process suggested by Smith et al. (2021). Steps 3 and 4 entail the creation of themes, and to ensure that various perspectives were taken into account, the drawings were included in this process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Each interview was coded separately. This can be described as the idiographic process, which is expected in IPA. Only then was the cross-case analysis conducted, which is steps 5 and 6.

Further validity was ensured by including negative case analysis. This means that codes and categories that seemed to be contrary to the majority of participants' quotations were not ignored but included in the findings. Participants were kept up to date after the data collection, and they were asked for feedback throughout the process. Credibility was thus ensured through regular member checking and prolonged involvement with participants. Rich data were obtained and enough direct quotes from participants were used to substantiate the findings. This is standard practice in IPA (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, several independent research colleagues read the transcriptions and evaluated the data-analysis process, which contributed to the integrity of this study.

Findings

This study provided me with insights that coincided with my personal experience, namely that MI sessions can provide participants with better self-insight, opportunities for growth and spiritual or transcendental experiences, which in turn can help in times of distress such as the pandemic. A healthy coping strategy would include regular self-care sessions to which music can contribute to a significant extent. The five participants, who will

each be introduced briefly below, each chose a pseudonym for this study to ensure anonymity.

Billie Holiday

Billie described herself as a music-mad person. She said she lives “in music”. Music makes her happy. She believes she is non-pretentious with both feet on the ground and explained that her first priority is her husband and two children. However, she is quick to add that she loves to teach music: “Music defines me”. The experiential statements from analysing Billie’s data included both challenging and positive emotions, growth and empowerment, spirituality and the supernatural, and transformation. (Billie’s complete case analysis is attached as Appendix A).

Chopin

I have known Chopin for more than twenty years, as we used to teach music at neighbouring schools. However, we had lost contact as we moved to different towns. Chopin was very open when he described himself as a 42-year-old gay person who loves music. He also loves to connect with people. He added that he is happy with who he is, and although his life is complicated, he is contented. Chopin is certain that music chose him, and teaching music is one of the reasons that he is still alive today. Chopin’s data analysis includes contradictory experiential statements such as lightness and vulnerability, and there are also indications of using music for self-care, transcendence and enhancing spirituality. (Chopin’s complete case analysis is attached as Appendix B).

Liszt

Liszt was the oldest participant at 65. However, she is still teaching and described herself as a successful teacher. She teaches both piano and harp. Although she originally planned to become a performer, and still performs whenever she can, she said that she feels that teaching music is her life. This was a conscious decision, and her experience during the

COVID-19 pandemic made her even more grateful for the opportunity, as she realized that every day is a gift, and there are no guarantees. Through Liszt's interview, the experiential statements that emerged were mindfulness, music as a transformational mechanism, empowerment, and connections. (Liszt's complete case analysis is attached as Appendix C).

Schumann

Schumann had a near-death experience after her diagnosis of being infected with the Coronavirus during the COVID-19 pandemic. After two years she still had to go for regular check-ups for her heart. Schumann said that she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. She admitted that teaching music was not necessarily what she had in mind initially but that she found teaching music was the right choice for her. If she was not a music teacher, she would have been involved with music in other ways. The experiential statements that were present in Schumann's data provided insight into her difficult journey. They included self-knowledge, self-care, vulnerability, surrender and inner peace. (Schumann's complete case analysis is attached as Appendix D).

Wolf

Wolf grew up in a musical family where her mother was a music teacher. During her career as a music teacher, she was a passionate choir director for 30 years. Wolf struck me as a positive person and an idealist. She said she always wants to make things whole and happy, and it is a character trait of hers to always ask others what she can do for them. Because she is such a giving person, she has often been disappointed and frustrated. The experiential statements that were revealed from her analysis showed her need for self-care, as they included freedom in creativity, inner needs fulfilled through music, release and letting go, and perspective and self-insight. (Wolf's complete case analysis is attached as Appendix E).

Group Experiential Themes

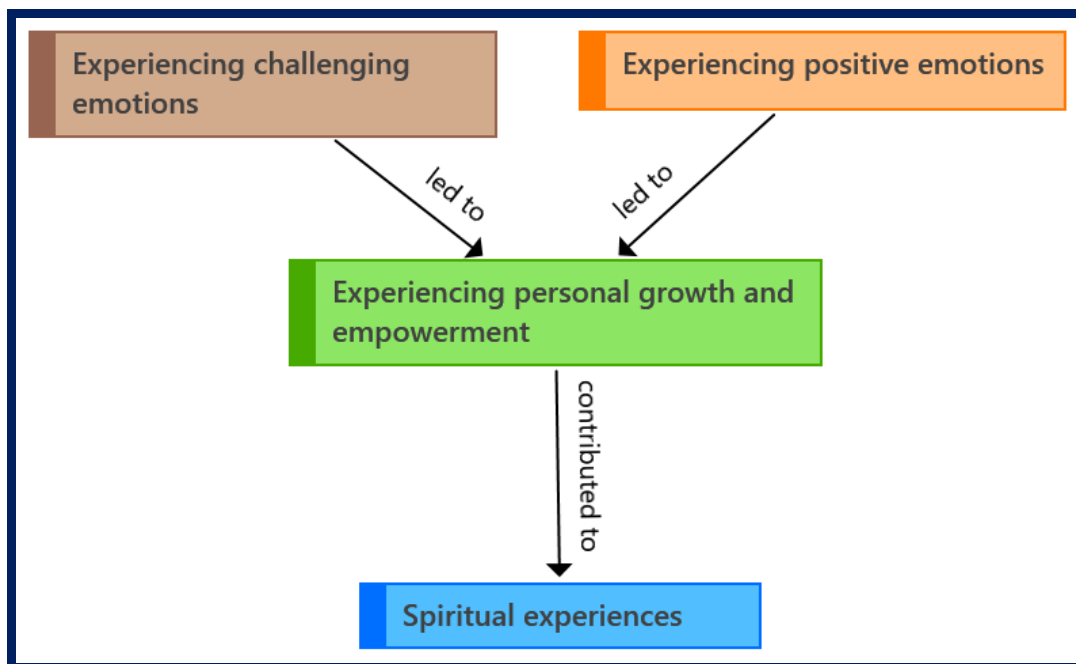
In the cross-case analysis, four group experiential themes emerged. These themes give an in-depth view of what the five participants' lived experiences entailed during MI sessions:

- 1) Experiencing personal growth and empowerment;
- 2) Experiencing positive emotions;
- 3) Experiencing challenging emotions; and
- 4) Spiritual experiences.

The cross-case analysis revealed that experiencing both challenging and positive emotions can lead to personal growth and empowerment among participants. Experiences of personal growth and empowerment contribute to having spiritual experiences (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The four group experiential themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis



First group experiential theme: Experiencing challenging emotions

Three out of the five participants experienced challenging emotions during the MI sessions. For Chopin, it was difficult to trust others, and memories about his difficult childhood came up during the therapy sessions. He said: "Part of me would prefer NOT to

discuss it because it is so personal. And how does one quantify the feeling in words? Because the feeling that I got is what is near to my heart”.

For both Billie and Schumann, the challenging emotions were related to the pandemic. Billie found it difficult to cry during the pandemic and she also felt trapped. She cried during the MI process and said that she was not able to mourn her uncle whom she had lost during COVID-19, but during the MI session she was able to allow the tears to flow: “The fact that I could not cry about him... I thought I did not have that grief about the loss. That came loose just now. Gee, this is amazing stuff”.

Schumann was not used to showing emotions, and while she was healthy again, she felt guilty if she would complain. She also experienced resistance to the therapy and found it difficult to open up. Her struggle with difficult emotions was noticeable during the music listening as she often covered her face and cried. She also spoke about being scared and feeling guilty, especially when she referred to her own recovery, whilst so many other people were less fortunate.

In my role as therapist, I was amazed at the participants’ sincere vulnerability and deep experiences during the music listening. It took me by surprise every time and there was a certain amount of transference as I felt vulnerable with them. These experiences with participants reminded me of how much respect we should have for each other as human beings, as well as for this process which allows for this kind of openness and sharing without feeling judged. The MI sessions provided an opportunity to allow difficult emotions to come to the fore without judgement. It was clear that music was the driving force for this outlet. The participants felt safe to cry and/or to talk about their difficult emotions. Apart from the experiences of difficult emotions, participants also expressed how they experienced positive emotions during MI sessions.

Second group experiential theme: Experiencing positive emotions

Four of the five participants experienced positive emotions during the MI sessions. Chopin and Billie could also identify inner strengths, e.g., hope and optimism within themselves. Whilst Billie said she felt trapped in an earlier comment, this had shifted. She had various descriptive words to express her positive emotions: “Not stifling, very safe, very nice, very contained, very free”.

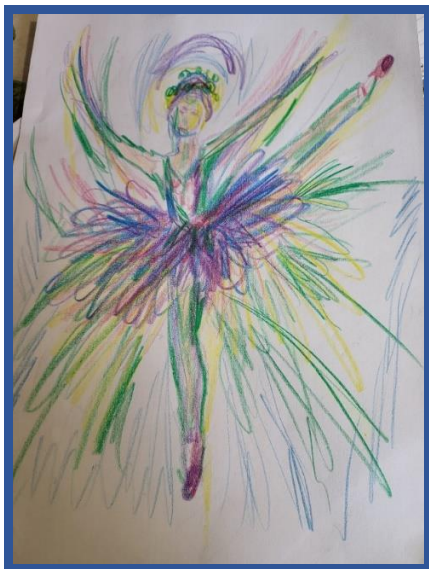
Chopin and Wolf both mentioned that they felt light and energized. Chopin was able to really immerse himself in the music: “Ooooh, I’m crying! I feel light as a feather. It is just beautiful! There is so much hope in this piece of music”. He also said that he wanted to do dance therapy and move with the music. Wolf put a lot of emphasis on the fact that she felt free and not judged during the drawing process: “I took a colour and I started. It just burst out of me. I knew which colours I wanted to use. Each colour of the pastels spoke to me and, uhm, it was interesting. I mean the chalk pastels is such a mess, but it is so therapeutic to just blend. It came immediately. I felt safe, and then you can do anything”.

Both Wolf and Liszt could access their inner child in the process and relive fond memories. Wolf said that she struggled to access her inner child, and that she needed to have more fun. When she drew a happy picture, remembering herself as a little girl, she wanted to see the sunshine and the beauty (Figure 2): “I always want to see something warm. So, the flame is warm, and emotional. I can breathe deeper; I can relax, and I don't have to think while I look into the fire. It's all so simple”.

Figure 2*Wolf's 'happy childhood' image*

Note. This image was drawn to the music: Leveleleven: Nordic Polska

Liszt also drew a childhood memory which was brought up by the music. Although this was a memory of a dream that she never fulfilled, it made her feel gratitude: "I always wanted to be a ballerina so badly, but my parents could not afford it. And this piece of music feels like it gives me energy, life, excitement" (Figure 3).

Figure 3*Liszt's 'ballerina'*

Note. This image was drawn to the music: Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, third movement (Rondo)

Music during the MI sessions gave participants the freedom to express their memories and their positive emotions. From their feedback, it was clear that they felt light, happy, and energized. The drawing whilst listening to carefully chosen music was therapeutic.

Positive emotions, as defined by Frederickson (2010), include joy, gratitude, serenity, inspiration, hope, love, awe, amusement, interest and a sense of pride. Many of these were reflected in the data of this theme. I felt privileged that participants engaged with these sessions. Witnessing how they allowed themselves to be in the moment, I also experienced a deep sense of gratitude. I also wondered if Liszt was not perhaps, in a sense, fulfilling her dream in her imagination through her image.

Third group experiential theme: Experiencing personal growth and empowerment

Experiences of personal growth and empowerment emerged from all the participants' data analyses. Personal experiential themes that emerged include growth and empowerment, using music for self-care, growth and empowerment, self-knowledge, perspective and insight, and the fulfilment of inner needs through the music.

Billie and Liszt both experienced empowerment that helped them grow in their personal lives. Billie found that one of the sessions led to a revelation for her life journey: "I'm in one direction now, and now [I make a] 180-degree summersault, backtracking. I need to move [in] another way. And I know that's now the path I need to take"! (Figure 4). Liszt also became aware of the power of the music and how it contributed to her becoming more honest and authentic: "And life is stressful, but there is always hope".

Figure 4*Billie's '180-degree turn'*

Note. This image was drawn to the music: Chaka Kahn: I'm every woman

In Wolf's case, the experience of how music could fulfil needs within her was very empowering. She felt that music could fulfil her emotional needs, her need to feel safe, and her need to connect with God and nature. It also gave her a new perspective and insight into her own needs: "I realized that I must guard my heart. It is a 'sound mind' decision! Like having a dog that you love, but he eats your stuff, stuff that you also love!! You must balance this. I need to stand my ground and know what I have to offer".

In this group experiential theme, both Chopin and Schumann realized their need for self-care and the role that music could play in taking better care of themselves. Chopin realized that he knew exactly what music he needed, and that listening to music could 'recharge' his personal 'battery'. He did not even have to put any effort in: "But when I listen to this music... It is my time. I don't have to do anything. The music plays, I don't even have to play".

Schumann also knew what music she needed, and she was even brave enough to say that with well-known music she was the one leading, whilst with unknown music the music was the leader: "If you want something out of the session, then I would say go with the unknown music, because the music you know keeps you in your comfort zone".

Although the levels of personal growth and empowerment differed between participants, it was unmistakably present in the data. In the cases of Billie and Wolf, feeling stronger and having more confidence arose. Schumann and Chopin were both empowered by their insight that music could help them grow, and Liszt got to a place of hope and self-acceptance.

Traits such as bravery, a love of learning, perseverance, perspective, self-regulation, hope and wisdom are all present in the list of 24 character strengths described by Peterson and Seligman (2004). To observe participants acknowledging these characteristics through the sessions made me realize how powerful this method is. It was almost tangible. As therapist I felt that I have grown, and as researcher I felt even more convinced that this phenomenon is worth researching within the clinical environment.

Fourth group experiential theme: Spiritual experiences

Spiritual experiences were also noted in the data of all five participants. Spirituality was a theme for Billie and Chopin. Transcendence was a theme emerging in both Wolf and Chopin's data, and transformation was a theme for both Liszt and Billie. Schumann's theme of inner peace with a category of connecting with God also fits into this group experiential theme (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Schumann's representation of transcendence



Note. This image was drawn to the music: Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D, Op. 35, first movement

Billie spoke about a heightened spiritual awareness and transformation that occurred in her process. She claimed that it changed her future and that she experienced this renewed spiritual awareness as humbling. It has given her confidence that was real, and it was refreshing to her: "But I experienced it in the here and the now and I could trust my experience. It's not something I read in a book, that somebody made up. It's my LIVED EXPERIENCE. And that gives me confidence to connect with people".

Liszt realized that her experience with COVID-19 had a detrimental effect on her and that she had so much to be grateful for. She noted that through her involvement with the music there was a transformation for her, even in a piece of music. She described Dring's music (Trio for flute, oboe and piano, the first movement: Allegro con Brio) as "symbolic", and she added that "the transposition is transformative" (Figure 6).

Figure 6*Liszt's 'acceptance'*

Note. This image was drawn to the music: Dring: Trio for flute oboe and piano first movement Allegro con brio

Chopin had an experience of transcendence more than once during the process. One example was when we listened to J.S. Bach's St Matthew's Passion part 1: "I could fly. I can leave my body behind. I am not fixed to the earth. Bach's music does this for me. It is unbelievable. Oooh, it's spacious up there and the earth is 5 billion years away from the space. It is the space that music opens up for me. No gravity, no rules of our lives are applicable in that space" (Figure 7). Chopin would also cry during listening, and sometimes a full repetition of the piece of music was necessary to give him enough time to come back to the 'here and now'.

Figure 7*Chopin's drawing*

Note. This image was drawn to the music: J. S. Bach: St Matthew's -Passion BWV 244 First section (Chorus 1 & 2)

Wolf also mentioned transcendence after we had listened to *O Magnum Mysterium* by Lauridsen. She said that she left the earth and “went up into the heavenlies”: “Listen, when you look at clouds, it detaches you from this earth, from the ‘little foxes’ [referring to Song of Solomon 2:15] and you can actually go... You transcend into a next dimension and that is what happened to me” (Figure 8).

Figure 8*Wolf's representation of transcendence*

Note. This image was drawn to the music: Lauridsen: *O Magnum Mysterium*

Schumann relates her experience of inner peace directly to her COVID-19 experience. Whilst listening to the first movement of Tchaikovsky's violin concerto in D, she drew in colourful circles (Figure 5), explaining afterwards how, whilst listening she relived this moment: "I was part of this rolling clouds. It was me and it was not me. A kind of out-of-body experience, and then I heard a voice saying clearly 'Everyone is going to be just fine'. And it was so fantastic, so strange, but with so much relief".

The last virtue in Peterson and Seligman's (2004) classification of strengths, is transcendence. The strengths which are grouped under this virtue include appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humour, and spirituality. Some of these character strengths were already noticed in earlier themes. They are grouped together under the umbrella of transcendence because all of them give meaning to individual's lives because they allow individuals to experience connections to the greater universe (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As a therapist and researcher, I humbly noticed these extraordinary changes during MI sessions, although the depth in which participants lived through spiritual experiences differed. Schumann's surrender led to the most touching spiritual moments where she could experience inner peace, and experience gratitude for her survival of the COVID-19 diagnosis and also realise the importance of being in touch with God and oneself. Billie's process of growth, self-acceptance and transformation took place literally in front of my eyes. For me, these sessions were as valuable as they were for the participants.

The data showed that through the music, each participant could experience either transcendence, transformation, or a deep inner peace. Each participant became aware of something bigger than themselves through the music. This was a very humbling experience to become part of.

Some of the personal experiential themes and categories could possibly fit into more than one group experiential theme. Deciding where it fitted best became clear after feedback from each participant. Table 1 summarises the cross-case analysis, containing the personal experiential themes and the group experiential themes.

Table 1*Cross-case analysis*

Personal Experiential Themes					
Group Experiential Themes	Billie Holiday's experiential statements & categories	Chopin's experiential statements & categories	Liszt's experiential statements & categories	Schumann's experiential statements & categories	Wolf's Experiential statements & categories
1. Experiencing challenging emotions	Challenging emotions • Not being able to cry • Feeling anxious • Feeling trapped • Self-criticism	Vulnerability • Difficult to trust • Open up to old hurt and pain		Vulnerability • Not used to showing emotions • Feeling guilty Surrender • Experiences of resistance to let go • Letting go	
	"Initially I felt very anxious, suddenly as if this little box was never going to move, I feel I am being smothered, as if someone pushes me down to smother me, as if somebody with an ice-cold hand presses on my stomach. ALWAYS when I try to reach my potential, there is always something that holds me back. I relate it back to a more powerful woman who is going to smother me, I	"But it is a choice I made. Actually, the music made the choice for me. So, I decided it would not be awkward. That is the choice of an adult. I chose what I wanted, and the experience was so important that I would not allow anything to stand in my way to get it".		"It is actually that thing of breaking through the resistance. It is on a different level when you do not feel confident to draw. If you are through it and you start, it is really quite nice... I could relax and surrender to doing it. When I allowed myself to GO THERE, it was really very nice! The process was good".	

Personal Experiential Themes

	don't know why, I am working on it. And then when I tried to get out of the room, there appeared locks and locks as if I can't come out".			
2. Experiencing positive emotions	Positive emotions • Feeling optimistic • Feeling happy • Feeling light	Lightness • Feeling light • Feeling energized	Mindfulness • Being in the moment • Reliving fond memories	Freedom in creativity • Therapeutic • Less judgement • Feeling good
	"SUDDENLY, there came hundreds of lights, this colour, (points to her drawing) indigo blue butterflies into the tunnel, and they lift me out of the tunnel and pulled me out and allow me to play with the light and the clouds and these butterflies changed colour, and they held me and I could not believe how it changed from the absolute darkness to this absolute freedom! There is movement forward, with great excitement, almost like what's coming next? I don't know, there is a pattern	"In this interlude, I can focus on the music, and it rejuvenates me, and I can go back to my work. My battery is fuller than before, and I can go on. I do not always have to DO.... In the music, the DOING falls away. I don't have to DO... I normally do many things at the same time to get through the work. But when I listen to this music... It is my time. I don't have to do anything. The music plays, I don't even have to play".	"What I have realized is that I was able to be in the moment. Now at this moment, in the moment. I am here now. It is difficult for me to live in the moment, because my head goes to lots of places, but these therapy sessions, it was nice to just be in the moment".	"This work, it takes my brain away completely. Afterwards I feel incredible. I feel light and even if there is something frightening that I have seen, it's okay, so that's good I know after sessions, I come back refreshed and unburdened. I show my people my pictures, and I love sharing and they can also see what they want, and I don't need to say anything".

Personal Experiential Themes

	and there is order there. And the question of what's coming next makes me feel very excited, optimistic, very excited, optimistic".				
	Growth and empowerment • Freedom of choice • Own potential • Trusting the process	Using music for self-care • Music is a tool for improving self-care	Empowerment • Power of the music • Becoming honest and authentic	Self-knowledge • Linked to knowledge of music Self-care • Being hard on herself	Perspective and Insight • Realizing the value of looking from a different perspective Inner needs fulfilled through music • Music helps to fulfil emotional needs • Music helps to fulfil needs to connect to nature and God • Music fulfils the need to feel safe
3. Experiencing personal growth and empowerment	"I decided and I felt I could be completely myself. [In the past] I would have found a way to back off and I'm facing resistance now, but I am empowered, and I am convinced, and I trust! I know it will shift!"	"I think that I have realized that if I.... to always remind myself how powerful music is... and if I am in a dark place, to actually go and say to myself you know, I actually know that that piece of music can help me. And to do it actually! Because it is a resource that is available. I don't even have to go and look for it".	"What I have realized that I thought I knew what is going on in my heart and my mind. And then the music plays, and you start drawing and then you start to see oh, I did not realize that this is actually how I feel. That preconceived idea, and here comes the music and then.... other things come up. You think you're doing okay and then....mmmmm".	"And remember that I have said to you that music for me is very closely linked to my emotional state of being. It touches me deeply emotionally. When I was in the hospital and I was sick with COVID-19, I did not listen to any music, I could not. I didn't want to. Music is a trigger for me".	"Music is just the soul of...you cannot not be connected. Each piece of music had its purpose for emotional connection. Each one was pretty highly intense for me. It has brought healing. It has definitely brought healing in a place where I did not even realize there was a scar or something hurting".

Personal Experiential Themes

	Spirituality and the supernatural • Trust • Physical sensations • Spiritual awareness	Spirituality • Relationship with God • Knowing • Hope Transcendence • Intimate connection with the music • Out of body experiences • Emotional experiences	Music as a transformational mechanism • Power of music • Realization of the importance of life Connections • Music connects to other art forms • Music connecting to emotions • Music connects to significant others • Music connects to self	Inner peace • Feeling safe • A sense of belonging • Connection with God	Release and letting go • Releasing emotions • Transcendence
4. Spiritual experiences	Transformation • Releasing stuckness • Changing the future • Humbling experience “TRUST my physical sensations, not fear them, not run away from them, but TRUST them, like engulf, I would say, everything that happens around me...Uhm, definitely a spiritual dimension [too] and that is so nice because you have this physical sensation but it is also spiritual so it's uhm, it's the most wonderful holistic	“That same feeling of escaping from my body to heaven. That is what Bach does to me. It takes over. It is so free and a nice feeling, I am not in my body. How can you describe it. It is as if I am a balloon and all of a sudden there is helium in the balloon. Gravity does not play a role, but I can't look down and say I am 20 meters above the earth. There is	“There was so much energy! It felt as if I could take off from the earth, the transposition is transformative. There is a tangible core in the purple (ballerina image), in the gut. I became Van Gogh while I drew. I did not realize that the connection between visual art and music, how important it is the music and the drawing, although I have been doing both for as long as I	“This kind of drawing is not because I like doodling, but it is all I can do. When I was in the near-death experience, and they shocked my heart during Covid-19, I was sedated, and this (she points at the drawing) is what I experienced. I was part of this rolling clouds. It was me and it was not me. A kind of out-of-body experience,	“I did not want to be part of this world, as it is challenging and stressful, so in the music I left that and went up into the heavenly's. First, I drew the cloud and then at the bottom I just mused with the pastels, and I thought okay this is rain starting. And I thought okay maybe I am going to cry now for a bit of release. That cloud that I drew, it was a prophetic drawing. I wanted to be taken away from this world and into the mysterious, so for me it was wonderful”!

Personal Experiential Themes

experience and you know when people say holistic they mean okay just don't take pills. It's more than that. I love taking the spiritual dimension into account".

nothing. The only thing there is, is the feeling because the music takes over".

live, how important it was to stimulate and enhance emotions, yes for sure. How did I not realize? I never grasped that one must do this. Yes, I am a little, wow, overwhelmed..."

and then I heard a voice saying clearly 'Everyone is going to be just fine'. And it was so fantastic, so strange, but with so much relief".

Discussion

Experiencing challenging emotions

Challenging emotions have been experienced during MI sessions before. Anger (Angulo et al., 2021; Kang, 2017), confusion (Story, 2018), fear and disconnection (Paik-Maier, 2017) have been described in the literature. Sadness and feelings of being overwhelmed were also noted by Karastatira (2021). In this study, the need to show emotions of sadness was seen in Billie and Schumann's data. Schumann and Chopin both felt vulnerable during their processes. MI sessions allowed for a safe space for participants to show and experience challenging emotions without feeling judged. Similarly, participants could share their experiences of positive emotions.

Experiencing positive emotions

Acceptance experienced as a positive emotion has been noted by Story and Beck (2017) as well as Paik-Maier (2017). In the present study Wolf said how she felt free from judgement. Feeling excitement and joy, similar to the data from Billie in this study, was observed in Karastatira's (2021) study with adolescents during MI sessions. Both Wolf and Liszt experienced positive memories, which strengthened them. Positive memories have also been recorded by Dimiceli-Mitran (2020), Story (2018) and Summer (2011). Paik-Maier (2010, 2013, 2017) referred to positive memories being stirred by music for clients in three different studies. MI has at its core the purpose of resourcing the individual by allowing them to find their inner strengths (Summer, 2015). A review of the literature (in review) suggests this is being achieved in the MI method.

Personal growth and empowerment

Personal growth and empowerment were evident in all the participants' cases in the present study. This echoes a previous study by Paik-Maier (2017) in which her client described how she could steer in any direction that she chose. Summer (2011) also described her client as feeling empowered and being hopeful, open, and contented. The MI

method allows for this growth and feelings of empowerment. One of the reasons is that clients can choose the music for their processes (Scott-Moncrieff, 2021).

Spiritual experiences

Dimiceli-Mitran (2020) described experiencing the music as liberating, and Hearn (2010) reported her client's experience as transformative and transpersonal. Previous studies also showed how music can stimulate different ways to communicate, which is transformational (Story, 2018; Paik-Maier, 2017). Lui (2021) had a client saying: "Music touches my heart. As if it's taking me on an amazing and adventurous journey". In the present study all the participants reported some form of spiritual experience, e.g., spiritual awareness (Billie and Schumann), transcendent experiences (Chopin and Wolf) and transformational awareness, realizing the importance of life (Liszt). Music in MI sessions thus serves as a catalyst for transformational experiences.

Conclusion

In the present study it was evident that all five participants had meaningful lived experiences during MI sessions. All the participants are self-employed music teachers in South Africa who were diagnosed with COVID-19 during the pandemic. Although many of the personal experiential statements that were identified in the analysis of each teacher's case were similar, the meaning that each of them ascribed to their lived experiences of the MI sessions was different.

Billie's sessions brought to the forefront her difficulty with self-esteem in her workplace, stemming from a long-standing, almost traumatic, belief that she is not good enough. Although our first session focused on emotional release after experiencing loss during the pandemic, the long-term outcome was an overall deepened self-belief, improved self-esteem and optimism which strengthened her enough to change direction in her teaching career. This will bring new meaning into her life.

Chopin's sessions highlighted his feelings of isolation due to the pandemic. He realized that he was in dire need of self-care. In finding the tools to take better care of himself, he will be able to be a healthier and more caring teacher. His process was thus meaningful on a personal level which will have a positive effect on others around him.

Schumann had a near-death experience whilst she had the virus, and she understood that she had unresolved trauma due to this experience. She had recovered and felt guilty to admit that she still had to work through the trauma. Similar to Chopin, her realization during the MI process was that self-care would be beneficial not only to herself, but also to her young daughter and her students; this insight contributed hugely to her renewed meaning-making.

Both Liszt and Wolf are nearing the end of their teaching careers. Yet the MI sessions added meaning to their lives by giving them fresh ideas for teaching and for their personal lives. They were contemplating the value of having their students draw in response to the music pieces that they are playing. Liszt ascribed new realization and meaning to the connection between the different art forms. Wolf realized how she could give a different meaning to music listening if she afforded herself the freedom to draw images at the same time.

Implications for music teachers

The findings of this study show that all the music teachers who participated benefited from the MI process. Because MI uses music as a tool for increased well-being, and the teachers' own music can be chosen for sessions, it is a good fit for music teachers. It is imperative that the self-care of music teachers be enhanced, and there is no doubt that improving their own well-being will contribute to strengthening their capacity as teachers as well as bolstering their relationships with their students.

There is scope for further research in using MI sessions to help music teachers cope and grow. This kind of study could be replicated using processes that run for more than just

four sessions. Similar research could be conducted with music teachers from other countries and schools and in other creative arts subjects. It would also be important to explore the experiences of music teachers from different cultural backgrounds. Positive psychological constructs such as courage, perseverance, kindness, love of learning and many more could also be the focus points for further research. The MI method is strength-building, and this study paves the way for further research into this field.

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Chapter 6: Research article 5

Exploring meaningful experiences of group Music and Imagery sessions: An intrinsic case study

Abstract

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to explore the meaning that participants ascribed to their lived experiences while participating in group Music and Imagery (MI) sessions. MI, as a strength-building receptive music therapy method. The method involves listening to music whilst drawing and can be utilised for individuals and groups. Five South African music teachers took part in a study exploring their meaning-making of MI sessions after they had been diagnosed with COVID-19. Each participant had four individual sessions and the group had three sessions together. This case study focuses on the three online group sessions. A focus group was held with all group members after the three group sessions, and the data collected from the focus group as well as the group feedback discussions after each session were transcribed, analysed and coded. The themes that arose included character strengths, trust, universality and the need to connect. Findings indicate that MI sessions can enhance personal well-being and experiences of meaning-making.

Keywords: Music and Imagery (MI); group music therapy; online sessions; case study

Introduction

Currently, an abundance of research is devoted to exploring human well-being, especially in light of the pandemic. The well-being of all people has been negatively impacted by COVID-19 (Sollis et al., 2021), especially those who were infected (Alharbi et al., 2022). According to an analysis of mental health and well-being during the pandemic in the United Kingdom (Wetherall et al., 2022), the well-being and mental health of the general

population deteriorated. The effect on teachers when schools were closed and online teaching was explored cannot be underestimated.

Teachers' well-being was the subject of several studies during and after the pandemic. In the United Kingdom, a survey was done, including 2698 teachers, regarding COVID-19 preventative measures in schools and staff well-being (Sundaram et al., 2023). Although this study focused on physical well-being, the emotional fatigue of teachers was also noted. Younger children and teachers were negatively influenced as well, as teachers reported that they did not achieve their teaching goals (Alsabeelah, 2021). Furthermore, teachers experienced feelings of disconnectedness and being overwhelmed (Frey-Clark et al., 2023).

Teachers' psychological distress was the subject of a study by Kong and Wong (2022) in which they explored the use of music listening for better coping. They found that well-being and distress could be moderated by music listening. The positive role that music can fulfil in terms of well-being was also noticed by Jerling and Heyns (2020) and Granot et al. (2021). Both these studies concluded that music helped with connection, coping, enjoyment and hope-giving, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and other difficult circumstances. Even prior to the pandemic, music, and more specifically the literature on music therapy as an enhancer of well-being was reviewed by Solli et al. (2013), McKinney and Honig (2017), and Jerling and Heyns (2020). Group music therapy enhances a sense of being together, 'being someone' and clients 'having a good time', according to Solli et al. (2013). McKinney and Honig's (2017) review reported improved quality of life, and the review by Jerling and Heyns (2020) also reported enhanced quality of life as well as increased resilience of clients in various settings where receptive music therapy was employed in groups.

Receptive music therapy can be defined as a therapy method which entails listening to existing, pre-composed music for therapeutic benefits. Other music therapy methods include active music-making and improvisation (Wigram et al., 2002). There are various

receptive music therapy methods, of which the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM) has been one of the most prominent since the 1970s with many adaptations (Bruscia, 2015; Grocke & Moe, 2015; Merrit, 1996). Lisa Summer was a student of Helen Bonny's, and she developed the Continuum Model of Guided Imagery and Music (CMGIM), which consists of two methods, namely BMGIM and Music and Imagery (MI) (Summer, 2015).

BMGIM uses a pre-programmed set of mostly Western, classical-style pieces of music to guide the listening client through a visual or imagined journey with closed eyes whilst deeply relaxed (Bonny, 2002). However, in MI, one piece of music is chosen collaboratively between the client and the therapist. Then, drawing takes place whilst the music is being listened to (Summer, 2015). The MI method ranges on a continuum from a supportive level, followed by the re-educative level, and lastly, a reconstructive level (Montgomery, 2012; Summer, 2015). The supportive level of MI is also called resource-oriented MI (Story & Beck, 2017), as it focuses on identifying and building the resources that are already present in the client. The purpose of the other levels is to gain new perspectives and find ways to put these resources into practice in daily life (Summer, 2015).

MI starts with identifying existing personal resources, which implies this method of therapy seems to be a perfect match with the principles of positive psychology that have to do with nurturing strong character traits. Positive psychology has at its core a focus on what is 'right' or healthy. It includes studying virtues and strengths, and then building on these instead of just focusing on pathology. In applying this approach, one can start looking at 'what is wrong' by using what is strong (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Research has shown that doing receptive music therapy in groups can be very helpful to clients in various settings (Summer, 2019). Examples in the literature include group receptive music therapy since the 1990s. Group work has been done with physically disabled clients (Short, 1992), clients struggling with PTSD (Blake & Bishop, 1994), patients with acute psychiatric conditions (Goldberg, 1994; Moe, 2009) and people with eating disorders (Justice, 1994).

However, there is a gap in the research regarding whether or how music teachers were helped through receptive music therapy at the time of the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on the well-being of musicians was explored by Whitley et al. (2022), and the findings revealed that it was very important for a musician's well-being to be sustained. Even so, no specific music therapy method has been investigated. The present study is unique since it focuses on music teachers who were all diagnosed with the virus. It uses MI as a method, with the additional circumstance of doing the group work online.

Procedures

Intrinsic case study refers to a case study where the case itself is the focus. It includes describing the case in detail, and taking the context into account is very important (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This means that a specific phenomenon is explored within a specific real-life situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, the phenomenon of group MI sessions was explored by five music teachers, who had all been diagnosed as having COVID-19 and had recovered. Furthermore, because of the pandemic, the therapy sessions had to take place online, which gives this study a bounded focus.

Five important questions should be answered before choosing an intrinsic case study as a research approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Firstly, are there clear boundaries around the case and is an in-depth understanding the goal of the researchers? In this study the boundaries were very clear. Sampling was purposive, which means that a homogenous group of participants was included through snowballing. Snowballing means that one interested person who meets the inclusion criteria tells somebody else who they know also suits the inclusion criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Only five participants took part in group MI sessions. South African music teachers who taught in their private capacity and had contracted the coronavirus, and who thus also suffered a loss of income, were eligible to participate in the study.

Secondly, is there a specific issue to be focused on? In our case study, the issue was helping music teachers who had all been diagnosed with COVID-19 and had recovered, yet

there were obvious deep-seated impacts in each case. We wanted to explore the meaning that participants ascribed to their lived experiences of MI sessions in a group. Thus, their personal experiences were of the essence (Wheeler, 2016), as well as finding out how and if group MI sessions were meaningful to them.

The third prerequisite for a case study is collecting data from multiple sources. In our study, we used drawings that were created during the sessions, participants' feedback during sessions, observations by the therapist, as well as a focus group interview with the group after the sessions. Furthermore, the analysis itself was shared with the participants to ensure engagement over a long time, not only during the sessions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Drawing on this range of sources contributes to the validity of the study (Creswell, 2014).

A fourth dimension for the case study approach is a systematic analysis which can provide a clear description of the case. In our study, we transcribed all the data, which were then, together with the drawings, included in one heuristic unit in ATLAS.ti 23. Data transcriptions were read, re-read and coded. Themes were then identified from the categories and codes. The thematic analysis was done according to the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). These steps include (1) reading through the transcribed data, (2) re-reading and initial coding of quotations in light of the purpose of the study, (3) generating initial themes, and (4) reviewing the themes. In step 5, themes are finalised and named, and the last step is to write up the findings.

As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2016), the findings should be reported in a reflective way. This was ensured by applying member checking and participants were asked for feedback after the analysis process. In addition, our study reports the findings by reflectively and critically comparing them to previous similar studies. Outcomes related to the constructs of positive psychology, such as character strengths, were examined through the lens of positive psychology.

The group sessions were unique in that, because of the COVID-19 restrictions implemented at the time in South Africa, all sessions and the focus group took place online.

We used Zoom as a platform to meet. Due to the fact that sessions were online, participants could choose their pseudonyms, not only for the purpose of staying anonymous for the research project, but also as group members. All participants chose the name of a composer or performer as a pseudonym⁴, and they were asked to label their Zoom identification with their pseudonyms as well. One participant in the group requested us not to use cameras, so the sessions were completely anonymous, as we could only hear each other. Although the blank screen felt very unusual and isolating, there was a freedom to share anything without any hesitation or holding back. Some comments from the participants pointed towards vulnerability, all related to their experiences with COVID-19. The anonymised meetings helped to mitigate further feelings of vulnerability.

In an individual resource-oriented session, the therapist and client will decide on a feature to focus on together, e.g. self-assurance, and collaboratively select music that links to this point of focus by listening to short extracts of possible pieces of music. Then, the chosen piece of music is played repeatedly whilst the client draws whatever the music elicits (Summer, 2015). In the group sessions, the group collaboratively decided on a focus for the session, and then each group member was given an opportunity to suggest a piece of music from their personal playlists. A short excerpt of each suggested piece of music was played, and once again, the group decided collaboratively which piece they wanted to explore the focus further on paper.

The focus of the first session was about trying to acknowledge their own bravery, and the music that was chosen for this session was Ralph Vaughan Williams's 'Silent noon' as performed by Ian Bostridge. The focus for the second session, as determined by the group, was their journey towards their own oasis. This time, the music was the 'Trio for flute, oboe and piano', the second movement (Andante semplice), composed by Madeleine Dring. Because of the bonds that were created during these sessions, trust came up in the third

⁴ The pseudonyms were Billie Holiday, Chopin, Liszt, Schumann and Wolf. For the sake of clarity, the first time each pseudonym is used in the text, it will be indicated with an asterisk*.⁴

session as a focal point. In this session the group listened to all the pieces of music and drew to each piece. The music used in the third session was as follows:

- 1) Horn Concerto No. 4 (Rondo) by Mozart

<https://open.spotify.com/track/6lahDdvnop8ywxGtohMVEm?si=6b0e6b8b4e3c4183>

- 2) *Orfeo ed Euridice* 'Danse des champs élysées', by Gluck, arranged for flute and piano

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1plQdAhNn5NniAzlYJy59Y?si=3491d65701bf4cb5>

- 3) 'Pilgrims Chorus' from *Tannhauser* by Wagner

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2oFkS2di723pt81mOVLW2K?si=e1c86668125141eb>

- 4) 'Jupiter' from *The Planets* by Holst

<https://open.spotify.com/track/59ld4KrBWizug53doxWtp?si=16f63f55cc2a4894>

- 5) 'Trust in me' from the film *Jungle Book*

<https://open.spotify.com/track/6UtpOAQMPOYVDHBhj0o0CF?si=7f9089cbe9a84c59>

- 6) 'I believe' by Andrea Bocelli and Katherine Jenkins

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0lEtNAIZT7BbWyMZbHNDhy?si=ce37c4b0c37c4fcc>

The participants drew whilst the music played. I asked them to tilt their screens at an angle where only their hands and drawing materials were visible, and switch on their cameras. In this way, I could see each participant's image unfold and still feel involved in the process (Figure 1). This also assisted with knowing how many times the music had to be repeated.

Figure 1

A screenshot taken during a listening-and-drawing process



Findings

In the findings section, the themes, as they emerged from the focus group data, will be discussed. The researchers found that the themes were clearly distilled in the focus group that was held after the three group sessions, illuminated by examples from discussions during the various sessions. Images will further supplement the discussion of themes as the images are representations of each participant's individual experiences and their interpretation of the music.

The following themes emerged from the data:

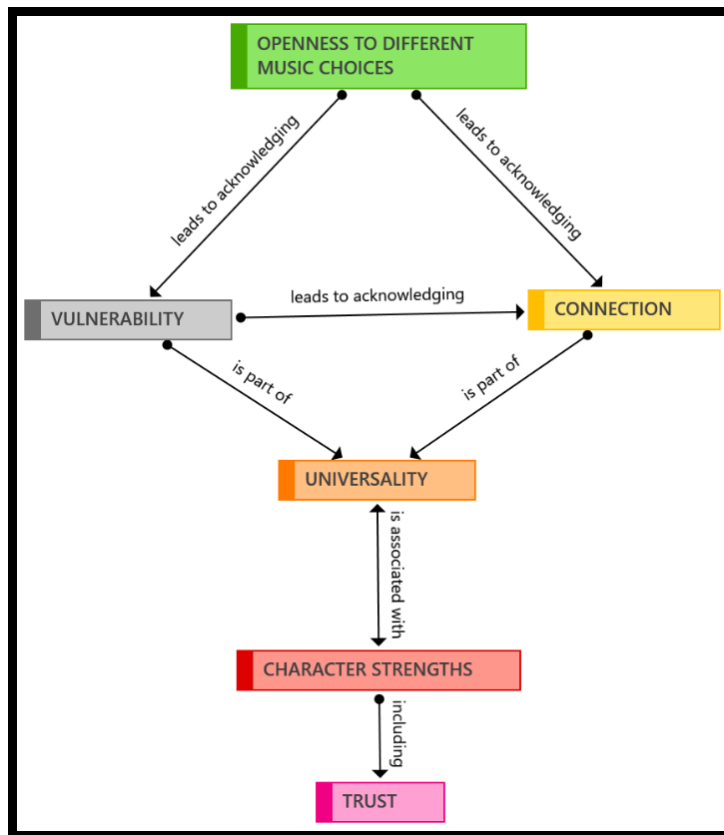
- 1) An openness to different music choices: all five participants were open to exploring new or unknown music;
- 2) Vulnerability: all participants felt exposed by having to share experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- 3) Connection: in spite of feeling vulnerable, there was a great need to connect after the isolation during the pandemic;

- 4) Universality: in this context the term refers to participants becoming aware, as they shared their experiences, that none of their fears and issues were unique, but were experienced by others too;
- 5) Character strengths: these were highlighted through sharing difficult material;
- 6) Trust: participants started to trust the music, the process and each other through these sessions.

The themes are connected in a specific way, as can be seen in figure 2. All participants have music in common and their openness to exploring new music was a great help to connect with each other in the group, especially because all participants understood each other's feelings of vulnerability. Through the process of listening, acknowledging vulnerability and connecting with each other, the realisation that many human ideas, thoughts and needs are 'universal' was recognised. Through working together in a group, various character strengths of each participant were highlighted. Lastly, the process lent itself to building trust.

Figure 2

Representation of relationships between themes



Theme 1: Openness to different music choices

It was “a revelation” for Liszt* when she realised that “other people don’t listen to what I like. It is important to extend one’s knowledge about music and other types of music that exist. It was good for me”. Chopin* said that he knew “exactly what music fits with what emotion”. He found it “different to incorporate someone else’s connection between emotion and music”. He also said that, in spite of this knowing, he could “accept another’s choice and it was good”. He also added that he would have been “100% honest” if he felt he could not work with somebody else’s choice. Furthermore, he had a strong experience of connection with other participants’ ideas and choices of music: “At first, I thought, ooh, I hope I am going to do justice to what they mean, but you said time and time again: trust the music”.

Schumann* found it enriching to listen to other people’s music choices:

I did not have a preconceived idea or felt that my opinion had to be considered here. You know one is open to whatever comes your way. And music is music, we enjoy it anyway. It is not going to be ugly. Even hip-hop would have brought up an emotion, even if it was an uncomfortable emotion. I felt comfortable. If we did not have the music, I might have felt less comfortable.

In the second session Schumann spoke about listening to the “intervals and the harmonies” of the chosen music. Billie* said that “the music touched me and the pathos of life...”. The group setting, to a great extent, facilitated an openness to listening to unfamiliar music. Three participants commented on some kind of surprise element for them. Billie was “surprised that I could offer my own music”, whilst Chopin was honest about the relief that “all the choices were acceptable to me”, and also “surprised that the group chose my music in the first sessions”. Liszt mentioned that she felt “surprised about what music they chose”.

It was valuable that participants disagreed on the choice of music. Chopin, who was so outspoken about being “old school”, also mentioned later that “one has also learnt that one doesn’t need to lose one’s head over somebody else’s choice”. Schumann felt that even when someone gave an opinion about the music, “in the end, I could always think of something (to draw)”. For Billie, the different music choices brought an important opportunity to learn something about music, different genres and other people’s choices. It also afforded an opportunity for personal growth:

It was difficult because I teach all kinds of music. All of a sudden these people with their vast knowledge about classical music: It was almost overwhelming! I can’t keep up. And then I had to realise that maybe that was the whole point. I was bowled over by the participants’ know-how, so I wrote down what everyone said. I felt a little shy about the choices I had in my head, maybe more jazz or pop music. So I sometimes felt I am hitting a blank, and I don’t normally hit blanks.

Thus, the group setting also contributed to participants feeling vulnerable. This became clear in the second theme. However, it was good to notice how the vulnerability was not seen as a weakness but as an opportunity to grow.

Theme 2: Vulnerability

All participants felt vulnerable in some way. For some, the vulnerability was directly linked to the COVID-19 diagnosis. In this sense, the concept of “feeling vulnerable” was mentioned by each participant, especially in the first session. Schumann said: “I think courage is good as it also refers to the anxiety that some of us feel”. Liszt added: “I am excited, and I want to take part as COVID-19 was very traumatic for me”, and Billie: “I am also excited, but also a bit anxious, and for the road I need to walk from here on”. Wolf* mentioned:

I didn't know what to expect, and so I came in very vulnerably, and I thought: 'Now what do I have to expose about myself here?' But, like I said, it was step-by-step, so I never felt uncomfortable. I found it very therapeutic.

In the first session Liszt explained her vulnerability through her image (Figure 3):

I noticed, the longer the music was playing the more red I was using (laughs). I did not realise how much anger I was carrying inside of me during this time. No one on earth deserves this kind of trauma and anger about how dare you do this to the world, and anger about how people are still suffering. I realise I'll have to work on it because it has obviously appeared while I was drawing, and it sits in my subconscious. I am such a positive person, but I realise now that I need to work on the buried anger that is inside of me due to this whole thing. While I was drawing, I went back to that experience of the 'scream' faces that haunted me whilst in hospital.

Figure 3

Liszt's courage image, where the red signifies her feelings of anger



Note: This image is from session 1; the music was Vaughan Williams's 'Silent noon'

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3NngddIDhmLQrObhoUjPyF?si=148f716f8fb04b81>

Wolf mentioned that she is always taking the lead, so she felt a little vulnerable when she had to stand back and hear “others’ opinions and emotions first”. Vulnerability was present in Chopin, who felt strongly about his music choice but worried about coming across as judgemental, until he realised: “...but one has also learnt that you don’t need to lose your head over somebody else’s choice”. Liszt’s vulnerability was about sharing her music in the group: “First I thought, oh hell, I should have thought about music beforehand, like a pathetic: ‘what now?’ But it taught me to think on my feet, and I want to do it in future”.

Schumann said that becoming vulnerable in sessions “opened a new small window” for her. Billie said that she knew “this is a healing space and a vulnerable space and a place where we could be who we are. I like that idea of taking small steps, you know”. Wolf felt a little vulnerable about her drawings: “And you said just draw what feels right, possibly because when we grow up, especially in music, that note is wrong, that chord, this is wrong, that is right. So, it was wonderful. And that is how I would like to share that”. In the midst of the vulnerability of the situation, Chopin noticed:

I think one has found a commonality every time we came together. We all feel anxiety, pain, sadness and heartache. And I could feel what others felt because I could feel it too. I think it would have been difficult if there were emotions that I was not familiar with”.

Billie said: “Initially, I was a little overwhelmed by the emotions and it was difficult to start drawing. It was extremely important to go with the flow and the tenderness of life, like the tendrils that come out”.

The realisation that there was no expectation to be perfect made sharing easier and brought the next theme, connection, to the fore. Connection as a theme was possible only in the group setting. This was noted by all participants, even though they all preferred the individual sessions for the sake of their personal growth.

Theme 3: Connection

Particularly during COVID-19, while we all felt isolated, there was a strong need for connection. Chopin put it in a unique way:

We experienced COVID-19 together, but we also experienced life together, it was about self-awareness, and that is the thing. What I wanted was to have an experience that could contribute to my emotional health, and there was definitely that element. Where I could say: I found a feeling that could help me. I can be with people who could share how I feel, but I can also feel myself.

Billie added:

We could feel there is a community, like a communal experience. Sharing was one of my favourite parts of the experience, purely because there I could experience each person’s inner heart. I could start to taste it in the music choices, for sure, but I really found it special. I really felt everyone was honest. It gave such a warm feeling. You know this shared humanity and then we were also all vulnerable together, that was good for me, and it started to feel like I was getting to know the people here.

Connection was also discussed in some images. When discussing her drawing from the second session (Figure 4), Billie commented: “It felt like little plants that come out very gently and then also the symbol of eternity and the connection between life and death, and so many people close to us died in the past year. So, it just came up again. It is part of life and part of the story, but you can feel safe in that”.

Figure 4

Billie’s image symbolising the oasis where one can feel safe



Note: This image is from session 2; the music was Dring’s ‘Trio for flute, oboe and piano’, 2nd movement (Andante semplice)

<https://open.spotify.com/track/5gJhFnXI0gl34jlXQspJWw?si=986d87c816f04b51>

Chopin felt the connection took place in sharing ideas about music choices: “I actually felt more connected to each person, and I trusted that there would be some or other connection between us in the music, and that was important for me to experience”. Liszt said: “The feedback was the best! The reality comes to the fore. Without you having planned it. I loved to hear the other’s stories, to hear each one’s experiences”.

There were also comments about sharing with others outside of the group. Schumann said that music and imagery were something that she wanted “to try now with my children, those I taught as well as my own little girl. To put on some music and draw while we listen”. Wolf echoed this when she said: “I want to do this fresh with my singing and piano

students, one session, maybe once a month". This kind of sharing would be a new way to connect to their students.

Billie spoke about how she connected in a unique way with her students by sharing her own experiences with her students:

It was so great when students entered and asked what these drawings [from our sessions] were, and I told them that I was part of this process and I thought it was so valuable to introduce them to this kind of work because we are so stuck in 'producing'; nothing wrong with that, but there are other things that can also happen that is meaningful, so I hope a new generation can be educated into this kind of therapy and processes.

The group sessions also created opportunities for the theme of 'universality' to develop. Chopin commented that he experienced the group sessions as "shared humanity". He said: "Through a process of conversation, you distil different thoughts a little bit and find something, a central theme, that the whole group agreed on".

Theme 4: Universality

Chopin explained himself as follows:

We are all the same. We are different, but we came together to feel the same as a person, as a human being. We feel the same, and yet we feel different things, but it was all so interlinked, and it was nice to share with others about their pain because you have the same pain, and that was nice.

Billie responded to Chopin's comment in the following way: "Chopin, in the first session you said that we are all still here and it's okay. I felt that shared humanity in that verbal sharing. It gave a deeper meaning to me that I enjoyed". Wolf added how she loved that everyone "tuned in". The value of "different interpretations" was also noticed by Wolf and Schumann, who mentioned: "It was interesting to hear and share anonymous people's

opinions and experiences". These comments point to the universal need for sharing and the value given to other people's interpretations.

Schumann shared how she felt that there is a universal need for nourishment and health through her image (Figure 5) articulated during the second session:

The green is the idea of the oasis, and the rest is everybody, and everybody with all their needs, are drawn to the oasis. It does not matter whether people are good or bad, at some point, one is drawn to an oasis. That is basically what my image is saying.

Figure 5

Schumann's image of the green oasis and everybody is drawn towards it



Note: This image is from session 2; the music was Dring's 'Trio for flute, oboe and piano', 2nd movement (Andante semplice)

<https://open.spotify.com/track/5gJhFnXlOgl34jIXQspJWw?si=986d87c816f04b51>

Chopin explained his experience in the same session (Figure 6), where participants wanted to journey towards their own oasis, as a universal journey:

By the third repetition, these footsteps developed, and they began alone, and then I realised that we all had an experience together. And it helps to get through it when you realise that everybody had sadness and difficulty and that you were not alone.

Figure 6

Chopin's image representing the human struggle to get to the oasis



Note: This image is from session 2; the music was Dring's 'Trio for flute, oboe and piano', 2nd movement (Andante semplice). The text on the right-hand side means: 'So unsure, BUT I made it! I am grateful...'

<https://open.spotify.com/track/5qJhFnXIOgl34jIXQspJWw?si=986d87c816f04b51>

Possibly because all participants were music teachers, the music played an even more important role as part of the therapy. Openness to different music choices as a theme was already discussed. Billie mentioned: "We share it with each other, and I can trust that because we are all part of that kind of world". Wolf elaborated on how the music was part of the universal human need for sharing and acceptance that came across in the sessions:

I had no problem with the music. Everything worked for me, it fell into place, it was 100%. I think because we could all share from our hearts and how we really felt, you know... the truth sets you free. And whatever you brought to the altar was accepted, and it brought a fresh aroma, fresh fragrance, and it just built towards the whole picture.

Theme 5: Character strengths

Character strengths, as defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004) include 24 specific strengths. Many of them were often foregrounded in the discussions. Character strengths such as *courage* and *hope* were present in the data. We discussed how the participants all had to be so brave after being diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus. Furthermore, they were

courageous enough to be part of this therapeutic process. Courage was also shown in their allowing themselves to be vulnerable. Other character strengths were also present.

Schumann admitted that she “had to be *open-minded* to join the process”, and Wolf was the first to mention her *gratitude* in the focus group discussion:

For me, it is about how everyone had to take small steps, and sometimes you could not follow in someone else’s footsteps, but then you were brought back onto the right track, and at the end of the session, there is a unity in spirit a unity in mind, and emotions and healing. My partner certainly enjoyed seeing how much it meant to me, and when I showed my artworks to my children, they always said how beautiful it was for them to see.

Chopin mentioned how grateful he felt when he arrived at his oasis: “There I got to *gratitude*. I am grateful, and that is my oasis”. Billie also spoke about her gratitude after the sessions had an impact on a long-lasting problem: “You have seen that things that were stuck for ten years became unstuck, and it led to gigantic growth in many different ways”.

Billie could testify to experiencing strengths such as *spaciousness*, *growth*, and *optimism*:

When we started, the gentleness of the music touched me, and it gave me solace, and there is also spaciousness in the music. That is why the soft curves came out. Lots of curves, and they can go in any direction. So, you don’t need to feel pressured to go in a particular direction (Figure 7). That thing of optimism, but I don’t need to rush, I don’t need to do anything immediately. That feeling of spacious time. And also, where the voice swells, the curves swell, but the space is still there and there is space to just ‘be’. I am an A-type personality and I need to do things, and this led me to be okay with sitting back a bit and also the freedom to choose the direction. Lots of things are happening in my life, some good, some not so wonderful, but this helps

me to realise there is space. When I turn the picture around, it looks like a seedling that is just starting to grow, which excites me.

Figure 7

Billie's courage image where the big swirls signify her feelings of spaciousness



Note: This image is from session 1; the music was Vaughan Williams's 'Silent noon'

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3NngddlDhmLQrObhoUjPyF?si=148f716f8fb04b81>

Schumann recalled a reassuring moment she experienced during her hospitalisation, which strengthened her *faith* (spirituality being a character strength):

I had a near-death experience with my COVID-19, and those images came up in that moment and a voice that said, 'everyone is going to be okay'. It was nice to get to that place again. You have reminded me of that place. I could access that place again and the voice that said everyone is going to be okay. When everything gets too overwhelming, that is a safe place to go to, and one can remember that voice and that feeling: the feeling of absolute peace and then the voice that speaks...

Chopin experienced deep emotions and awe; appreciation of beauty is a character strength, which he expressed in the following words: "I expected that there would be a cognitive belief shift in my head, but what I got was an emotive experience, and the music

was a vehicle to move forward. The experience was beautiful and intense and fantastic”!

Chopin also spoke about hope:

There was so little hope, and all the questions and then the decision: I am going to try, and at the end, it all worked out. The feeling that I got was a re-look at my personal journey through COVID-19. It is a quiet, a stillness. A feeling of personal stillness that I have made it. My heart soft and touched. Stillness and calmness; that is what I feel now. That feeling of sitting in a cathedral and experiencing the magnificence of life, faith and hope. These are softly knocking on the door of courage. The topography of the music is a journey which I could have undertaken even without the text.

Schumann found the process to be a *creative* way to deal with her emotions, which is another character strength:

The nicest was to sit back and draw, rather than to talk about your feelings. I felt a freedom to do what I wanted. I don't like talking about how I feel. And although drawing was not the easiest for me, when I realised that it did not matter, anything is fine, just let the colours flow and just take out what you have to give, then it became very enjoyable for me.

Cognitive strength, also part of the character strengths, was important for Billie:

I wanted something to guide me for the time between sessions, like courage or bravery or hope. Those things I took seriously, and I worked cognitively with it. I leaned back into the artwork because it is concrete. I want to see it, I want to paste it on the wall, and it must help me a little.

Theme 6: Trust

Trust was the focus in one of our sessions, but it also came up in the focus group data as a theme. Several aspects that had not been mentioned in the session discussions were raised in the focus group. Wolf and Schumann both explicitly spoke about the “safe

space” that was provided during the sessions, and how that helped them to trust the process. Chopin, Liszt, Schumann and Billie all mentioned how they could “trust the music” to help them express themselves without “the fear of being judged”.

Two participants referred to how enriching it was to experience different interpretations of trust. This was enabled by the focus of the third session. Each group member, including the therapist, chose their own music, and the group drew to all the pieces (Figure 8). Wolf said: “It was nice for me to see how another person’s going to interpret a word, and how I am going to interpret somebody else’s”. Schumann mentioned the following:

I also think it was new to hear what other people’s interpretations of trust was. You always only have your own idea, so it was good to see the concept of trust being thrown into a washing machine and to see what comes out of it.

Figure 8

Wolf’s images of all six pieces of music representing each participant’s idea of trust



Note: This image is from session 3. The links to the music are in the beginning of the ‘Findings’ section.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how music teachers experienced group MI sessions. Findings showed that working as a group was beneficial for the participants. The participants in this study found the connection with others important, and they realised that

many of the issues, struggles, questions and emotions, also those brought on by the pandemic, were universal. In the group setting participants felt that it was safe to expose their difficult emotions and become vulnerable where the support of the group was present and non-judgemental. This led group members to acknowledge their own character strengths and an important sense of trust was established.

The importance of trust, feeling safe, and not being judged can lead to growth and insight for the individual. This is then acknowledged and witnessed by others. In the group setting there was space for individual meaning-making as well as shared meaning-making. Knowing that others have similar questions and emotions increases self-acceptance and gives meaning to one's own life. The benefits of such strengthening in a group cannot be underestimated.

Participants in this study referred to the values of group sessions considering all aspects, including the music, which is highly emotive, their images and emotions. Putting one's subjective feelings onto paper as a representation helped to regulate the feelings. They found the feedback in the group very valuable.

The literature confirms that group therapy can be beneficial. Inpatients with varied treatment programmes reported that their participation in group receptive music therapy was a valuable component of their recovery. They also made specific references to images, symbols and emotions that came to the fore during the receptive music therapy sessions (Moe, 2012).

Data in this study that refer to connection and the shared needs of participants can be compared to findings in Kim's (2020) study, as well as the study by Rudstam (2023). In the study by Kim (2020) five themes were explored, with MI as the method. MI trainees were the participants and they also reported successful group experiences, such as the awareness of the influence of the group, the support in the group and positive emotions; trust; expansive experiences and new insights; restrictions of individual sessions and support in the group. Rudstam (2023) identified eight themes, including empowerment;

safety; playfulness; connection through music; non-verbal expressions; overcoming resistance; feeling part of a group; and sharing challenging and good memories. Perceptions of supportive characteristics of the group, a theme in Kim's (2020) study, can be compared to comments in the current study about shared experiences, new music, new insights and perspectives. The first theme of the current study refers to the experience of openness towards different music choices. Similarly, Kim (2020) refers to expansive experiences in one of her themes.

Themes such as safety, feeling part of a group and connection through music, which are clear in the study by Rudstam (2023), are echoed in the current study's theme: connection and openness towards music choices, while the theme of vulnerability is similar to the sharing of challenging and good memories in Rudstam's (2023) study.

The important principle of trust, which was one of the themes in this study, is echoed in the second theme of Kim's (2020) study. Trust in the group that led to enjoyment, but also the sense of safety in opening up and being willing to become vulnerable, were clear in the current study. Similar concepts in groupwork were also noticed by Solli et al. (2013). In a meta-synthesis, Solli et al. (2013) identified four areas where group music therapy was meaningful, namely "having a good time", "being together", "feeling", and "being someone".

Theme 5 of the current study, namely character strengths, needs special mention as there are so many parallels with the literature in positive psychology on character strengths. Creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, a love of learning and a sense of perspective were all found in the data of this study. These are all grouped under the virtue of wisdom and knowledge, according to Peterson and Seligman (2004). The second virtue that Peterson and Seligman (2004) mention is courage. This virtue was clear in the data collected under the theme of vulnerability, as one cannot show or overcome vulnerability without being brave. Rudstam (2023) also explored a theme of empowerment and overcoming initial resistance.

Under both the themes connection and universality, the following character strengths were represented in the data: love, kindness and social intelligence were represented. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), these character strengths fall under the third virtue: humanity. The way in which topics were chosen, as well as the attitude of participants when choosing the music for each topic, highlighted the virtue of justice, which includes character strengths such as leadership, teamwork and fairness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Self-regulation, forgiveness and prudence came to the fore under the theme of vulnerability. This finding relates to the fifth virtue, which is temperance. Character strengths that are grouped under the umbrella term 'temperance' include forgiveness, humility, prudence and self-regulation.

Appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humour as well as spirituality were expressed in the data. These correspond with the virtue of transcendence according to Peterson and Seligman's (2004) categories. Virtues have the potential to counteract problems, especially the kind of problems that are inherent in humans (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). This understanding confirms what emerged from the data of the current study. All participants could gain insight through their processes to face problems that were deepened by the pandemic.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the meaningfulness of experiencing group MI sessions. The importance of supportive group music therapy is emphasised by Summer (2019). She explains how the imagery can provide participants with a 'catalyst for immediate and positive interpersonal interaction'. This is exactly what was experienced by the participants in the current study. However, when participants in this study were asked to compare group sessions to individual sessions, all participants claimed to have benefitted more from the individual sessions. On the other hand, the last theme in Kim's (2020) study was 'Restricted experiences during individual sessions.' That theme emerged in the data when the

participants were asked the same question as the one in the current study, namely: What were the main differences between individual sessions and group sessions? A possible reason for this discrepancy might be that in Kim's (2020) study, the participants were MI trainees, whilst in the current study participants were music teachers. When one is training to become an MI therapist, feedback and acknowledgement from other trainees are quite important. This is how one learns from one another's input, whilst one's insecurities as a trainee are still present in the individual sessions. This might be a reason why the individual sessions felt restrictive to Kim's (2020) participants. In the current study, all the participants went through the troublesome time and distancing circumstances of the pandemic. They consequently felt a greater need for interaction with the therapist on an individual level, which would enable them to share their personal issues. The value of group MI sessions and individual MI sessions is different for each individual. Questions concerning the different experiences should be explored in further research.

A limitation of this study was certainly, especially because of the need for interaction, the fact that the sessions took place in a virtual space. Under 'normal circumstances', sessions would have been conducted in person, and participants would have had an opportunity to get to know each other in a more authentic way. The role of the empathetic and warm therapist in group MI cannot be underestimated (Hertrampf, 2017). This was challenging in online group work. Similarly, the therapist's role as activator of the here-and-now experience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) is also jeopardised by the online situation, as there is no real way to know if all participants, each in their own space, are staying in the here-and-now. Lastly, transference and countertransference, both real factors in group therapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), can become problematic in a virtual space. However, contrary to studies describing group MI sessions, where the therapist selected the music beforehand (Hertrampf, 2017), all participants in the current study were given opportunities to suggest music from their personal playlists. Although this was empowering, some participants expressed fear of being judged for their choices. This would have been much easier sitting in

a room together. Anxiety and depression were two themes identified in Hertrampf's (2017) study with cancer patients. This seems natural with such a participant group, and it can be described as a cathartic experience. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) claim that catharsis is an important factor of group psychotherapy. Catharsis will certainly be challenging in a virtual space, if not impossible, although challenging emotions were explored by participants in the current study. On the other hand, the fact that everything was anonymous contributed to open sharing. These positive and negative sides of online therapy were confirmed in a study by Honig and Hannibal (2022). They conducted interviews with two participants about in-person versus online music therapy sessions. Two important factors were highlighted in the results. First, there was a strong relationship between the participant and the therapist, which initially felt less personal during virtual therapy. Second, as familiarity with the format and the technology grew, both felt that the therapy was, although less powerful, still effective and acceptable.

Another limitation could be the fact that only three group sessions were held. However, in a study by De Kock and Lotter (2023) which explored single-session music therapy groupwork, the outcomes showed clear benefits, including consistent personal engagement. More research is needed to explore long-term versus short-term therapy MI sessions.

Lastly, having meaningful relations with the self and others can strengthen and help create meaningful experiences in all areas of life. The MI sessions described in this study showed promising results in terms of enhancing the well-being of people, especially meaning-making and maintenance. The study also enabled the exploration of many of the constructs of positive psychology, especially as applied after the disruptions of the pandemic. MI therapy sessions might be a good starting point to help people flourish again. The results of this study should be a motivation for further research, especially in connecting the fields of positive psychology and receptive music therapy.

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Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the research findings in relation to the relevant scholarly literature⁵ (Silverman, 2013). First, I will discuss how each of the five articles answered the research question in its own way. Then, I will do a comparative analysis across the articles, also with reference to the literature. Second, I will present my personal insights around lessons I learnt, including the strengths and limitations of this study. Third, the implications of the research will be discussed. Fourth, the chapter will indicate further research possibilities on the basis of the findings and the methods applied in this study.

Answering the research question

The research question for this study was: What is the meaning that participants ascribe to their lived experiences of MI sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic? To respond to the research question from different angles, a range of perspectives and research approaches were applied for each article constituting the chapters. Qualitative data analysis was conducted in each of the five articles.

The research study started with an integrative literature review focusing on participants' experiences of MI sessions (article 1). I explored the interpretations of MI session experiences of both the clients and their therapists. The literature dates from before the pandemic; hence, the research question of the integrated literature review was: How does the scholarly literature describe clients' experiences of MI sessions? Five themes emerged from the review, namely "music as a catalyst for transformational experiences", "emotional experiences", "strengths, acceptance and self-awareness", "affect regulation", and "trust and feeling protected".

Article 2 is an autoethnography. In this article, I explored and identified my own meaning-making of experiences of MI sessions during the pandemic. In the cross-case

⁵ The available MI literature was explored in the integrative literature review (article 1), therefore I have drawn on other receptive music therapy methods and related literature for this discussion.

analysis, eight themes emerged from this article, namely “trusting the music”, “connection to and through the music”, “painful experiences”, “resilience”, “surrender”, “transformation”, “connectedness”, and “post-traumatic growth”.

In article 3, a trioethnography, two music therapists and I explored our experiences of MI training during the pandemic. In this article, we focused on the transition section of MI sessions, which entails choosing the appropriate music. Seven themes emerged, namely “openness to music”, “trust”, “connection”, “character strengths”, “personal growth”, “surrender”, and “challenging and positive emotional experiences”. Although thematic analysis was not included in the autoethnography and trioethnography articles, the data from these two articles were analysed using ATLAS.ti 23 for the purpose of the cross-case analysis of all five articles to identify superordinate themes (See Appendix F and Appendix G).

In article 4, an interpretative phenomenological analysis, I wanted to explore how music teachers who survived contracting the coronavirus experienced the MI sessions. Four superordinate themes were identified in the IPA, namely “experiencing challenging emotions”, “experiencing positive emotions”, “experiencing growth and empowerment” and “spiritual experiences”.

Article 5 is an intrinsic case study. In this article, I wanted to know what meaning the same music teachers ascribed to their experiences of MI in a group setting. Six themes emerged in this article: “openness to music”, “vulnerability”, “connection”, “universality”, “character strengths” and “trust”.

Table 1 gives a comparative overview of the themes of all the articles. The table clearly indicates how themes overlapped between different articles. Six new superordinate themes were constructed in the cross-case analysis.

Table 1

A comparison of themes arising from each article's data analysis

→ Research approach	Integrative Literature Review	Autoethnography	Trioethnography	IPA	Intrinsic Case Study
Article title → Superordinate themes↓	1. Clients' experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions: An integrative literature review	2. My journey of personal transformation: An autoethnographic perspective on the meaning I ascribe to my lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) training during the COVID-19 pandemic	3. Selecting the best music for the moment in a Music and Imagery (MI) session: How do we experience the choosing? A trioethnography	4. The meaning that five music teachers ascribe to their lived experiences of Music and Imagery sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	5. Exploring meaningful experiences of group Music and Imagery sessions: An intrinsic case study
1. Music as activator	Music as catalyst	Trusting the music Connection to and through the music	Openness to music		Openness to music
2. Emotional Experiences	Emotional experiences	Painful experiences	Challenging and positive emotional experiences	Experiencing challenging emotions Experiencing positive emotions	Vulnerability
3. Strengths and Growth	Strengths, acceptance and self-awareness Affect regulation	Resilience Post-traumatic growth	Character strengths Personal growth	Experiencing growth and empowerment	Character strengths
4. Trusting self and others	Trust and feeling protected		Trust		Trust
5. Relatedness	Connectedness	Connectedness	Connection		Connection Universality
6. Spiritual experiences		Transformation Surrender	Surrender	Spiritual experiences	

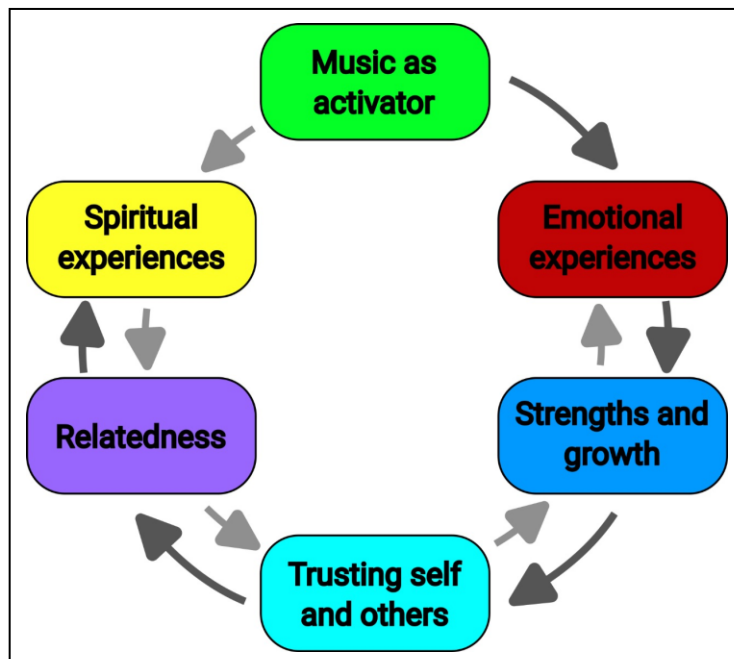
Discussing the superordinate themes

Six superordinate themes emerged when all the themes from the five articles were considered together. A very specific relationship or connection was identified between the six superordinate themes. Music as an activator (superordinate theme 1) led to emotional experiences (superordinate theme 2). Both challenging and positive emotions were experienced. However, when we experience and grapple with our emotions, this will help us to grow, and it will make us stronger. In turn, strengths and growth (superordinate theme 3) can be associated with trust, especially trusting oneself but also others (superordinate theme 4), which directly leads to relatedness (superordinate theme 5). Relatedness is associated with spiritual experiences (superordinate theme 6), because as we connect with ourselves at a metaphysical level; these relationships help us on our own spiritual journey as well as to connect us with a “Transcendent Other” (De Souza, 2009, p. 181).

The circle also works the other way around. Music can also be the activator (superordinate theme 1) of spiritual experiences (superordinate theme 6), and as we experience the spiritual, we relate to our Higher Power, but also to ourselves and others (Boyce-Tillman, 2009). This relatedness (superordinate theme 5) leads to trust (superordinate theme 4), which in turn helps us to grow and feel stronger. When we experience strengths and growth (superordinate theme 3), this can lead to expressing, acknowledging and experiencing both positive and challenging emotions (superordinate theme 2) (Figure 1).

Figure 1

A model of meaning-making within Music and Imagery



First superordinate theme: Music as activator

A prerequisite for the MI method to be practised successfully is music. Music is the glue that can hold together whatever is brought into the therapeutic space. Music and imagery serve as projective tools and become concrete reminders of the experience (Story & Beck, 2017). Paik-Maier (2010) also discusses how music can be a trigger for both difficult and positive memories and emotions. Music has the ability to go beyond words.

Any language used to describe the experience of music therapy does not necessarily capture the essence of the actual experience. This is due to the nature of art, which is often nonverbal, secretive, and mysterious. As such it contains elements such as spirituality, emotions, and beauty (Amir, 1995, p. 56).

The music can trigger transference, countertransference and projective identifications. This can happen while the client and the therapist are experiencing music together. In a sense, music psychotherapy can be described as unique (Bruscia, 1998). When music serves the essential functions of therapeutic processes, it can also serve as

pure music transference (Summer, 1998). Music as an integral part of the experiences was identified as a central theme in four of the five articles.

The subordinate themes that were identified in this superordinate theme were “music as catalyst in the literature review. In the autoethnography two themes came to the fore: “trusting the music” and “connection to and through the music”. In both the trioethnography and the case study “openness to music” was a theme.

In the integrative literature review (article 1), the theme of “music as a catalyst” emerged. Several clients acknowledged that music had transformative qualities for them (Herold, 2021). Music helped them to communicate in a different way, as if the music was speaking to them (Paik-Maier, 2010), and they found music to be liberating and empowering (Story, 2018). Music even evoked challenging experiences (Hearns, 2010).

Band et al. (2002) explored the influence of music on the mental imagery of students in an introductory class to music. Two contrasting pieces of music were played and a control group with no music was included in the study. It was found that music enhanced participants’ engagement with imagery experiences. Vividness of imagery as well as absorption in the imagery process were reported. Furthermore, participants also experienced emotions, memories, mood activity and sensations of movement during the listening. Band et al. (2002) add that “the music appeared to help participants suspend the ‘here and now’ and become absorbed in the imagery experience on a sensory level” (p. 12).

These findings are in line with the data from my study.

Trusting the music: connection to and through the music

I also felt connected to the music and could allow flow in the autoethnography (article 2). I described music as an important connection between myself and others.

Furthermore, music could create both a sense of freedom and a feeling of tension in me. In my own experience I mostly learnt that trusting the music is an important aspect of the MI process.

This was confirmed in the trioethnography (article 3), where openness to the music allowed for much deeper and more authentic experiences during MI sessions. For one of the three participants the music was “enlightening”, while another said that “the flow of the music set her free” and they “could let go of control”.

Although music was not identified as a group experiential theme in the IPA article (article 4), music was taken into account by each participant, and music was part of various categories. Both Chopin⁶ and Schumann² said that music was the tool that improved their self-care, while Schumann added that music was linked to her self-knowledge. Billie Holiday² and Liszt² referred to music as an empowering ingredient of their processes, while Wolf² claimed that music fulfilled her inner needs. Music as the catalyst was thus present by definition in all sessions. Wetzler (2010) found, in a study working with a client suffering from anxiety, that music provided the most opportune setting for listening to each other. Where there are no words, there might be a harmony or a rhythm.

Wetzler’s (2010) point was confirmed in the case study (article 5), where participants who did not know each other came together for group sessions. Their openness to the music contributed to the intensity of these sessions. More than one participant expressed how surprising it was to notice that not all music teachers listened to the same music. One participant, Chopin, said that they were concerned that they would feel “judged” because of the music they preferred. They also spoke about the gift of getting to know new music or music that they were not familiar with. Liszt used the word “revelation” when talking about discovering unfamiliar music. Another participant, Schumann, described this as “enriching”.

Przybysz (2013) identified three levels on which emotions and music are connected: the level of brain functioning as well as physiologically and psychologically. Music influences us on a psychological level through various emotional experiences.

⁶ Participants in this study chose the names of musicians or composers as their pseudonyms. The superscript will only be used in the first instance of mentioning each participant.

Second superordinate theme: Emotional experiences

All the articles explored themes that involved emotions. Subordinate themes that were identified were as follows: “Emotional experiences” was an overarching theme in the literature review while “painful experiences” were explored in the autoethnography. In the trioethnography, “challenging and positive emotional experiences” were noted, similar to “experiencing challenging emotions” and “experiencing positive emotions” in the IPA. Lastly, in the case study “vulnerability” was a theme.

In two of the articles, the autoethnography (article 2) and the case study (article 5), only challenging emotions were highlighted as themes. Both challenging and positive emotions were present as themes in the other three articles: the integrative literature review (article 1), the trioethnography (article 3) and the IPA (article 4).

Participants’ experiences of challenging and positive emotions were addressed in the integrative literature review. Challenging emotions included sadness (Karastatira, 2021) and anger (Angulo et al., 2021), while confusion (Story, 2018), frustration (Kang, 2017) and fear (Paik-Maier, 2017) were also found in the data. Positive emotions included joy and excitement (Karastatira, 2021), relief (Dimiceli-Mitran, 2020), while positive memories were stirred by the music (Paik-Maier, 2010; Summer, 2011).

McKinney (1990) studied the impact of music listening on imagery with students during a music appreciation class. She discovered that music affects various senses and different types of imagery, some of which can be very vivid and others even active. However, the most significant effect was the increase of emotional experiences. This finding was certainly confirmed in the data of my study, as is demonstrated in the autoethnography (article 2).

Painful experiences were brought to the fore by the music selected in the autoethnography, especially when I heard of my brother’s passing. These experiences included feeling uncomfortable, feeling deep sadness and feeling alone. All three

participants in the trioethnography (article 3) experienced deepened emotional responses when there was an intense focus on the music. The experiences were deepened as we could share them with each other in a safe space. This corresponds with what Goldberg (1992) found in the GIM process. Goldberg (1992) theorised that music can stimulate emotions which in turn can evoke images. She thus concluded that images, music and emotional responses were intensely connected.

In the trioethnography (article 3), challenging emotions such as disappointment, anger and self-doubt were experienced in some sessions. The research article by Goldberg (1992) mentions challenging emotions such as anger and sadness, which corresponds to the data of this study. Guilt is another uncomfortable emotion that came to the fore in the data. It seemed as if we were all so hard on ourselves when it came to being therapists. In the data for the IPA (article 4) Schumann also mentioned feelings of guilt. Schumann's guilt was connected with the fact that they had survived the COVID-19 pandemic while so many lost their lives. This kind of conflict was the reason for Frohne-Hagemann's (2018) creating a music listening programme especially to explore guilt, because these conflicting thoughts and emotions can be challenged in the music and imagery process. In this programme one is challenged to face the guilt and move to a place of acceptance (Frohne-Hagemann, 2018), which is what happened in two sessions with Schumann.

In a study by Juslin (2013) the expression of emotions through music is coded in three layers. Iconic codes represent so-called basic emotions, intrinsic codes are applied where the emotion in the music is associated with the human emotion such as tension, and associative coding is used when an emotion is associated with a specific music genre or instrument. The findings confirm that a wide range of emotions can be stimulated by the music.

More challenging emotions, such as disgust and tension, are included in Juslin's (2013) study. Such challenging emotions can be compared to the challenging emotions that emerged in the data of this study. This was especially noted in the cases where music stirred

memories which evoked challenging emotions. Although music can stir memories that awaken both challenging and positive emotions, challenging emotional memories were registered in the IPA (article 4) data. Billie Holiday described experiences of feeling trapped and anxious. According to Billie, these emotional memories were hidden deep inside her for a very long time. The MI sessions assisted in facing these memories and challenging emotions safely. My own experience of the music during the trioethnographic process (article 3), was eliciting memories that aroused emotions that I was not even aware of, such as feeling overwhelmed and lost.

Lee (2018) used the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM) for the purpose of re-experiencing the past. Findings showed that memories that are evoked by music can be experienced as confusing and trigger emotions such as feelings of regret. On the other hand, reliving challenging memories through music can be experienced as bringing relief or an opportunity for healing. The data of this study confirm this. “Vulnerability” was a theme in the case study (article 5). Participants expressed their experiences of feeling anxious, feeling uncomfortable and feeling deceived during the pandemic when they had an opportunity to explore these feelings during MI sessions. There is a strong correspondence between these findings and what Bruns et al. (2018) described in their study. They compared cancer patients’ feedback after supportive music and imagery sessions and music listening during their treatment. An interesting finding was that patients engaged deeper in the MI sessions than when they just listened to music. They encountered a wide range of emotions which assisted them with connecting to both the realistic distressing feelings about their treatment as well as their own positive resources.

Anxiety and depression can also be alleviated through music, according to Xie et al. (2023), who investigated the effect of Shang-tune music on the emotional state of patients suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. By means of a case study, Bjørke and Beck (2023) describe how music can be used as a tool to help regulate affect for individuals who struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder. It became clear in the integrative literature

review (article 1) that MI is very useful when anxiety, depression and affect regulation are the issues to be addressed.

However, positive emotions were also present in the data. Participants in the trioethnography (article 3) and the IPA (article 4) referred to positive emotions. Goldberg (1992) also described similar experiences in her research study: “Included in the category of deep emotional responses are positive emotions such as joy and bliss” (p. 13). Positive emotional experiences included feeling happy, optimistic, relieved and light (article 3). There were also data describing experiences of love and acceptance (article 4).

Corresponding to what is described in the ‘guilt’ programme by Frohne-Hageman (2018), the data in this study showed how very challenging emotions could be alleviated by the music. Juslin (2013) also found that nuanced emotions such as tenderness, relief and arousal can be experienced in music. These emotional expressions correspond with the findings of this study. This kind of change (relief, acceptance, etc.) is one of the main goals in MI.

It is clear from the literature and from this study that emotions are stimulated by the music, but more importantly, that healing can take place through a music-listening process that leads to realising strengths and growth.

Third superordinate theme: Strengths and growth

Burns et al. (2018) reported that supportive MI allowed for patients’ experiences of replenishing resources that were depleted, and it “activated positive coping mechanisms” (p. 104). The superordinate theme “strengths and growth” was identified in all five articles. In the integrative literature review (article 1) two themes can be discussed under the umbrella of strengths and growth. They are “strengths, acceptance and self-awareness” and “affect regulation”. In the autoethnography (article 2) two themes are clustered together namely “resilience” and “post-traumatic growth”. In both the trioethnography (article 3) and the case study (article 5) one theme that emerged was “character strengths”. Another theme from the

trioethnography is “personal growth”, and in the IPA (article 4) the theme “experiencing growth and empowerment” emerged.

The data in the integrative literature review included a number of different aspects of strengths and growth. Strengths like courage (Paik-Maier, 2017), faith and forgiveness (Story, 2018), appreciation of life (Liu, 2021), and resilience (Dimiceli-Mitran, 2020) were present in the data. Acceptance (Summer, 2011) and self-awareness (Hearns, 2010), which are both important aspects of growth, were also noted. Lastly, in the theme of affect regulation, a release of physical tension (Meadows et al., 2015) and calming down of the body by focusing on slowing down breathing and becoming more relaxed, (Paik-Maier, 2013) emerged from the data. Additional aspects evident in the data were feeling energised by the music (Hearns, 2010) and the enjoyment of being in the moment (Liu, 2021), both signs of personal growth.

Music has the potential to facilitate growth and heighten self-awareness (Ashton, 2010). Many GIM programmes are designed to aid clients who come for therapy because they feel ‘empty’ or without energy (Fuglestad, 2015). Such programmes include “Positive Affect” and the “Creativity” programmes. Fuglestad (2015) created the programme “Uplifting” with this agenda in mind. In a case study he describes a client who said they ‘felt lighter’, were ‘breathing deeper’ and their ‘mind was brighter’ (p. 297). This is very comparable to my own experience of strengths and growth, as noted in the autoethnography (article 2). I felt resilient, after I realised that I could bounce back after experiencing adversity; post-traumatic growth became part of my MI journey.

Personal growth, as well as character strengths, were both themes in the trioethnography (article 3). Resilience was mentioned by two participants and self-awareness was part of the reflective discussion by all three participants. We all noticed how MI helped us become more self-aware, which in turn meant that we could experience personal growth.

Similarly, experiencing growth and empowerment was a theme in the IPA (article 4). Two participants felt empowered through their realisation that they had a freedom of choice, not only in the music, but also in their lives. The three other participants mentioned how they gained new insight into their own situations, which led to personal growth. Powell (2007) developed creative music and imagery sessions focusing on the exploration of personal values, building self-esteem, finding solutions for problems and experiencing the power of positive thinking. All of these principles noted in Powell's (2007) developed session materials were also evident in the data of this study.

The notion of 'character strengths' is an important construct in positive psychology. Character strengths, as defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004), were evinced in the data of all the participants in the case study (article 5) and included courage, open-mindedness and creativity. The transcendental strengths that were also represented in the data included spirituality, gratitude, appreciation of beauty and hope. This highlights the fact that MI sessions can develop character strengths.

Creagh and Dimiceli-Mitran (2018), in describing case material from GIM sessions, mention how important it is to acknowledge all experiences and add that such acknowledgement will contribute to growth. When we grow, and we realise that we are growing, meaning is added to our lives. This contributes to our well-being (Potgieter & Botha, 2014). The main purpose of supportive Music and Imagery sessions is to unleash our own inner resources (Summer, 2015). Abbott (2020) emphasises that the processing after a GIM session is all about personal growth. The data of this study revealed in all the articles that the MI sessions allowed for the acknowledgement of personal strengths and that participants experienced growth. As we continue to grow, and become more self-aware, we also realise that we need to trust ourselves and others.

Fourth superordinate theme: Trusting self and others

In some form or another, trust emerged in the data of three of the articles. In the literature review, the theme that emerged was "trust and feeling protected". "Trust" as a

subordinate theme was also found in the data of the trioethnography and in the case study. Trust seems to be an important theme where groupwork is being explored.

Data from the integrative literature review (article 1) revealed that one could trust oneself more easily when there was trust in the music (Park, 2021). Similarly, groups in MI therapy also shared that they could trust each other (Kim, 2020). Participants in some studies felt safer (Summer, 2011) and more grounded (Story & Beck, 2017) in the MI sessions.

In a case study by Christenbury (2020) the client referred to trusting their 'gut' during a GIM journey, and the guide accompanied the client who was learning to trust the self more. This can be compared to the experience of one participant in the trioethnography (article 3) who experienced how trust in themselves grew through the process. Another participant in the trioethnography also experienced that insight became clearer as the trust grew.

The music contributed to one participant in the trioethnography being able to trust others more deeply. "Trusting the music" was also a theme in the autoethnography (article 2). This corresponds with an important theme in Venkatarangam's (2017) study: "trusting the music". However, Venkatarangam (2017) emphasises the therapist's trust in the music, while in the autoethnography and trioethnography, it was the participants who trusted the music. The importance of the participant trusting the therapist and the therapist trusting the participant during GIM sessions is highlighted by Yoshihara (2020). Fox (2020) refers to a participant who suffers from fibromyalgia as trusting the music, themselves and the therapist. Wärja and Bonde (2014), in their creating a taxonomy for music in receptive music therapy, talk about music as the co-therapist. There is thus no question that the participant must trust the music. MI gives the participant an opportunity to use their preferred music and this directly leads to trusting the music. This empowering feeling also helps with trusting the therapist.

Clements-Cortes (2014) mentions one of their goals in therapy was for the client who suffered from various forms of abuse to learn to trust others and themselves. Four of the five

participants in the current case study (article 5) also mentioned how they could trust the group enough not to feel judged by anyone. Two participants felt that they could trust other group members as they were in a space that felt safe. Correspondingly, Hesser (1995) emphasises how an atmosphere of gentleness and acceptance can contribute to the “experience of self-discovery through music” (p. 48), which can lead them “into a healing relationship with other members of the therapy group” (p. 48).

Again, in the IPA (article 4) trust was not a superordinate theme. However, trust was mentioned in participants’ separate theme analyses. Trust was also clear in some categories included in the superordinate theme: spiritual experiences.

Wärja and Bonde (2014) emphasise that the ability to “create trust is the prerequisite for growth and reciprocal relationships” (p. 25). The superordinate theme of trust directly links to the theme of relatedness. When we trust ourselves and also can trust others, the potential for authentic connection grows.

Fifth superordinate theme: Relatedness

“Connection” or “connectedness” was a theme in four out of the five articles. In the case study (article 5), a second theme related to connection, “universality”, emerged. A theory of spiritual experiences in Dalcroze Eurhythmics was developed by Van der Merwe and Habron (2019). To arrive at this theory four earlier qualitative studies were revisited. Connection was an important theme in their study as all four previous articles that were coded for causality, included relationality concepts. Connectedness was found in the codes of all the articles which were included in the integrative literature review (article 1) too.

Van der Merwe and Habron (2019) found that participants reported a sense of connection between them and the sacred, between them and others, a connection with self and connection with the environment. Similar to Van der Merwe and Habron's (2019) findings, there were references to connection with nature, with self, with others, with the music and with God across the articles in this study. An important finding was how

understanding others better helped the participants in their healing processes (Kim, 2020; Story & Beck, 2017; Summer, 2011; Kim, 2021).

My own experiences during writing up the autoethnography (article 2) was that when I could connect with the music, I re-connected with God and with myself. This was also the case in a GIM session with a cancer patient in a case study by Papanikolaou (2020). Connection with God was of the essence for this patient, and this was achieved during the process of listening to the music. This same study also highlighted connecting with personal resources (Papanikolaou, 2020).

I could also identify improved connection with significant others (article 2). This connection with others was also noted in the trioethnography (article 3), where all three participants realised that, because we trusted each other, we could connect on a much more meaningful level. This meaningful connection can be compared to the description by Wärja and Bonde (2014), who explain that trust will bring about surrender in the session, and in surrendering, the participant is ready “to give and receive the experiences that will come with the mutual connection, such as communication” (p. 25).

The case study (article 5) highlighted how real connectedness was absent during the pandemic and how great the need for connection was. Participants found connection in listening to music together, sharing ideas and also sharing their images. Connection led to yet another theme, “universality” as participants realised how they were “all the same”. The need to be seen, and heard, and connected was felt by all. This universal need for connection was also identified in the interpretative phenomenological analysis by Swart (2014).

Swart’s (2014) IPA focused on two musicians who had both suffered traumatic experiences that influenced their musicianship. For both musicians, music played an important role in their healing processes. They could re-establish their connections to others and themselves through music. The COVID-19 pandemic was experienced as a traumatic event on a global level, and this study highlighted how MI sessions could re-establish

connections on various levels, which was a need that many could not satisfy during the pandemic. Our need to feel connected is part of being human. We have a strong need to belong which is a prominent aspect of our spiritual needs.

Sixth superordinate theme: Spiritual experiences

“Spiritual experiences” was a subordinate theme in the IPA, the same as the overarching superordinate theme. Two themes in the realm of spirituality emerged in the autoethnography, namely “transformation” and “surrender”. “Surrender” was also a subordinate theme in the trioethnography. “Spiritual experiences” was thus a theme that emerged in three of the articles for this study.

A GIM-focused study by Creagh and Dimiceli-Mitran (2018), which discusses nine different cases of transpersonal experiences in music, leaves no doubt that music can be the activator of spiritual experiences. In one example, the participant felt connected to the souls who lost their lives during the 9/11 tragedy. Another example involved a participant who experiences a healing balm being poured over them and a light “coming to the earth through the beauty of music” (p. 8). Another participant was clothed in a luminous dress by a beautiful feminine figure (Creagh & Dimiceli-Mitran, 2018).

In the IPA (article 4) of this study, all the participants described spiritual experiences similar to those in Creagh and Dimiceli-Mitran (2018). Three of the participants in the IPA reported their connection with God during the MI sessions. In all three cases, participants transcended space and time and had a real sense of either being in God’s presence or hearing His voice. The other two participants both spoke about either spiritual awareness or a renewed realisation of the value of life.

Boyce-Tillman (2009) described the transitional space of music as a space where we leave reality for a while and, when we return, a transformation has taken place. She describes how she was “drawn into a new world of musical shapes and colours”. (p. 188). This is exactly what I experienced in the autoethnography (article 2). I experienced deeply

spiritual connections; I was drawn closer to God while immersing myself in the music. The music helped me to surrender completely to circumstances that could not be changed. This experience led to transformation.

A participant in the trioethnography gave a similar account (article 3). In their description the participant said that the music gave them 'permission' to let go of situations which had seemed impossible to deal with before the session and listening to the music.

Creagh and Dimiceli (2018) discussed examples where spiritual experiences are sad and dark. In one session a participant talked about experiencing "a river of despair" (p. 12) and another participant experienced the hopelessness of the Jews who had suffered during the Holocaust. However, this experience was so strong that, in response, the participant called their image that was drawn in this session "Hope" (Creagh & Dimiceli-Mitran, 2018). One of the participants in the IPA (article 4) had a near-death experience after a coronavirus infection. This life-threatening time in their life was re-experienced in an MI session, yet the outcome of the therapy for them was one of gratitude and hope too!

Recurrence of the cycle

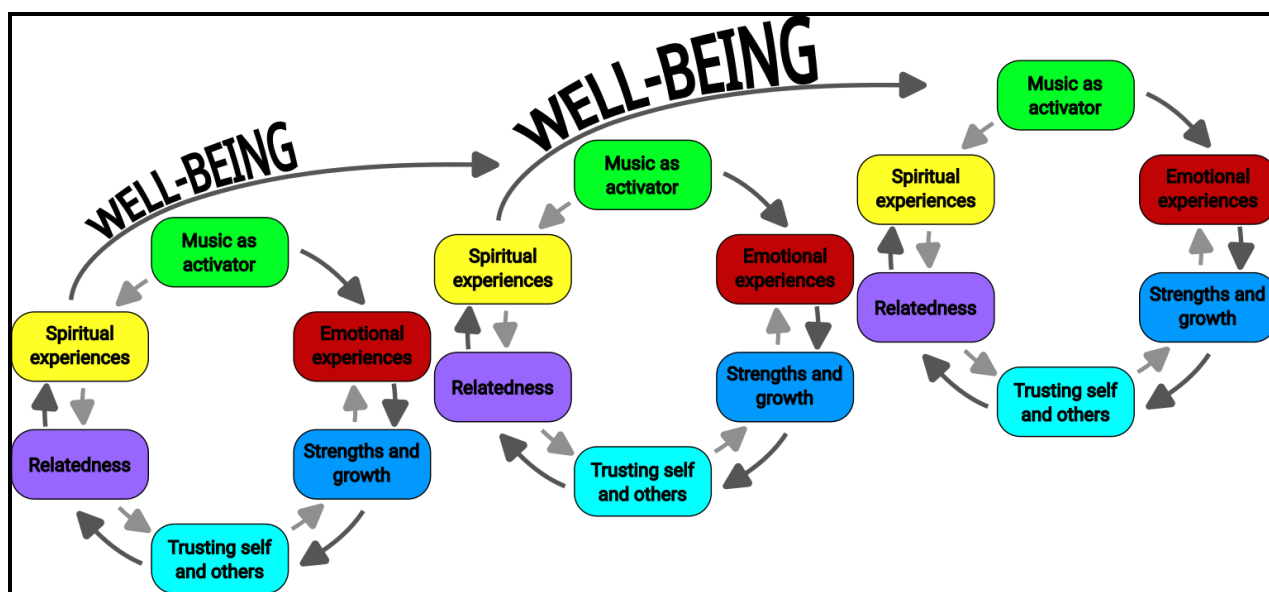
To summarise the meaning that participants ascribed to their experiences of MI sessions during COVID-19, it is clear that music served as an activator of emotional as well as spiritual experiences. During sessions, participants had an opportunity to allow their emotions, whether difficult or positive, to come to the surface. Experiencing and sharing difficult and painful emotions as well as positive emotions, led to improved affect regulation, which is part of personal growth. Growth also allows for enhanced self-awareness and feelings of empowerment. The participants could then start to recognise their inner resources and develop their character strengths. Experiencing personal growth and character strengths can be associated with a greater capacity for trust. In the data it was clear that participants started to trust the music, the process, their Higher Power, but mostly themselves and also others. When one develops trust in oneself and others, the next natural step is the need for relatedness, for connection between people, as well as the need to feel

safe and protected as universal phenomena could be expressed. There was a universal feeling of loneliness, vulnerability, insecurity and a strong need for connection during the pandemic. The need for connections or connectedness also emerged in all articles where more than one participant was involved. Connectedness is associated with spiritual experiences, because when a deep connection is explored, a sense of oneness can be experienced, which leads to transformation (Hesser, 1995). Such spiritual experiences can also be activated by music.

What is even more significant is that this circle of experiences, activated by music, can recur. This recurrence takes place in an upward spiral, which ensures more emotional experiences, more strengths and growth, more trust, more relatedness and more spiritual experiences leading to improved well-being (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The cyclical spiral of how the superordinate themes lead to improved well-being



Discussing the findings in terms of the self-determination theory

The findings of this research study can be illuminated with reference to the self-determination theory (SDT) introduced by Ryan and Deci (2000). SDT claims that meeting three basic psychological needs will secure well-being and psychological growth: autonomy,

competence and relatedness. The findings in this study confirm that the three basic psychological needs can be fulfilled through Music and Imagery. Each of the three needs will be discussed briefly in relation to the themes presented in this study.

Autonomy is the need to act or behave according to one's prevailing sense of self without external pressure or control (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy is an important aspect of MI, and it was evinced in this research as participants always had a choice of the music used, what they wanted to focus on in the sessions, choosing their own pseudonyms and also how much they wanted to share. Superordinate themes that emerged from the data relating to autonomy include "self-awareness" as well as "character strengths". Autonomy was also evident in the subordinate themes "surrender" and "vulnerability". Although these notions can seem like the loss of autonomy, participants' preparedness to let go and to allow themselves to feel vulnerable which can lead to feeling empowered, are all testament to being autonomous.

Competence is the human capability to acquire and master new skills. Ryan and Deci (2000) refer specifically to skills that we need to cope with our environment and circumstances often beyond our control. Closely linked to this mastery is a sense of satisfaction, because when we are satisfied with our achievements, we are naturally, intrinsically motivated to further explore new challenges. In the MI process participants derived this satisfaction in choosing their own music. The new skill of visualising their needs and emotions by drawing on paper instead of having to explain them verbally is experienced as empowering. In MI sessions participants can experience how their chosen music evokes certain emotions. The superordinate themes "self-awareness", "emotional experiences" and "transcendence" can all be related to competence. Being able to experience and process both positive and difficult emotions, and even to progress to transformational experiences, create a great sense of competence in that even complex concepts and encounters can be explored. Understanding that process was more important than the product, thus having a mindset oriented towards growth (Dweck, 2017), also proved personal competency.

Relatedness refers to the basic human need to belong and to feel connected to others. We feel more secure and thus motivated when we know we are accepted and in a caring environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A sense of relatedness is very important for enhancing intrinsic motivation (Nel, 2014). One of the most important features of MI sessions is the non-judgemental point of departure, which already nurtures a sense of belonging and acceptance. In group sessions participants experienced openness towards each other's music choices. Participants also encouraged each other, and it was clear in their feedback that the significant others in participants' lives were very supportive. One theme in this study that alluded exclusively to the presence of connection was the superordinate theme of "relatedness". This theme included the subordinate themes of "connectedness" and "universality".

Strengths and limitations of the study

Even though the research project was widely advertised, the only people responding to the call for participants who fit the inclusion criteria were all white music teacher trained in the Western (classical) culture of music. This meant that the music styles that were utilised during the sessions were limited to mostly Western music. It would have made for richer data if the impact of music styles from other cultural groups in South Africa could also have been explored. Because MI as a method uses client-preferred music, music that was unfamiliar to the participants was not considered. Furthermore, of the five participants, only one was male. If the gender balance had been more equal, the findings might have reflected quite a different range of experiences.

Seven sessions were conducted with each participant, four of which were individual sessions, followed by an in-depth interview. Personal growth and benefits from these sessions were deep and valuable for the individuals. Three group sessions were held, followed by a focus group interview. More sessions would have made exploration of the different issues created by the pandemic possible. The fact that all participants were present for all sessions, both individual and group sessions, as well as individual interviews and the

focus group interview, is a strong indication that each of them had meaningful experiences during the process.

Group sessions were held online. This could be seen as a limitation, as there was no real connection between participants and the therapist in the room. One might think that such a connection would be essential for successful therapy, but it was a completely novel idea accepted by all participants. However, although the 'space' could probably be described as artificial, participants felt free to share everything and anything without any fear of judgement. Although Honig and Hannibal (2022) found that participants reported their online sessions were still beneficial, findings might have been very different if the group sessions had been conducted live in a space where participants could get to know each other on a different level.

One of the important strengths of this research study was undoubtedly the various research approaches that were used. Pluralistic qualitative inquiry ensured that a wide variety of experiences and a range of descriptions of experiences could be reported in the data. Additionally, collecting the data in different forms – including responses to music, images and spoken word – contributed to an even richer pool of data. These different data sources ensured enough information was available for thick descriptions.

The number of participants in qualitative studies need not be high. There were five participants in the IPA and the case study. Especially in an IPA, where it is the aim to analytically interpret participants' experiences, a small number of participants is preferred. It is expected that rich, detailed data of each participant's' experiences should be described comprehensively. With a small sample it is possible to take into account both convergence and deviation (Smith et al., 2021). In the case of this study, all participants were fully committed as well as involved and present in the entire process of both individual and group sessions.

I strongly believe that another strength was my involvement from different perspectives. In the autoethnography I already had to absorb the role of participant whilst

also being the researcher. In the trioethnography I had multiple roles as well, namely that of participant, therapist, witness and author. In the IPA and case study I fulfilled the roles of therapist and researcher. These different personal perspectives were invaluable in arriving at the findings. Doing the analysis of my own participation, that of colleagues, as well as willing participants whom I did not know, created a mass of interesting data which I had to work through on both an empathic as well as objective level. Another strength worth mentioning was the ongoing involvement of participants. The other two therapists involved in the trioethnography contributed to the article by analysing the data and finalising the findings with me. The music teachers in the individual and group MI sessions were contacted regularly after the process to give feedback and receive input regarding the findings that were included in the articles. There was a positive chain reaction in the continued interest of all participants. Billie Holiday expressed the view that this interaction served as an ideal kind of supervision.

Implications for practice

“The aim of music therapy is to use our subconscious responses to music to assist recovery from a medical or psychological condition” (Powell, 2016, p. 70). A number of implications emerged from the findings of this research project. The most important ones will be highlighted below for possible exploration in practice.

In the music therapy setting in South Africa, MI is absolutely ideal as it makes use of the client's preferred music. Music therapy is a relatively young profession in South Africa and the majority of qualified music therapists are white females who are trained in Western music. Many African clients do not relate to this style of music and the traditional music therapy methods do not resonate with them, although it is generally accepted that music is an integral part of indigenous African cultures. Brain activity was measured while listening to music by Pereira et al. (2011) and findings showed that activity was significantly higher when listening to familiar and preferred music than with unfamiliar music. The MI method will thus

form the perfect bridge to serve African clients in a therapeutic space, using their preferred music.

However, this leads directly to the next implication of training in MI. At the moment, I am the only trained MI therapist in the country. There is thus huge scope for training in the MI method in the South African context. The training is rigorous and expensive, but there is the possibility to train others in helping professions, for example, psychologists, who already understand psychotherapy and have an interest in music as a therapeutic tool.

This research project focused on music teachers only. There are many other client groups that could benefit from this method, especially in mental health settings, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, and even correctional services. Adolescent client groups are ideal for this method as this age group relates strongly to music as part of their identity (Tarrant et al., 2002).

MI, as part of a multidisciplinary treatment plan, can be very valuable for other professionals in the team as a supportive and/or alternative therapy input. Clients benefit from varied therapeutic contributions. Additionally, exploring MI sessions in individual and group settings is a viable possibility. Furthermore, because the method uses client-preferred music, it is a tool that clients can take with them and practise after sessions.

Lastly, from a very personal perspective, I found that MI could be employed as a very effective supervision method for music therapists and those professionals in other helping professions such as counsellors. Billie Holiday gave the following feedback: “It works in the language we know, but it is one step removed (not talk therapy) and is therefore safe and empowering”. There is a great need for supervision in general in the Arts Therapies, particularly in South Africa, and I experienced this first-hand during this research project.

Future research

Should training in the MI therapy method be explored in South Africa, a variety of projects could be suggested for future research. This research project as it stands involved

only a small group of participants, which is appropriate for qualitative research. First, this method could be explored with bigger groups in quantitative studies. Even if the same client group (i.e. music teachers) is used, comparisons could be drawn between young teachers and more experienced teachers, teachers in different provinces, primary and high school teachers, teachers in rural education and in private education, and teachers from different culture groups.

Second, it would also be valuable to compare the findings of the individual experiences with experiences in groups as a follow-up study. One article in the study, the IPA deals with individual participants and another article, the case study, deals with group work. Participants were asked what the main differences were between individual and group sessions, and all participants felt that the individual sessions were more beneficial. Although there were two themes that were referenced in both these articles, these were not explored further or more deeply or discussed with participants. One theme that appeared in both articles was “character strengths” and the other was “emotional experiences”.

A third suggestion would be to extend the therapeutic process to more sessions. Although this would be costly and difficult, the findings in a longitudinal study might be very different to those from short-term therapy sessions.

Fourth, other client groups should be involved. Participants in addiction care, adolescent groups, youth-at-risk groups, and patients in mental health institutions are but a few examples. Everyone has musical preferences that could be a resource for their well-being.

Fifth, more constructs from positive psychology could be the point of departure for MI research work. Because MI is client-centred and strengths-based, similar to positive psychology, a vast field remains to be explored. For example, it seems possible to employ MI together with the concept of psychological capital (PsyCap). PsyCap wants to develop an understanding of how people can overcome setbacks and difficulties by focusing on four concepts, namely hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (Youssef & Luthans, 2010). Hope,

resilience and courage were all categories coded in this study, which points to the possible connection between MI and PsyCap. “Character strengths”, as they are described in the positive psychology literature by Peterson and Seligman (2004), also emerged as themes in different articles in this study. There is thus certainly room for further exploration of character strengths within MI.

Lastly, other methods of research can be included in MI work. Arts-based research methods are but one example. Mixed-methods research can also likely give different and more nuanced insights.

Conclusion

This research study aimed to understand participants’ experiences of MI sessions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the findings, I developed an original model which demonstrates that music as an activator can generate various experiences that heighten well-being, and not only the well-being of the individual. The well-being of others is influenced by the interaction with the individual who is stronger, more self-aware, empowered and has grown through the process. Furthermore, in a group setting, this growth, empowerment, trust and relatedness will also contribute to the well-being of everyone in the group.

I interpreted these experiences in terms of self-determination theory, where participants experienced autonomy, competence and relatedness. These three basic psychological needs can be described as being crucial for improved well-being, integrity and psychological growth (Nel, 2014). Through this study it became clear the MI sessions fulfilled the three basic psychological needs, thus improving clients’ well-being.

However, although rich and thick descriptions were extracted from the data, to believe that all possible experiences during an MI session were included and correctly understood would be missing the point. There is ample room for further research. In practice, MI sessions can be used in individual and group settings. Highlighted particularly in the

autoethnography and the trioethnography, is the value of MI in supervision. MI as method lies on a continuum starting at the supportive level of therapy, followed by the re-educative level and then the reconstructive level. This study focused on the supportive level. The re-educative and reconstructive levels are waiting to be explored.

MI as a therapeutic method can assist in improving well-being, because it focuses on strengths, acceptance and empowerment of the client on the various levels of the continuum (Summer, 2015). Strengths are enhanced at the supportive level of MI, whilst learning to accept is the purpose of re-educative MI sessions. Empowerment is part of the reconstructive level of MI, where the focus is on helping the client manage difficult situations in a healthy way. Feeling empowered directly contributes to psychological growth and general well-being.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Billie Holiday⁷

Billie describes herself as “an Arts person, a music-mad person”. She says she lives “in music”. It makes her happy. She believes she is non-pretentious with both feet on the ground and her first priority is her husband and two children. But she is quick to add: “And I love to teach music, any form of music and making music with anybody! Music defines me”.

She explains that it is “completely unthinkable” for her to imagine what her life would have been like if she had not chosen music:

Music was the golden thread throughout my life and since childhood I made up my own songs and I made music with the young children of the farm workers where I grew up. Everything I did in my whole life I related through music, through making music. I already taught music as a student.

Through teaching music, I have met the most wonderful people, and children, from young to even old people who wants to take music at the age of 80 and somebody with MS wanting to play saxophone, and women who’ve been left by their husbands who want to take music lessons now. Without music my life would have been without sparkle.

Not being able to teach music, and relate through music during the pandemic, was a huge challenge for Billie. She lost people close to her and it was not easy to process everything. During our MI sessions, the following five themes emerged from analysing the data of her experiences:

- positive emotions;
- challenging emotions;

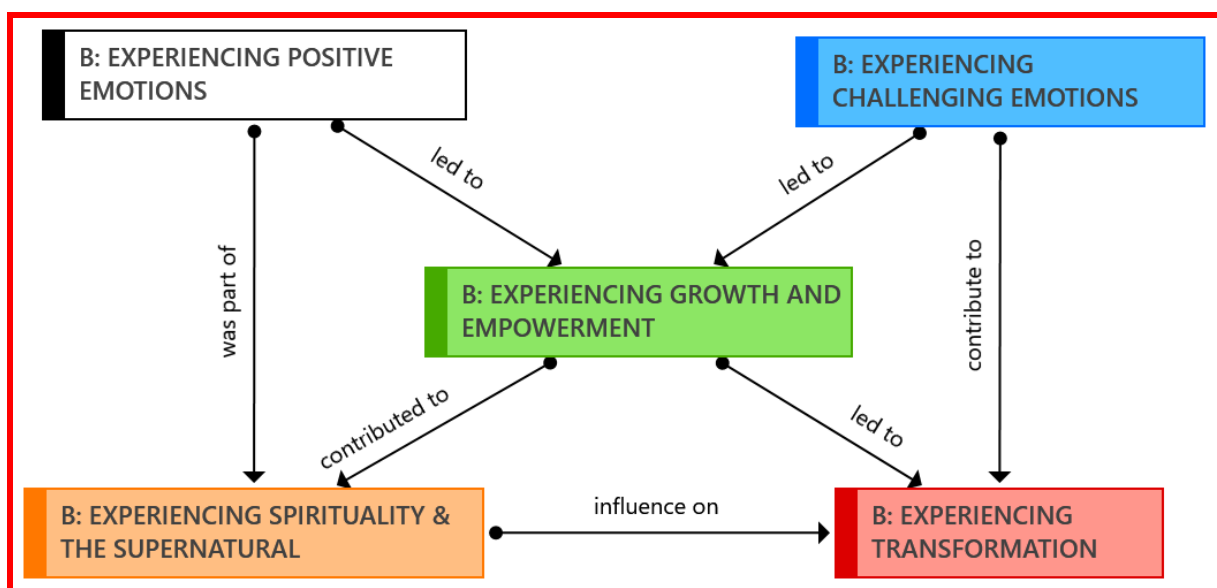
⁷ Pseudonym chosen by participant, in line with her love for and connection with jazz music.

- growth and empowerment;
- spirituality and the supernatural; and
- transformation.

Figure 1 shows the interconnection between the themes. For Billie, challenging and positive emotions were both important ingredients which led to her growth and made her feel empowered. Once she could acknowledge and own her empowerment, she also realised how that contributed to her spiritual and even supernatural experiences and, similarly, spiritual experiences contributed to her experiencing growth and empowerment. This interconnectedness between feeling empowered and experiencing some supernatural and spiritual moments, had a direct influence on her transformation in terms of how she saw herself in all her roles, at home and as a professional.

Figure 1

Emergent themes in Billie's sessions



Theme 1: Positive emotions

Positive emotions that were identified in the codes of this theme include concepts such as joy, courage, hope, love, excitement and amusement, Billie said “music makes me

happy” and she also describes herself as quite “naughty” – meaning she can be mischievous and spontaneous. Her self-description implies that positive emotions are not an unfamiliar phenomenon in her life. In Billie’s very first session she said: “I just feel optimistic about the future”. The music that she chose was Paul Hanmer’s ‘Prop Hat’. During her first MI process, an unexpected ‘friend’ came to visit her while she was listening to the music and drawing (the ‘friend’ she referred to was a butterfly which happened some years ago in a therapy session):

I thought about him, and I hoped, but he has never appeared of his own. So, when he appeared today, so suddenly, I was very happy! So, yes, he tells me that anything is possible. When I started drawing I really felt that lightness which I don’t normally get with my drawings. It never feels light. It usually feels quite condensed, but now it is really nice and light and the openings between the circles is also quite nice because it is done. I don’t need to colour it all in.

When she encountered the butterfly for the first time, she was “in a dark despondent space” and the butterfly, symbol of transformation, gave her hope and courage. In this session it brought her positive emotions and new hope:

SUDDENLY, there came hundreds of lights, this colour [points to her drawing] indigo blue butterflies into the tunnel, and they lift me out of the tunnel and pulled me out and allow me to play with the light and the clouds and these butterflies changed colour, and they held me, and I could not believe how it changed from the absolute darkness to this absolute freedom! There is movement forward, with great excitement, almost like: What’s coming next? I don’t know, there is a pattern and there is order there. And the question of what’s coming next makes me feel very excited, optimistic, very excited, optimistic.

Figure 2*Billie's butterfly image session 1*

When reflecting on this experience, I noticed a mixture of emotions in Billie. There was utter surprise, quickly followed by relief, and then came the hopefulness about the future. The tears were both a sign of feeling overwhelmed and joyful. The experience was an affirmation of her earlier comment: "I just feel optimistic about the future".

In the second MI session, the freedom that Billie experienced whilst listening and drawing reaffirmed her positivity and something of her mischief and waywardness came to the fore in her picture. The music in this session was 'Anitra's Dance' from Grieg's Peer Gynt suite. Her own description of it:

It feels very very good! It was so nice to do this, because when I think of the previous time, it was so 'whooo' and it dragged me along and wow this thing (butterfly) comes again. This was just so much lighter, and very playful for me, very playful, almost a little naughty. So in this image, the curly hair is about a playful outburst of 'ha-ha-ha-ha'. So just the curls and the red, I tried to be a bit mischievous, star in the eye type of hamster, it is more like a porcupine, but anyway.... That is what it looks like to me (Figure 3).

However, she is still aware of reality as she refers to the porcupine's 'pegs' which are present as "part of the protection measurement". Along with the little "soft and woolly" animal is the "Ferris wheel", and although originally it was the wheel which traps the little "hamster", it became something different through the process:

Figure 3

Billie's porcupine and Ferris wheel, image session 2



...it doesn't feel terribly scary or trapping or stifling. It does not look anything like a wheel that I am trapped in anymore, it is more like a pie chart of my life. It's just a nicely contained little snapshot of all the different aspects of my life with all the different colours, beautiful colours. So the green immediately felt like a strong foundation, very contained but not stifling! It was really nice I thought when I started to draw it was going to feel stifling, but NOT AT ALL. Not stifling, very safe, very nice, very contained, very free. And also with all the diverse colours. It's quite nice to see and it was also very nice not to fill each of the segments. I love the space. It is not holes, it feels very nice to just look at it, it feels quite comfortable.

It was quite encouraging to witness how Billie described herself. This mischievous light-heartedness that she wanted to portray into the world, but the realisation that she had to protect herself too. Also, the realisation that her life is so full. It was as if she might have

felt her life is too full, and it is difficult to balance everything, but then through the process realised there is space and there is colour.

In the third session, very deep and difficult issues emerged, but even in the midst of the tough work Billie felt “some kind of release there”. And positive emotions in the form of a sense of safety came to the fore in the fourth session: “Very safe, more safe, as if I needed to find it. The sunshine is there, I just need to move with it. I want to cling to this image!” Allowing emotions to be expressed in a safe environment can be a great release and relief.

Theme 2: Challenging emotions

Billie explained that the most challenging emotions came with the process of MI itself. She said: “I was quite scared, because I thought I knew what to expect, but it was completely different to what I expected”. She also felt choosing the music was “quite challenging”, as if she was “blank” in that moment. The one challenging emotion that Billie explicitly experienced in her first session was a feeling of grief. She struggled with grieving the death of a near uncle, and in the session she said: “The fact that I could not cry about him... I thought I did not have that grief about the loss that came loose just now. Gee, this is amazing stuff” and she continued to cry.

This experience gave Billie ‘permission’ to also delve into very painful memories, which led to her disempowerment in a later session. The music that helped to elicit these memories, was ‘Cumulonimbus Part 2’ by Max Richter:

She describes this as if she is “pulled” and she “want(s) to move but things are holding me back.”

During the process she said:

Initially I felt very anxious, suddenly as if this little box was never going to move, I feel I am being smothered, as if someone pushes me down to smother me, as if

somebody with an ice-cold hand presses on my stomach. It felt like Snow White, just lying there, feeling lame and poisoned. I wasn't totally out of it. And when I got up and started to walk around there was this typical archetypal evil stepmother witch, almost like Maleficent, her face, almost the typical Cinderella mother with black hair and purple outfit and high eyebrows, who turns round and round above me in this room and then I recognised the witch. It linked to the pre-talk, but it also symbolised that ALWAYS when I try to reach my potential, there is always something that holds me back. I relate it back to a more powerful woman who is going to smother me. I don't know why, I am working on it. And then when I tried to get out of the room, there appeared locks and locks as if I can't come out."

Billie's experience of feeling trapped has been holding her back, and it was very difficult to express and acknowledge that. It was even harder to stay with it. After this session, Billie said: "I felt completely drained, tired afterwards. I felt I can't go to work now, I need to lie down and sleep a bit...".

However, she emphasised that during the session "we worked through it and it moved suddenly". This is testament to the fact that Billie was completely willing to stare her difficult emotions in the face and work during the sessions. This openness led directly to growth and empowerment.

Theme 3: Growth and empowerment

Billie realised that through working through her issues and acknowledging her emotions could only lead to her own growth and empowerment: "It was incredibly valuable and very empowering". She could also see this in the use of colours in her drawings: "I think it also has something to do with freedom and I love about the colours, maybe a little magic...", and: "...and then it became green and that is growth, so it is a very satisfying image to me". She added:

The colour green is huge. This one [green] it is as if it has a little more potential, it is a little heavier, as if it is a little richer for me. That is also nice for me: the richness and the depth. It is almost winter but the growth and I would say freedom, the green is more about freedom, because it can grow any place, it can go anywhere.

To me, it was as if the growth almost happened in the moment as she was describing her own process:

...because blackness or darkness is something potent, and a place of rest, and growth and creativity and so on. You know that thing about shining your light in the world? Everything, nothing may be dark, so I try to think more about even in my soul that darkness can be a place of potency and rest, and everything works together, like sleeping to re-energise, so that is how I started. Yes, it might be scary, and it is a little bit like a 'maalkolk' [whirlpool], but it is also beautiful. If I now look at that black spot, it looks very dynamic, and safe, almost like a nest, vibrant with the yellow on the side. There is depth and it is not smothering. It is almost inviting, and then towards the end I had to think deeply whether I was going to add another colour or not.

Figure 4

Billie's image session 4



In the sessions one thing that stood out for Billie was the “potential”. The music choice, ‘I’m every woman’ by Chaka Kahn, certainly contributed to this feeling of potential. This potential was described in many senses: “physical awareness”, “professional identity” and “personal identity”. Billie summed it up as follows:

I think there was just one, where I was shocked through the revelations in a way.

That I felt like it was a double take: I’m in one direction now, and now [I make a] 180 degrees summersault, backtracking. And now I need to move [in] another way. And I know that’s now the path I need to take!

What a privilege it was for me to witness how, after having gone through the previous struggle to face her insecurities, she was growing in confidence and taking responsibility immediately. She certainly seems like the sort of person who is going to grab the opportunity whilst it is fresh in her mind.

In one of the sessions, Billie commented “that was again immensely surprising, and deep stuff happening there in conjunction with the breathing, so that connected me [in] the deepest [way] to [the] hidden process”. She added that the music in each session had a direct influence on her growth process:

I do think that this kind of way of using the music opens up a deeper connection and I can’t say between client and therapist, or between you and spirit, or you and your own physicality. It just brings it home a bit more... and also the fact that sometimes I can choose and sometimes we do it together. I also don’t have to feel trapped that every time I have to think ‘oh, what now?’ Uhm, so I really also like the diversity that could happen in the music. There is no denying it. It is immensely powerful, it is inviting, it is stimulating, it is empowering, it is beautiful.

It was clear that the empowerment and growth that Billie experienced was partly about the music, the freedom of choice, as well as partly about the drawing and colours she could choose, but certainly also a trust in the MI process. Billie felt confident and safe in

these sessions to open up and share. She also mentioned that the 'freedom' that is part of the process is often absent in other kinds of therapies. All of this had an influence on her personal growth:

In the past I have done similar processes with lecturers or people with whom I walked a path, and I was inhibited by that. Look, I am not easily intimidated, inhibited, so don't get me wrong, but I have not given 100% in sessions. I gave 98%, but here I could go 100%. I thought okay this is a research study, and I must be on my best behaviour and so on, and then it was not necessary, so that was unexpected. I know I did not have to give myself fully, but I decided and I felt I could be completely myself. [In the past] I would have found a way to back off and I'm facing resistance now, but I am empowered and I am convinced and I trust! I know it will shift!

With such acknowledgement and honesty, the way was prepared for spiritual experiences, which is the fourth theme.

Theme 4: Spirituality and the supernatural

Billie, referring to the butterfly image that came up in her first session, said that she was completely caught off-guard by an

...old friend revisiting. It is my friend! He is on my side. I can't believe it! Because it was a symbol I found 8 years ago in a session. It rescued me then, so when it appeared again it strengthened my faith and belief, and trust in our process.

Because this happened in the very first session, "that is why I trust the spiritual aspect of it as well". It opened up the potential for Billie to allow for spiritual experiences during sessions, and later on she claimed that she "did not expect to access the material that I did". She soon realised that "you're almost in a different zone and it is a very special, potent kind of zone but you're always aware, always here, almost like an expanded consciousness, expanded awareness. This is immensely powerful. No hypnosis, no over-thinking...".

Billie had a supernatural encounter in her third session. The imagery that she experienced was that of being locked up in a rondavel. However, when she plucked up the courage to go straight to the door, the locks dissolved. She is now using this analogy to help her face her fears: “Even if I am in a closed rondavel of stone, with locks which appear when I want to go there (out into the open), they (the locks) will dissolve, because I’ve seen it dissolve in a spiritual realm. In a spiritual realm I saw it dissolve”. She also noticed that her “senses are enlivened in a way” which enhanced her spiritual awareness:

It’s not just the musical sensitivity but there is a different kind of I would call it sense awareness, smell, feeling, uhm humidity even, temperature! Yaa, I haven’t thought about it hey, but now it’s actually a reality that I can perceive things more fully and trust my physical sensations, that’s a big thing. TRUST my physical sensations, not fear them, not run away from them, but TRUST them, like engulf, I would say, everything that happens around me...Uhm, definitely a spiritual dimension [too] and that is so nice because you have this physical sensation but it is also spiritual so it’s uhm, it’s the most wonderful holistic experience and you know when people say holistic they mean okay just don’t take pills. It’s more than that. I love taking the spiritual dimension into account.

Furthermore, Billie felt that she lost track of time: “time did not exist in a way”, and this comment about time took her on a different route when she spoke about the supernatural experience of how “it fell into place at the right time! It is uncanny how these sessions just happened at the right time. It is flippen bull’s eye that pulls me”:

How come every session, even with my own work planning it happened at exactly the right time that I experience something in my own life. The time booking of our sessions: Sometimes it couldn’t work out at certain times and then it came at exactly the right time. It’s not like a regular thing every week. It formed part of my life, and it is as if some kind of higher power fused this to help me.

It was these kinds of experiences that led to the transformational work that could take place and to the fifth and last theme.

Theme 5: Transformation

Sometimes I would come here, and I feel really down and then through the artistic process, my emotional state would translate into a different bodily sensation, that would completely transform [me] from when I stepped in. And that would often last, it would often last after sessions. Sometimes like a few days, sometimes actually two weeks.

A strong transformational theme came through during the process, and this was clear from the start when the transformational 'butterfly' made its appearance:

My stuckness... those butterflies... previously... my whole life. It took me out of the stuckness then, and that shift that I had then, it is life changing, it is fucking huge! This little butterfly is not just a little butterfly. It's something transformative for my future. But strange, where I am sitting now, I feel softer, I feel different, which is great.

To experience Billie's own recognition of how she perceived her own change was awe-inspiring. Another humbling experience to witness was in Billie's third session where transformation was at the core of the process. It happened when:

I made a giant decade-long painful block which I could see in a different way for the first time and transform. Although I know there is a lot of work that I still have to do. But there was a remarkable, noticeable shift, physical (she gets emotional while she speaks). I could feel it in my bones, and my husband said: 'What is going on with you? You are a different person, you sparkle, you glow, you're doing it!' It was that session. (LONG SIGNIFICANT SILENCE) If it wasn't for that session, if it wasn't for that session, my career would have gone in a different direction, because I would

never have followed the path that was actually planned for me at the conserve. It happened at the same time.

To conclude, the importance of the 'concrete' images, the actual pictures that Billie drew during sessions, as transformational objects was clearly seen. For Billie, it is important to be able to "revisit it and see how it transforms" She explained this as follows:

The revelations came in the drawing and the fact that I could use different mediums. Uhm, and with every session I felt: What surprise was going to come for me? Sometimes we are shy to draw. It's a dream of mine, I wish I could have been a visual artist but, uhm, yah, so it was wonderful to be able to draw and also take it home and put it on my wall!

It was insightful to hear that someone who feels her drawing might be inferior in terms of art could appreciate the drawing as part of the process so deeply. Billie concluded our interview with the following words:

The confidence I grew here, to be able to speak about the arts and therapy was just immense and [to] share it with other people, share it with actors that I spoke to that I thought: how can I ever speak to this actor about the arts as a therapeutic medium? Or how, as somebody would ask me at the conserve, tell me why do you think we have to have therapeutic work with musicians? You need to say why...Because I experienced it? Yes, years ago, five years ago.

But I experienced it in the here and the now and I could trust my experience. It's not something I read in a book, that somebody made up. It's my LIVED EXPERIENCE. And that gives me confidence to connect with people.

Billie's process of growth, self-acceptance and transformation took place literally in front of my eyes. These sessions were as valuable for me as they were for her. I found new faith in the method, as it was so powerful that it was tangible. As therapist I feel that I have

grown, and as researcher I feel even more convinced that this phenomenon is worth researching within the clinical environment

Appendix B: Chopin⁸

Chopin and I have known each other since 2000. We used to teach music in neighbouring schools and this led to a music-driven friendship. At eisteddfods, we accompanied each other and also attempted piano duets together. Once we even were rewarded with the prize for the best adult piano duet. However, we both moved to different towns and our contact dwindled, until 2018 when we were in London together for a course. We rekindled the music-driven memories by going to the West End together to watch *Wicked*. From then on, we stayed in contact.

Chopin is very open when he describes himself as a 42-year-old gay person who loves music and he loves to connect with people. He adds that he is happy with who he is and, although his life is not easy, he says it does not have to be! Chopin is certain that 'music chose him' when he says: "My hands moved around as if I was playing a piano before I ever laid my eyes on a piano. And I always loved music when I heard it on the radio. Music is the reason why I am alive today".

His decision to become a music teacher was 'made for him' as he did not get a bursary to study music, so he chose education instead with music as part of the course: "I got the opportunity to become a teacher late in my life, because it was taken from me as a child. I came out of a bad family situation. I was not allowed as a child to take music or ballet". Chopin speaks with a light-hearted tone when he says:

My life is a joke, a big joke, there is always a little problem. I did music as a subject in Standard 6 (as a beginner) NOT to take Tswana, because I could not learn or remember those words! I can still remember what I played, and I progressed very well. And there was a little concert, and the adjudicator was a flautist and an opera singer, and he said his toes curled up when I played, and he offered to teach me for free. My mom was okay with it and my dad had no say, as he did not have to pay. So

⁸ Pseudonym chosen by participant, as Chopin is his favourite composer.

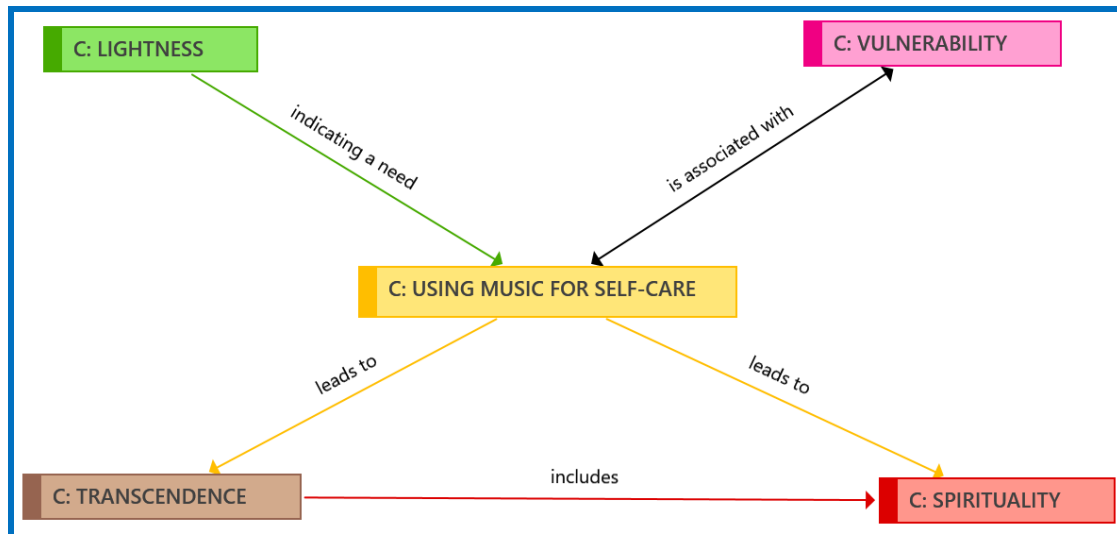
I started with piano lessons in Standard 7, played the Grade 5 examination in Standard 8, and Grade 8 in Standard 10. At sixteen I started playing the flute as well. One year later I played the flute Grade 7 examination and Grade 8 in the following year. I think that is why music is such a thing for me, as it gave me hope to become something. When I heard harmonies, I wanted to throw up because it was so beautiful to me.

Upon reflecting on this account, I wondered if Chopin was not possibly masking his pain by being so light-hearted, since he is deeply musical and he almost missed the opportunity due to circumstances beyond his control or even knowledge.

During the pandemic Chopin was isolated. His engagement with music (going to concerts and teaching) and connection with people were both negatively influenced, but this certainly gave him an opportunity to delve deeper into himself. The five themes that emerged from analysing the data of his experiences during MI sessions are as follows:

- lightness;
- vulnerability;
- using music for self-care;
- transcendence; and
- spirituality.

Figure 1 indicates how these themes relate to each other. Although Chopin always uses his sense of humour to help him cope, he was also willing to become vulnerable during sessions. Both his awareness that he was always trying to cope by 'being funny', as well as his willingness to become vulnerable, clearly indicated to him that he needed to take better care of himself. Once he afforded himself that very needed 'luxury' of using music for self-care by engaging with MI sessions, he could transcend and connect to God in a very deep way.

Figure 1*Emergent themes in Chopin's sessions***Theme 1: Lightness**

Chopin is quite open about the fact that he suffered from depression. Although this is “in the past”, he still feels intensely sad about former adversities in his life, and he uses humour to help him cope. This became clear in this theme. Although humour as such, and even humour and playfulness as a character strength, was never the focus in his MI sessions, there was often the relief when something ‘light’ came up for him during a listening experience. Once, he exclaimed that “there was a time when I felt nothing and that felt FABULOUS”. He said ‘nothing’ did not feel ‘scary’. Another example of such an experience was when he said: “I become the music...I want to try dance therapy! In a hall and there is a therapist and I move with the music”.

Sometimes it felt to me that Chopin needed to convince himself, or remind himself, to remain hopeful: “I love hope. It is a snowball, but it is a positive snowball. The core of energy is hope, I suppose”. However, real lightness appeared during the music listening when Chopin was really immersed in the music and would comment after the music has finished:

“Ooooh, I’m crying! I feel light as a feather. It is just beautiful! There is so much hope in this piece of music”. Chopin equates hope with energy:

In this interlude, I can focus on the music, and it rejuvenates me, and I can go back to my work. My battery is fuller than before, and I can go on. I do not always have to DO.... In the music, the DOING falls away. I don’t have to DO... I normally do many things at the same time to get through the work. But when I listen to this music... It is my time. I don’t have to do anything. The music plays, I don’t even have to play.

For me it felt like, through being in the session and affording himself the opportunity to ‘not do’, he realised how seldom he did this, and how necessary this would be for him to take self-care more seriously. I also felt that he might be working so hard so as not to give in to the depression or loneliness. I felt grateful and privileged that he agreed to engage with these sessions.

Theme 2: Vulnerability

When analysing the codes in this theme, I realised that my reflection was probably correct, as when I asked Chopin how he felt about discussing his experiences with me, he replied:

Part of me would prefer NOT to discuss it, because it is so personal. And how does one quantify the feeling in words? Because the feeling that I got is what is near to my heart. It touched me, and now I need to talk about it ‘academically’ in language and I don’t know how to express it in words. It is qualitative and not quantitative. It is about my experience which is inexpressible, and I can’t quantify how I have felt. It [discussing the experience] is almost like an anti-climax. I know [in therapy] it is necessary to get back in reality, but... But the music experience was 100% fantastic. It was LOVELY, LOVELY, LOVELY!

Chopin's vulnerability also came to the fore when he explained why he consented to go through this process and the interview:

I thought, because I know you, it would be different, there would be an emotional awkwardness, because if you cry with someone you don't know, who cares? But it is a choice I made. Actually, the music made the choice for me. So, I decided it would not be awkward. That is the choice of an adult. I chose what I wanted, and the experience was so important that I would not allow anything to stand in my way to get it.

Later on in the interview Chopin acknowledged his vulnerability when he said: "Whether I cried or not, even if I did not cry, I had to cry to get 100% out of it. So that had to override that feeling of being vulnerable".

During our third session, Chopin shared openly his past experience of depression over a period of 20 years. He also added that he is now able to acknowledge that "we DON'T KNOW that tomorrow is also going to be black" so he wants to "get hold of hope". He chooses 'Morning' from Grieg's Peer Gynt suite, as it allows him to breathe. When the music ends, he is so overwhelmed that it takes him a long time to 'return' to our discussion. He says: "Oooh I am crying. I feel as light as a feather. It is just so beautiful. There is so much hope in this piece of music".

In the next session it is inevitable that the vulnerability will come to the fore in the pre-talk as we discuss what happened in the music during the previous session. Chopin puts this in perspective himself when he talks about his father wanting him to play rugby and was not at all in favour of his son doing ballet or taking music lessons. He tells me for a second time: "When I started music lessons, and I started experiencing the beautiful harmonies, I wanted to throw up because it was too beautiful!". His own memory opens up an opportunity for him to become vulnerable again about his youth, and he asks to focus on a childhood memory

where he felt his “soul was at home”. He talks about walking bare feet in the cold water in the irrigation furrows [‘leivore’] in the rain. After the music experience, Chopin says:

I think it is the first time I have experienced it again since when I was a little child, and shooo, that feeling under my feet, those bare feet... I am content. It is long lasting. When you are contented, then there can be happy moments and that is wow, but the contentment stays... I don’t want to say I am tired, but I am contented and I don’t want to necessarily now have a lot of stimulation from outside. Because it is fragile. There is a fragility that comes with this session and the time is not ready to burst the bubble.

I am amazed at his sincere vulnerability and deep experiences in the music. It takes me by surprise every time and there is a certain amount of transference as I feel vulnerable with him. My reflection includes how much respect we should have for each other as human beings, as well as for this process, which allows for this kind of openness and sharing without feeling judged. This was Chopin’s only session where his imagery and his drawing was linked to a memory, and he allowed the music to take him back to something real and tangible. However, after the session, he crumpled it up (although afterwards he gave me permission to photograph and use it) and I am left with the thought whether it was another sign of his vulnerability.

Figure 2

Chopin's image of walking in the irrigation furrows



Theme 3: Using music for self-care

In becoming vulnerable, and realising that there was no judgement, Chopin also realised his need for self-care, and that music is an enormously powerful tool that he could use for self-care.

I think that I have realised that if I.... to always remind myself how powerful music is... and if I am in a dark place, to actually go and say to myself you know, I actually know that that piece of music can help me. And to do it actually! Because it is a resource that is available. I don't even have to go and look for it.

He further claims that he knows that music will be with him whether it is going 'slow' or 'rough':

That is how sure I am of the energy [that the music will provide]. It feels like one of the things that helps me the most with my mental health. I KNOW I'll make it even when it is difficult. There is safety in THAT KNOWING. The music is an emotional reminder. Even when I listen to 'rough' music, I know I am safe in my boat, even when the storm is busy around the boat.

When I asked him how MI sessions have affected his life, his response was immediate and, although for a moment he was feeling a little selfish, his voice had a tone of self-insight:

Self-care, huge, and that I have had the opportunity to feel this with somebody and that is a gift in itself. Because I am the focus of it and it was great to say this was for me, it was a little just for me. I want this on my own. It is not a 'bad' selfish, but I know what I want: it is actually self-care.

With every session I was astounded by how exactly Chopin knew what he wanted to listen to, and when I asked him about his music choices, it was clear that he knew what he got out of the music:

...all the genres that I chose gave me emotional power, energy, and Bach gives me emotional food. It is really like gentle steroids. Exactly the right quantity. Minerals and vitamins, pitch perfect for my body.

Theme 4: Transcendence

Because of Chopin's knowledge of music, it was easy for him to decide what music he wanted to use in each session. His intense knowledge of every piece, every nuance, detail and note in each of his chosen pieces made it possible for him to transcend the here and now during the listening process as he was so intimately connected to the music. He talks about how "time disappears, GONE", how "I can fly" and how "I become lighter and lighter" and how "...if I allow myself, this can happen". Chopin is able to describe exactly where in the music this transcendence happens. His own description of this experience in listening to J. S. Bach's St. Mathew Passion Part 1:

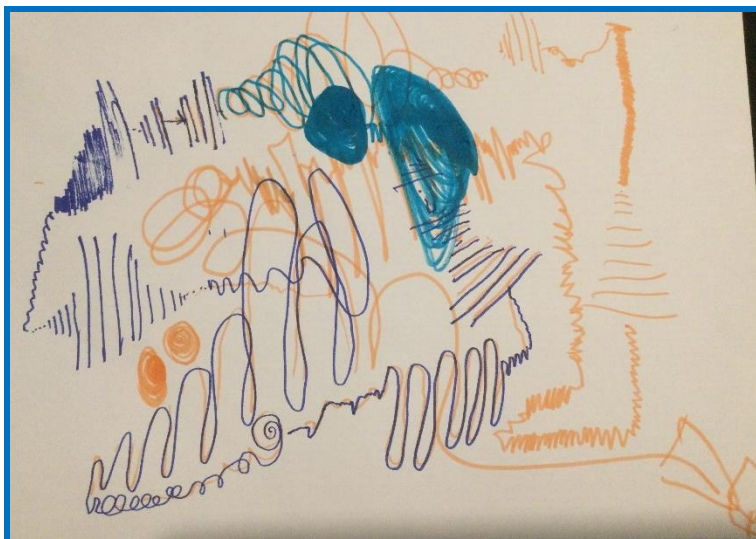
The repetitiveness at the beginning created a mood and put me in a trance. The moment when there is singing, it is jubilation. Like Hannah in the Bible, who was praying alone. I could fly. I can leave my body behind. I am not fixed to the earth.

Bach's music does this for me. It is unbelievable. Oooh, it's just, it is actually space up there and the earth is 5 billion years away from the space. It is the space that music opens up for me. No gravity, no rules of our lives are applicable in that space.

He can also link it to his drawing, as he talks about the flying: "Now everything on the paper is gone. I am there (he points to the clean white part of the paper). I do not have to understand anything, I can only feel the feeling". It happens in another session again where he explains what happened on the paper:

Figure 3

Chopin's representation of transcendence



Here, these dark blue (purple) lines, this is my cognitive listening. When the peach colour takes over, it is the heart/ feeling that takes over. Where the dark blue disappears, it is feeling only. Almost like a transcendental experience once again.

The MIDDLE BLUE is where I am totally immersed in the music.

Interestingly enough, in this case the music was Liszt's *Études d'exécution transcendante*, No. 10. It is as if Chopin becomes freer in each session to allow himself to

transcend, as in the last session, when he chooses “Bach’s Italian Concerto in F major, (but the second movement is in D minor). The Alfred Brendel recording”. His description afterwards:

Oooh, it is not that it was unexpected... but when I connected, I cried... if I must cry then I can cry... but when that moment when my heartstring is hit, like in the Italian concert the mordent, that A G A, and then it just is enough for me to say ‘aah... I am light, I am lifted up in the air.

This session was online, and in the discussion of the session during the interview, Chopin said:

I wish I could sit next to you, because it would have been more intense. It was intense enough, absolutely, because I chose to be the focus, but if we were next to each other, we would have shared it physically and I maybe could have taken your hand and where that right hand plays that mordent, I could have showed you exactly where I were in that moment. It could have given it a deeper meaning.

This feedback is extremely intense and I feel privileged that Chopin is so open and so graciously sharing his transcendent experiences with me. An important realisation is how music helps him to connect to people, and that listening WITH someone gives the listening experience an even deeper meaning. I also realise that it is a rare gift indeed to be able to describe such experiences in so much detail without hesitation. Chopin is certainly very aware, and he feels safe. It is astonishing how he is present in the moment as well as in a different realm.

These transcendent experiences can be, in my opinion, clearly linked to his spiritual experiences, which is the last theme in this data analysis. One of the quotes that links the transcendence and spirituality reads as follows:

That same feeling of escaping from my body to heaven. That is what Bach does to me. It takes over. It is so free and a nice feeling, I am not in my body. How can you describe it. It is as if I am a balloon and all of a sudden there is helium in the balloon. Gravity does not play a role, but I can't look down and say I am 20 metres above the earth. There is nothing. The only thing there is, is the feeling because the music takes over.

In this instance I asked him if he was aware of the music. The answer came straight away "Yes, every note. It is this fruitful land that gets water and that is my soul, and then something can grow again".

Theme 5: Spirituality

From the very first session, Chopin is very explicit about his relationship with God, as well as how this is linked with the music of Bach:

Bach's music is the closest I can get to God. It is the quickest and easiest way to connect to God. For Bach, the music comes from God and that is how he praises the Lord. To God all the glory! His holiness is close.

For Chopin "music is, after theology, the straightest road to God's ear and faith". His faith and spiritual connection also manifest strongly in the music listening: "How can I describe where it is in my body? It feels like hands on my chest that are drawing me up to heaven. I can meet my Creator. It is profound"!

When we discussed Bach and his music, as well as the huge influence his music has on Chopin and his spirituality, descriptive words included “divine”, “silence” and “sublime”. One of the quotes that touched me deeply was Chopin’s passionate, repetitive way of proclaiming his personal faith after a session where we listened to Bach:

The KNOWING THE KNOWING THE KNOWING THE KNOWING that God is there. There is NO doubt. It is as perfect as the knowing that God holds me tight. I don’t know how people actually live without something bigger than themselves. I don’t know. One can feel how the Lord is pulled into pieces on the cross and that raw emotion. In terms of feeling re-energised: When He died, He gave me power and strength. For me.

When reflecting on our process as a whole, I notice how important it was for Chopin to be heard, understood, and not be judged. This openness led him to feel safe to share how he sees God, what makes his faith strong and unwavering, and one of these things is:

Music! Bach is IT. It puts me right next to the Lord. That always happens to me with Bach, in these sessions or outside of it, but it was nice to experience it in the sessions with someone who knows my culture and that part of me.

Appendix C: Liszt⁹

Liszt is 65 years old, still teaching from home and she describes herself as “a successful teacher”. Besides piano she also teaches harp, and for this instrument she says “I mostly compose pieces that suit each of my students”. She feels supported by her husband and also has children and grandchildren who fill her life: “I would have missed out a lot if I did not have children of my own, because they enabled my personal growth”. Liszt believes “we are born with a specific kind of personality. I have a positive outlook. You know things can go bad, but it can only go better...”

Although Liszt performs whenever she gets an opportunity, she feels that teaching music is her life – “it was a conscious decision”.

Look, I studied in France, and I had the opportunity to become a concert pianist, and I considered it, but other performers who are very successful, but they say they get terrible lonely.... no husband, etc. So, I decided to get married and have children so I became a teacher. That was my choice. When I had to work for the first time, teaching was so overwhelming I went to the bathroom between each period and sat there and cried. But after a few weeks, I said to myself ‘OKAY from now on, if I can make a difference in ONE child’s life, then my life is worthwhile’. And those six years became the most wonderful years of my life.

Without teaching my life would have been very empty. Teaching is WOW. I would have been a very different person. I would have been unfulfilled, because when a child walks in, I start to live. I know now I would have missed a lot if I did not teach.

Four themes emerged from analysing the data of Liszt’s experiences during MI sessions. They are:

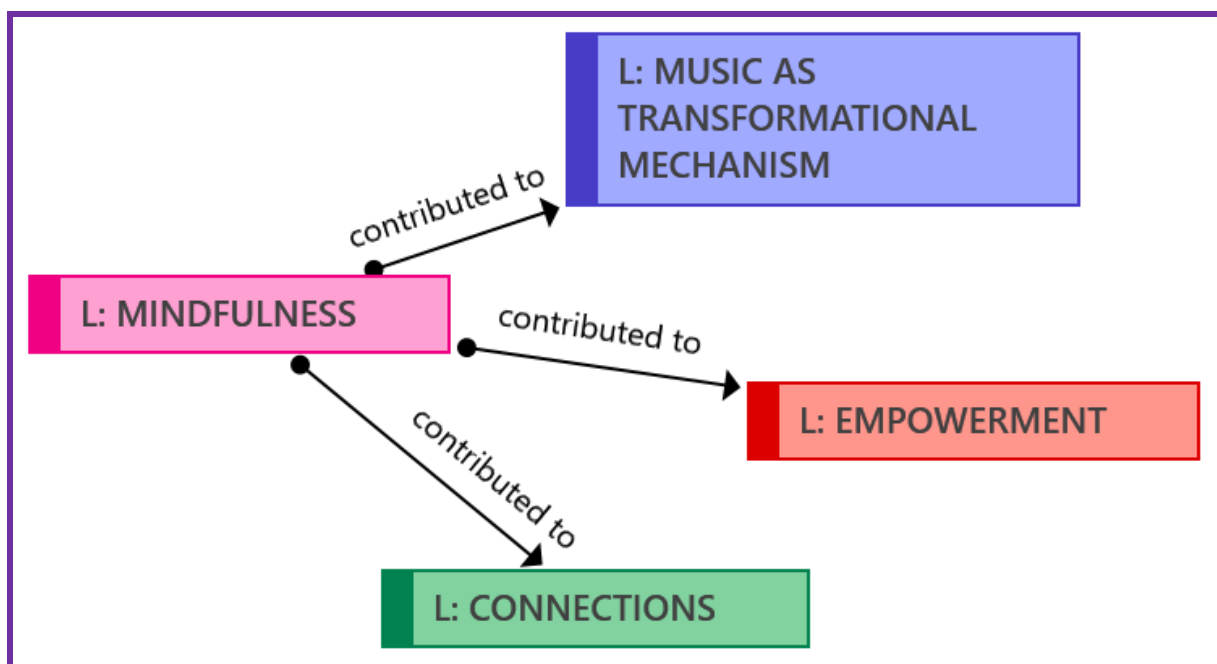
⁹ Pseudonym chosen by participant, as Liszt is one of her favourite composers.

- mindfulness;
- music as transformational mechanism;
- empowerment; and
- connections.

Figure 1 indicates how Liszt experienced a deep state of mindfulness whilst listening to music and drawing. This mindful awareness contributed to her realisation that music was a strong mechanism for transformation. It also contributed to her feelings of being empowered and her experiences of connections.

Figure 1

Emergent themes in Liszt's sessions



Theme 1: Mindfulness

One of Liszt's first comments during sessions was "I am alive". She recalled that moment of feeling alive in our interview when she said:

What I have realised is that I was able to be in the moment. Now at this moment, in the moment. I am here now. It is difficult for me to live in the moment, because my head goes to lots of places, but these therapy sessions, it was nice to just be 'in the moment'.

The fact that Liszt could acknowledge that she struggled with being in the moment was a great relief, and she was also able to say that the sessions were "good, positive, and it is as if I can breathe deeper and feel a relief". She also found that she became "aware of the colours, bright colours" which she used in her drawings. Once she said: "Every time I had a session, I felt wow, I should do this. I can sit for an hour a day and draw while I listen to music". For me this was as if I could breathe deeper with her, as she was always busy in her head, and sometimes it almost felt as if she was 'out of breath'. Her slowing down was very necessary, and I could hear that when she once explained that after a session, "I am very enthusiastic to continue with the day" but then insightfully continued: "It was never over and done and now life goes on". I felt that, as she spoke, she realised that previously it was a case of 'now life goes on', but these sessions helped her to slow down and be in the moment.

When Liszt allowed herself to be in the moment, she often relived fond memories and experienced a deep sense of gratitude. One of the examples really touched me deeply, when she chose the very well-known theme song from the film *Ladies in Lavender*, composed by Nigel Hess, to work with in the session. It was her own recording in which she played both piano and harp:

This recording was made before COVID and the whole thing, after I played it, I said ‘I can die now’. It was almost the truth! With COVID! Those were prophetic words! That is what I experienced NOW while I listened to the music and drew. It is a bit scary. So, I drew tulips, my favourite flowers, and lavenders yes. Now I can say I survived. It brought back to mind that I am grateful, thankful, that I am still here, and I can still do things. Many people can’t do anything after COVID. I have realised that as BAD as COVID was, it was just as GOOD from other perspectives, you know with all the heartache and pain, and sadness, but still there comes something new, the flowers grow again.

Figure 2

Liszt’s “Ladies in lavender” drawing



Such an open discussion about how the pandemic touched her and influenced her, was a definite proof that Liszt could, through this process, and being mindful of her own feelings, work through her pain and see the positive amidst all the uncertainty she went through. There was another session when we listened to Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 5, movement 3 (Rondo Allegro); another memory was stirred up, but once again Liszt looked at

it with gratitude and she spoke about her own fulfilment, even though she did not have everything that she wanted:

Since I was a little girl, I was always involved with music, and piano is what I did. But I always wanted to be a ballerina so badly, but my parents could not afford it. And this piece of music feels like it gives me energy, life, excitement. And maybe I did not become a ballerina, but I became quite a good pianist, and the empowerment of hard work, discipline and achievement, and also the recognition in all of that links clearly with ballet.

Figure 3

Liszt's memory of wanting to be a ballerina



For me, the way in which Liszt could immerse herself in the music, be in the

moment, allow a memory to guide her in her drawing, and still take the positive from it was truly a mindful experience for her. She became aware of difficulties, and at the same time could find ways to interpret these logically in a positive way so that it was strengthening and not a matter of self-pity or regret. We both became aware of the power of music in this process, but in the analysis of Liszt's data I became deeply conscious of the transformational power it had for her.

Theme 2: Music as transformational mechanism

The transformational power of music was established in our first session, and I believe it strengthened our relationship and her openness to the process for future sessions as well. After the listening and drawing, Liszt spoke about her picture:

You know, it is my happy place...mountains and water, water, water... When I was drawing, I became calm, and I am certain I can carry this with me. It is a good place to start: a place where I feel safe; when I visualise a safe place.

Figure 4

Liszt's 'safe place' image



A similar comment was made in the second session: “There was so much energy! It felt as if I could take off from the earth. There is a tangible core in the purple (ballerina image), in the gut”. In the following session, the music was even stronger as a mechanism for transformation: “I became Van Gogh while I drew”. The music that Liszt chose for this session was Dring’s Trio For Flute, Oboe and Piano, the first movement (Allegro con Brio). Madeleine Dring is a 20th-century British composer, and besides composing she was also an excellent pianist, singer and actress. I could see how Liszt could relate to Dring, as she was also a versatile artist in her own right. Liszt described her experience of the music as follows:

Figure 5

Liszt’s representation of transformation



[Dring uses] quite well-known chords, but in disharmony with each other, and that can throw you off balance. There is that E minor chord with the C-sharp in the bass. This piece is like a symbol of my life. It is how I see my life. It is not in a box anymore. Like in the picture. I was on a rock, but then the wave threw me off. During COVID-19, I was alone, and I was weak, and my husband was not in a position to talk to me, because he was in a coma. But in the end, it was a good thing because I needed to

learn, adapt and decide what I want. But there are NO guarantees. That all came out clearly in the music. The waves are never the same. You never know where it is going to land, or whether it is going to throw you from the rock. And the beauty is that one has to embrace that! Right?

Liszt's realisation of what is important in life, and how there are no guarantees, was a transformational point in this session which was brought on by the surprises in the music. I believe that this gave her strength, once again, and it helped her to add the rainbow to the picture where she had just been thrown off the rock. She described Dring's music as "symbolic", and she added that "the transposition is transformative". This comment was repeated in the session where we used 'Ladies in lavender'.

A last comment by Liszt that will stay with me as therapist and researcher for a long time was: "What bothers me is: Do people in the world out there realise how valuable this music therapy is?" Although I add this comment in the theme of music as a mechanism for transformation, it links directly with the next theme where the role of music is seen as empowering.

Theme 3: Empowerment

Liszt used the word 'power' when she explained what happened to her when she drew the ballerina: "I never realised the power of taking a piece of paper and drawing on it whilst listening to such beautiful music!" It reminded me of her saying that being a music teacher, and a performer, being involved with music and being passionate about music "leads to empowerment, simple as that!"

It came to the fore strongly again in the session with Dring's music, when Liszt was quite emotional and in a sense reliving the anxiety around her when both she and her

husband were diagnosed with COVID-19 simultaneously during the pandemic: “And life is stressful, but there is always hope. And this picture shows that I can accept my situation and who I am. I am happy to say I am OUT OF MY BOX!”

In our interview after the process, Liszt admitted the power of music and also the empowerment of the process on two levels. Firstly, music empowered her to be spontaneous:

And I must tell you also that before the first session I thought I am going to think what I am going to draw in the session so that you don't think I am stupid, but it does not work like that. I did not think about what I am going to draw again. It is amazing what comes up, it is mind-blowing! Whatever I planned, did not work out.

Secondly, on an emotional level, music could empower an experience of honesty and authenticity:

What I realised was that I thought I knew what is going on in my heart and my mind. And then the music plays, and you start drawing and then you start to see oh, I did not realise that this is actually how I feel. That preconceived idea, and here comes the music and then.... other things come up. You think you're doing okay and then...mmmmm

Theme 4: Connection

The last theme that became clear after data analysis was the theme of connection. Liszt experienced a new connectedness between the art forms that she so passionately loves. She also experiences a new connectedness with her emotions, with nature and with others.

The way in which she experienced the connection between the arts is clear in the following quotation: “It [the music] is an amazing tool. I always paint in silence. I never listen to music, but now I am going to do it”. She also said about the process that it was an “eye-opener”:

I did not realise that the connection between visual art and music, how important it is the music and the drawing, although I have been doing both for as long as I live, how important it was to stimulate and enhance emotions, yes for sure. How did I not realise? I never grasped that one must do this. Yes, I am a little, wow, overwhelmed... Why haven't I thought of doing this long ago?

In this quotation she already refers to the emotional connection as well. This was further noticed when she pointed out “the link between music and that whole thing, of [emotional] yes, I'm alive!” In the session where we listened to the Intermezzo from ‘Cavalleria Rusticana’ by Mascagni, she reminisced about how she had “arranged it for harp” and how “it became a part of me, of who I am as a musician and music teacher”. She also acknowledged to having “a different connection with each piece of music”:

And I realised there are so many emotions that are within me, and that the music brings these different emotions to the fore. I think it was good because we live too far from our emotions. We are taught not to cry, to try again, not lay back, but it is important to also just BE.

Liszt confessed that she also “became aware of emotions which I often want to suppress”. In the ‘Ladies in Lavender’ session, she exclaimed: “I was in tears now whilst listening and drawing, yes! I just realised everything was worth it”.

Furthermore, this process helped her to re-connect to nature in a way that had been “forgotten”: “I draw nature quite often, but I think I look at nature, and especially at flowers from another perspective now, more intensely”. Lastly Liszt experienced that she connects to

others differently. In terms of our relationship, she said that our conversations “came very naturally. There was nothing that I thought I should not have said. I said what I wanted to say”. As a teacher she also experienced a need to connect differently:

Yes, I connect differently to other people. Look, when I teach then I'll look at the children and then I would love to say: 'I see you do not feel well today, draw me a picture while I play something for you', but I have not done it yet, because of time limitations etc...but I really want to do it with a child that is not okay. And I won't do therapy with them. The simple fact that he listens and draws is already the therapy. And I'll ask if they feel better now. Remember I am not a therapist.

During our process, I felt that Liszt had really come to a place where she could become still, be in the moment and just be mindful. More than once she mentioned how busy she was, and also how she never thought of things in this particular way. She realised the importance to live in the here and now, because that is all we have. I felt that she has also become more patient with herself, giving herself some space, and is maybe even prepared to say to herself: Well done! I sincerely hope that Liszt can hold onto the mindfulness way of being and allow herself to just BE.

Appendix D: Schumann¹⁰

Schumann had a near-death experience when she was diagnosed with the Corona virus during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two years later she still has to go for regular check-ups for her heart. I really felt that it was quite a responsibility to have her as a client, but also a huge privilege. We are living far apart, which meant that all sessions were online. This is an added stress factor that needed to be taken into account, but her positivity shone through each and every session, never getting impatient or irritated, whether circumstances on either my side or hers proved to be difficult, e.g. loadshedding or internet connection problems.

When I asked her to tell me a little bit about herself, she replies by using a quotation by Eckart Tolle: 'You are the sky and all the things around you are clouds, but you are not the clouds. You are the sky'. This is a deeply philosophical way to describe oneself, so I ask how this applies to her. She replied:

We were not allowed to talk about ourselves, so I did not ever think about myself. I was always linked to outside things. I wish I had more freedom to get to know myself. Especially when you are part of a big family, then you talk about yourself less.

She said that she felt like she was 'talking in circles', and described herself as a "stable, dependable, hard-working person with integrity".

This 'talking in circles' response made me realise that it is possible that no-one has ever asked Schumann to talk about herself. It could also be that she wanted to be elusive, as she is not used to the attention. A huge shift in how she perceives life and herself might have taken place during her near-death experience. Or she might have needed more time to build a relationship with me.

¹⁰ Pseudonym chosen by participant, as her daughter's name is Nina.

I asked her why she became a music teacher. Schumann said that she always knew she “wanted to be a teacher”. She admitted that teaching music was not necessarily what she had in mind, but “I think music teaching was the right thing for me”. If she was not a music teacher, she might have been an arranger, or even on stage as an accompanist, “but not the main attraction. But I love being a teacher”.

From this short introduction I was certain that, even if Schumann did not become a music teacher, she would have had another career that still involved music. When our MI sessions together started, she felt a little insecure, as she “did not know what was going to happen, what to expect” and she asked herself the question: “What have I let myself in for?”. It made me wonder if she had read through the information in the consent form, or if she just felt she needed the therapy so badly after her life-threatening ordeal that she was keen for any kind of help. However, after the first session she said that once she knew what to expect, she could fully embrace the time we were going to have together. This background is valuable when I looked at the themes that emerged from analysing the data of Schumann’s experiences during MI sessions:

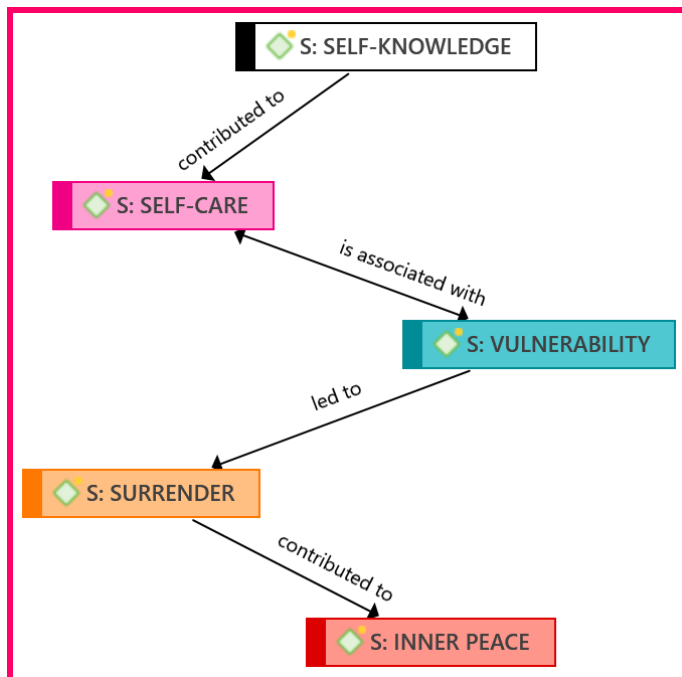
- self-knowledge;
- self-care;
- vulnerability;
- surrender; and
- inner peace.

Figure 1 is an indication of how I think these themes relate to each other. In spite of the fact that she said she never talks about herself, Schumann knows herself quite well and music contributes to that self-knowledge. One of the serious realisations was that she was in need of self-care, but she knew self-care would mean that she would have to become vulnerable and also that she would have to be vulnerable if she was going to take self-care seriously. However, during the MI process she could surrender to the process and become

vulnerable, so that self-care and healing could take place. And the surrender led to a deep experience of inner peace.

Figure 1

Emergent themes in Schumann's sessions



Theme 1: Self-knowledge

Schumann's self-knowledge is directly linked to her relationship with music. In the first session, I thought it would be valuable for her to dig a little deeper into her own character strengths, because of her fragility after the long recovery process and the fact that she said she never talks about herself. One of the concepts was "steadfastness". She immediately knew that she can "connect with these feelings of steadfastness through something from the Baroque era". In a later session something similar occurred when she said: "Maybe something with text! What about a John Rutter; but not too melancholy. Maybe from a musical, a movie, a chorus, even an opera chorus...". In another session she wanted "an orchestra! What about a violin concerto? Tchaikovsky's violin concerto. The only one.

Violin concerto in D. Op 35, first movement. It is just beautiful, that's all". This notion was linked to how she described the role of music in our interview:

And remember that I have said to you that music for me is very closely linked to my emotional state of being. It touches me deeply emotionally. When I was in the hospital and I was sick with COVID-19, I did not listen to any music, I could not. I didn't want to. Music is a trigger for me.

On one occasion she used music as an analogy for life: "The music is a little like one's life. There is the constant bassline and a fixed beat, but over that, on top of that, it can be full sometimes, and less full (empty) at other times". This seems to be an apt description for her own feelings.

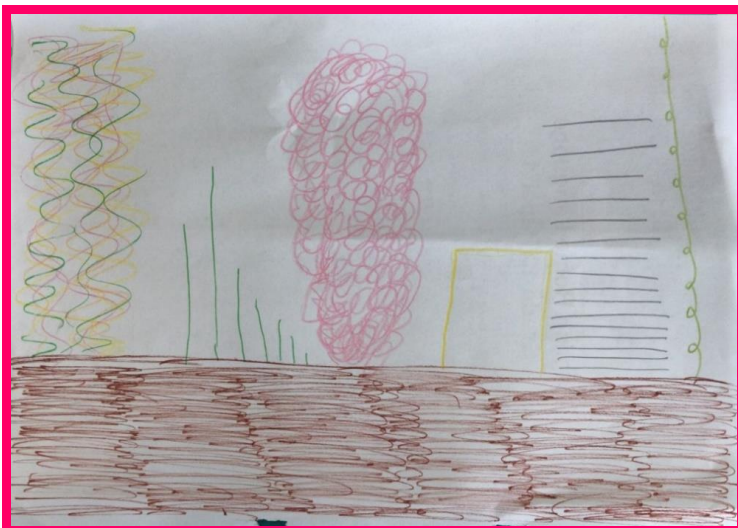
I experienced her as a client similarly to what she experienced in the sessions. These feelings varied from "feeling grounded and going nowhere, like an ostinato", "feeling inspired", "feeling emotional", "feeling energised" to "feeling weird". It was as if there was a mutual influence from the music on her mood, or her mood on her choice of music. She also acknowledged how an energising session stayed in her head: "It was not just in and out".

Another aspect of self-knowledge came through in her attitude towards the drawings. She explained "I'd rather move. A piece of paper makes me feel limited. It's too small". However, on the other hand, in more than one session, when we discussed the images, there were interesting insights in her analyses of her own drawings. There were at least three examples where the drawing enhanced her self-knowledge. Once she described her drawing as follows: "It is actually quite a good picture of what I feel. There is nothing positive up there, only the ground! The brown should have been more even, but it represents the foundation, the steadfastness". And then her own interpretation of how she felt followed: "I must work on it".

Schumann could also explain something about herself and her relationships with others, through relating to her image. This can be seen in the following quotes, after having listened to "Spring" from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*: "The lines next to the swirls represent how much I can give at a certain time. Sometimes there is more available than other times. Different 'amounts' are available" and "The lines to the right of the empty box is similar to the left-hand side swirls, but these things are not related, such as work, home, shopping, gym, bank, etc....".

Figure 2

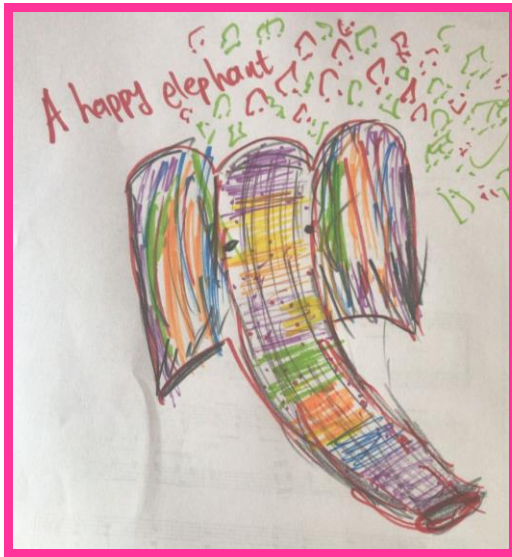
Schumann's representation of being grounded and related feelings drawn while listening to Vivaldi



In another session, where the choice of music was "Cool" from Leonard Bernstein's *Westside Story*, this is what was brought to the foreground in the image (Figure 3): "It looks like an angel with wings, maybe Moses with his tablets. It was nice to do this, very nice, and I chose colours that are alive. I really enjoyed the process".

Figure 3

Schumann's 'Happy elephant' drawn while listening to Bernstein



In my opinion, it might be true that Schumann does not like drawing, or she might feel that her 'talent' is insufficient: "The frustration is in the fact that you know what you want to see, and you can't do it". But as she got involved in our work together, she realised that the process was valuable. She could certainly explain her images and she also learned a lot about herself through her own interpretations. A significant acknowledgement that was highlighted in a very simple picture (Figure 4) was when she admitted the value of the image: "but if it is about my involvement and emotions my squiggles are worth more". Once she realised that there was no judgement, she admitted that she needed some self-care: "Yes, I have realised that I need to do something about this (tears). I **must** do something about it".

Theme 2: Self-care

I noticed that Schumann became very emotional every time the discussion went in the direction of taking care of herself. She seemed to be desperate for "me time", and in more than one session she would say she needed "a little energy for the rest of the year" or "inspiration to get through the year". Another comment that made me realise how seriously

she needed some self-care, was when she said: “I can’t **‘can’t’**. I **have** to!” She also referred to our sessions as “a bit of an escapism”. As a single mother, she hardly ever had time for herself.

Once during a session we focused on visualisation, and she had a wonderful image of being with her family:

Now I see people. My family. It feels good, easy, nice, comfortable. Just like a normal family visit. Just being together... I don’t see anyone special, but I wish there was someone! It is just a good place to be, and mood. All are happy!

It became clear to me that her family was one place where she felt safe and cared for. But the reality was that, although her family was supportive, they were not always present. The way in which Schumann referred to the music and these sessions as “escapism”, led me directly to the understanding that she knew she needed to give attention to her own wellbeing, but that she also knew this would mean she had to become vulnerable. Fortunately, this happened during our process in later sessions and vulnerability became a theme in the analysis too.

Theme 3: Vulnerability

The theme of vulnerability became much clearer in coding Schumann’s body language and emotional responses. In 50% of our sessions there were moments of ‘crying’, ‘putting her hands over her face’, ‘clenched lips’ and ‘deep sighing’. This happened more than once in a session. Schumann would also stop speaking, trying to contain herself and then suddenly say “...let’s continue”. In one of the processes of listening to music, she visualises:

Here I almost see, I get the feeling of as if somebody is in trouble, in need, the long high drone. Somebody says I need help, but underneath, everyone just continues with what they are busy with. The people who are underneath, gets more and more busy, and the busier they get, the less they are aware of the person in need.

When I ask if the person in need is her, she says “No, whenever I was in need, I was always supported. So, it is not personal, but the image is strong”. My honest thoughts are that it is possibly about her. She is now thinking of when she was in hospital during the pandemic, but overall, I believe she is quite lonely and craves some support.

Schumann became very vulnerable when she opened up about her mother’s illness and the impact it had on her:

My mom is struggling with dementia at the moment and we all battle/scramble (‘spartel’) to try and help, but we can’t (breaking down in tears). We will not be able to get there to help her, and that is... [she is unable to continue; long silence, then] ...and then one thinks how she is simply disappearing ... slowly... [she cries and cover her face with her hands] and nobody can help anymore... [the crying continues... it’s so painful.

After this revelation, and showing her emotions so clearly, she finally admits: “...and you know, one is scared for oneself, because what if the gene sits with me?” The way in which she referred to herself as ‘oneself’, and then asked the question referring to herself as ‘me’ was, in my opinion, a turning point in our process, where she finally realised that she needed to surrender and open up. If she could become honest, mostly with herself, the healing process, not only physically but also emotionally, would progress.

Theme 4: Surrender

A very interesting quotation from Schumann's interview sheds light on how she struggled to surrender, both in the sessions and, I think, also in the reality of life. Even in her own words, there seem to be some contradictory statements: "The more one knows what is expected, the easier it becomes. But I don't think the level of the resistance changed. No unfortunately not". She described the process as a whole as follows: "I did not like it, BUT once I have started... I felt the resistance... but I did not have a choice... but once I started it was nice". However, later on she said:

It is actually that thing of breaking through the resistance. It is on a different level when you do not feel confident to draw. If you are through it and you start, it is really quite nice... I could relax and surrender to doing it. When I allowed myself to GO THERE, it was really very nice! The process was good.

Once Schumann could "go there", she realised that "the process was good" and "you could feel there is something going on here. I am not used to doing this. I do not do such things because it touches on the emotional". This was an important realisation, and what makes it significant is that Schumann, once she decided to surrender, really benefited from the process. She said "yes, one could get away, far away completely, even if it was just for a while, and time was not a factor. It did not even come up. I lost my sense of time, certainly".

She even acknowledged that unknown music was more beneficial for her, and through this recognition, it became clear that she had surrendered to the process:

Most of the music I knew so that was easy and just listening, but the session where you chose the music, was new to me, and the music led me. In the other cases I led and the music followed me. If you want something out of the session, then I would

say go with the unknown music, because the music you know keeps you in your comfort zone.

After the whole process I asked her how she felt about suggesting this kind of work to other people. Her reply was astonishing, especially if I take into consideration how 'resistant' she was:

How would one say this. Look, if you say it's a waste of time, then it means that you are very far from yourself. You are very far detached from yourself. There is not even a spark, no electric current between your emotional intelligence and your IQ, you know. The two don't even touch each other.

Schumann's surrender led to the most touching spiritual moments where she could experience inner peace, and experience gratitude for her survival of COVID-19 and also realise the importance of being in touch with God and oneself.

Theme 5: Inner peace

It was absolutely awesome and humbling and such a privilege to share these experiences of inner peace with Schumann. Her own acknowledgement was tangible in our last session: "No, today was on a spiritual level. I don't know. The session reminded me to focus on my spiritual relationship".

The quotations are taken from Schumann's visualisations and drawings in two sessions. They are deeply touching and the most significant ones which will be quoted here speak for themselves. The first example was the only session where I chose the music. The first piece of music was "1995" by Ólafur Arnalds, and she described her listening experience as follows:

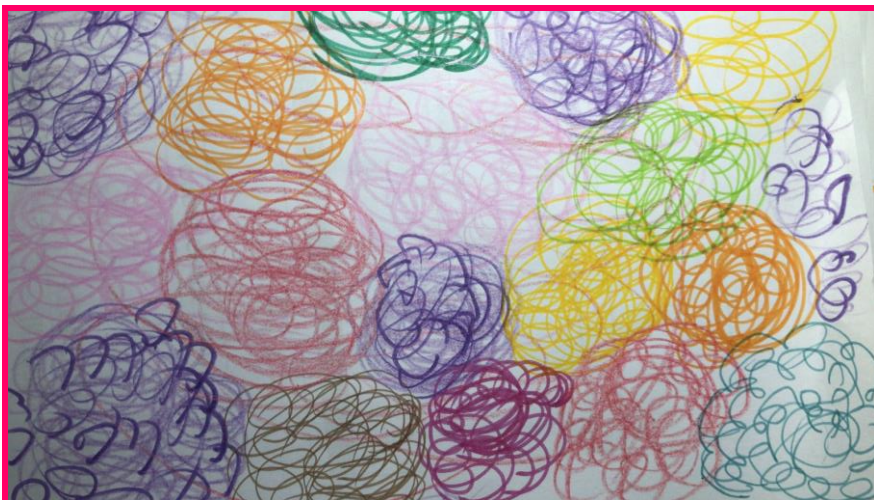
Okay, so I am in a Bushveld scene, and everything is in harmony. There is no earth warming. All the trees are there. And the thought of 'Be still and know that I am God' is there. So, I feel peaceful. A peacefulness and I am part of the creation.

And after a while: "A feeling of safety, of belonging, but no other people. I don't see animals, but I know they are there. It is just trees and grass, and I am kind of part of it all. Safe and peaceful and belonging". I felt it was important to give her the opportunity to stay in that safe environment, so I continued with another piece of music: "Reflections" by Ola Gjeilo. Here Schumann experienced "the sense of belonging is not as strong as in the previous piece, but there is a feeling of contentment".

In a later session, when she chose Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D. Op 35, first movement, there was no resistance around the drawing anymore, and after the drawing (Figure 4), Schumann shared this very intimate experience:

Figure 4

Schumann's representation of reassurance drawn while listening to Tchaikovsky



This kind of drawing is not because I like doodling, but it is all I can do. When I was in the near-death experience, and they shocked my heart during COVID-19, I was sedated, and this [she points at the drawing] is what I experienced. I was part of this rolling clouds. It was me and it was not me. A kind of out-of-body experience, and then I heard a voice saying clearly 'Everyone is going to be just fine'. And it was so fantastic, so strange, but with so much relief. And then, later, I went to watch a programme on M-Net: 'Surviving death', and people all came with this kind of picture. The images they use to describe people's experiences is also this kind of bubbling colours. It moves, like clouds. You become part of it. First, I thought it is the medication, but it must be a place where you are in your brain at a point where you are almost dead. But it was very reassuring. There is something there, on the other side which we do not have a clue about, but also that everybody is going to be fine. And I got the same memory now. So that is why I made these curls and I tried to make the movement visible, but I don't know how, but it is so reassuring.

Schumann really became invested in the MI sessions and the benefits were multiple. In our interview she said "I think I must do it more often, almost like meditation, then it would have a bigger influence. Look, this was like just sticking out your feelers, but I think if one does it more often, on a regular basis, it would probably roll deeper into your life". Since our process, Schumann has also tried music listening and drawing "with the kids at school". She has also realised that these sessions were "a trigger and for me it meant I need to take my 'issues' further".

Schumann now knows that she needs to take care of her own wellbeing, for her own sake, but also for that of her loved ones. She has opened up in spite of her own resistance. She is more self-aware, less self-critical and has certainly realised how important her connection with God is.

Appendix E: Wolf¹¹

Wolf grew up in a musical family where her mother was a music teacher. She tells her story:

I had the privilege of studying BMus with piano and singing, and my singing was the highlight. And then I walked into Maties Travel and said I want to go overseas. I got into the Royal Academy, without even having known that I should have auditioned. I also had a master class in Switzerland and Austria. This was after my BMus. Then I went to Germany and did only opera for three years. When I returned, I taught at a school where my sister was head of music. I taught there for 16 years.

Wolf also told me that, during her career as music teacher, she was a passionate choir director for 30 years. She said she does not know what would have happened if she had not returned to South Africa and became a music teacher: "If I stayed in Germany I would have been in a room and I would have been very lonely. So I returned to South Africa and then I met my husband and we have two children. Now, I live through my students and their dreams. I like making things better".

Wolf continues by saying that she is "a positive person". She told me that she was an "idealist, always wanting to make things whole and happy", and it is a character trait of hers to always ask others what she can do for them. She is the fifth of six siblings, and from a young age she had to learn to "always protect a little piece of" herself. Wolf said: "I had to survive from a young age". She also said: "I suppress a lot of things in my life, because life doesn't allow you to.... There is no time to smell the roses, there is not enough time to digest everything that you've taken in".

Because she is such a giving person, she has often been disappointed and frustrated: "I get frustrated when others don't want to help. And then I must stand back and

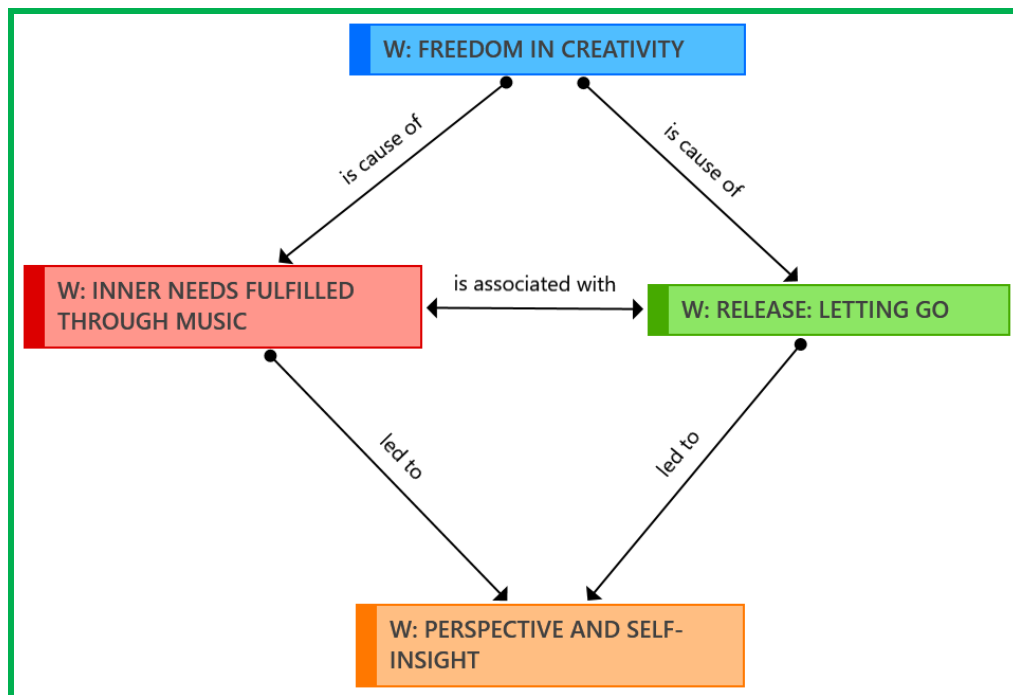
¹¹ Pseudonym chosen by participant. Her passion is singing, and her favourite lieder composer is Hugo Wolf.

breathe because I don't want to show my frustration". This has led to her to "not have expectations anymore, then there can't be disappointment. I have joy and love and all those things, but my boundaries are important because I have been abused. We pretend to be stronger than what we are".

It seems that there is a conflicting energy in her, as she is such a positive and giving person, but in her experience these gifts have been misused, which has made her a little more careful, maybe even cynical. This gave rise to interesting themes in the analysis of her data after her experiences during MI sessions:

- freedom in creativity;
- inner needs fulfilled through music;
- release: letting go;
- perspective and self-insight

Figure 1 indicates how I think these themes are related to each other. Wolf experienced a great sense of freedom in the creative process during our sessions. This led to fulfilment of her inner needs, which was in turn associated with a great sense of release and relief. Also, the sense of letting go was associated with the fulfilling of her inner needs. Both the fulfilment of inner needs through the music and the release led to new perspectives and deeper self-insight. In developing new perspectives, Wolf could see both the positive and negative poles of her experiences, which she could relate to her reality outside of the sessions.

Figure 1*Emergent themes in Wolf's sessions***Theme 1: Freedom in creativity**

In our first session, when I asked her to draw, Wolf admitted that she has “never tried this before” and that it was “actually very exciting”. She said: “I did not know what to draw, but then you said: ‘don’t think’. It was a great discovery for me”. And so, the process unfolded naturally for her:

I took a colour and I started. It just burst out of me. I knew which colours I wanted to use. Each colour of the pastels spoke to me and, uhm, it was interesting. I mean the chalk pastels is such a mess, but it is so therapeutic to just blend. It came immediately. I felt safe, and then you can do anything."

I thought that Wolf's confidence in her own drawing skills also increased, as she started to realise it was more about the process than it was about the product. She also became less critical of herself:

Uhm, I think I used a lot of detail in the beginning and over time it became more relaxed. It is fine to not over-exhaust yourself. Because that is a pattern of mine, so what I have learnt is to relax. No need for going over the top. I started to trust myself, and not fear judgement. Because I can be quite spontaneously critical. I think I've really relaxed and became compassionate. It has changed, just like the smudging in my pictures.

Although Wolf originally said that she struggled to access her inner child, the creativity helped her to do that again. The "happy mood of the music" further contributed to this possibility of unlocking the inner child. We used 'Nordic Polska' performed by Leveleleven. I felt that this was a valuable asset in Wolf's process of healing:

When I drew, remembering myself as a little girl again, about 5 years old, I wanted to see the sunshine and the beauty. I always want to see something warm. So, the flame is warm, and emotional. I can breathe deeper; I can relax, and I don't have to think while I look into the fire. It's all so simple. So, this picture is all about enthusiasm. It is not so easy to access my inner child. I have lost a bit of my adventure. [And after a pause] I think I need to have more fun! I have always had that little girl in me, so I think I am very spontaneous, and I need to do that more. I know my inner child is still alive.

Figure 2

Wolf reliving her childhood as a 5-year-old



During our process I thought that being creative was becoming part of a self-healing ritual for Wolf, and she was feeling more and more free to express herself through drawing, when she said that “I have never sat and drawn by myself. Now, I think I can sit down anytime, play some music and draw.... and see what the spirit wants to reveal to me”. She even added “I like inspiring others with drawing”. This was only possible when she realised how she felt after sessions:

This work, it takes my brain away completely. Afterwards I feel incredible. I feel light and even if there is something frightening that I have seen, it's okay, so that's good I know after sessions, I come back refreshed and unburdened. I show my people my pictures, and I love sharing and they can also see what they want, and I don't need to say anything.

In our second session, Wolf wanted to focus on her relationship with her husband. The image helped her to express how she felt, both in happy and in difficult times. The

image allowed her to 'see' what she could only experience emotionally before. She said: "It is actually very valuable for me to share this with you, because I was hurt in the past and I became like a shell".

Figure 3

Wolf's representation of 'both sides' of a relationship



Her freedom to express also increased as she experienced no judgement: "When I draw, there is no judgement, so it helped me to express without having to explain. It is a very easy way to put it on paper". This freedom to express creatively was associated both with the experience of her needs that could be fulfilled through music listening, and the experience of release. These are the next two themes to be discussed.

Theme 2: Inner needs fulfilled through music

Wolf felt that through this process of listening attentively to music, her emotional needs could be fulfilled. Furthermore, her need for fulfilment in her relationship came to the fore in the music listening, as well as need for connection with nature and God. Lastly, she had a need to feel safe, which could also happen in the music. The following quotation from our interview sums up how Wolf experienced how her inner needs could be fulfilled through listening to music:

I was connected to the music in all the sessions, every time. Because music is my life, and to add the drawing to it makes it even more valuable. Music is just the soul of...you cannot *not* be connected. Each piece of music had its purpose for emotional connection. Each one was pretty highly intense for me.

In the session when she spoke about her relationship with her husband, and drew the hearts, we used the song “Liefde van later” by Herman van Veen. She explained how she experienced it as follows:

I listened to that music the first time when I was sharing a little student’s place with someone who introduced me to that music. It rips my soul apart; I don’t know why. And when my husband had his accident with his finger, I gave him a Walkman with this music on it. So, he listened to it too, and it became our song! That piece of music is a very deep emotional thing for me. I love listening to it.

Wolf also felt that the music could fulfil her need to connect more deeply to nature and to God: “It opened my eyes for my environment. Nature is a big thing for me. It is powerful”. In her drawing she explains “it was soft in the music with shimmers of gold and fragrance, even though you can’t see or smell it in the image. There is more than what meets the eye”. Furthermore “there was a spiritual dimension added. Depending on what music we choose, like the ‘O Magnum Mysterium’, it gives (me) a strong connection with God”. On one occasion she sighed very deeply and said: “I feel peaceful”.

Her need to feel safe and to be heard was also clear in our process. In our first session, when I asked her what music she wanted to listen to, she said: “This is so unbelievable, because no-one ever asks me what they can do for me, what I want. I always ask others what I can do for them”. And in our interview Wolf said: “I felt very safe. In a place where I don’t feel safe, I won’t share. I felt that this was a very safe, but also a spacious and open place”.

Her life was affected by our process. She spoke about the listening and the MI sessions in general as follows:

It has brought healing. It has definitely brought healing in a place where I did not even realise there was a scar or something hurting. I think it's a trust issue that I have. I need to trust, because God taught me to trust and He expects it from me.

In this same quotation, she refers to her trust issues. During the process, Wolf could also 'let go' of many of her self-protection masks and walls that she had built around her. This will be further discussed in the next theme.

Theme 3: Release: Letting go

In more than half of our sessions, Wolf referred to some form of release in her feedback. This was also discussed in the interview, and I think that this was a very important part of Wolf's growth. In our first session, after the listening and drawing, Wolf acknowledged:

There was a release, because although I planned greys, more hues of blue came out than grey or charcoal. My programming is very black and white, and then I started drawing the cloud, and then the cloud started to give rain. That emotion to me was quite deep. It's not holding it here [she points to her heart], it is releasing it and actually enjoying it! I enjoyed it more than I thought I would. I've got it, I just need to let go! I like what I am seeing. Because it released something that I was not even aware of.

Wolf went on and spoke about how she could transcend her everyday concerns in this process: "Listen, when you look at clouds, it detaches you from this earth, from the 'little

foxes' [referring to Song of Solomon 2:15] and you can actually go... You transcend into a next dimension and that is what happened to me".

Figure 4

Wolf's clouds



In this same session, where she drew the clouds while we listened to Lauridsen's 'O Magnum Mysterium', Wolf, almost angrily, burst out:

I did not want to be part of this world, as it is challenging and stressful, so in the music I left that and went up into the heavenly realm. First, I drew the cloud and then at the bottom I just mused with the pastels, and I thought okay this is rain starting. And I thought okay maybe I am going to cry now for a bit of release. That cloud that I drew, it was a prophetic drawing. I wanted to be taken away from this world and into the mysterious, so for me it was wonderful!

She referred to crying again in our interview: "Crying was such a wonderful thing! It is definitely becoming more (regular), and I am okay with it". The session about her relationship with her husband was also emotional, as something came 'unstuck' in that process: "By the

grace of God fresh blood can flow again and then I can go again". In this session she also said that she forgot about time: "I am usually very aware of time, but in this session, I went into a zone...."

I realised how important these moments of release were for Wolf when I asked her in the interview how she experienced the MI sessions overall.

It was an incredible luxury to take the time to sit and draw and listen. Where and when else would I do it? Talking therapy is very exhausting and my issues never were resolved, whereas with this, something happened inside. And I did not necessarily have to talk about it. The pictures were so explanatory. The quick release of what was in my mind was expressed in the matter of an hour. I think...

Wolf's ability to let go and just be herself, without self-criticism, or need to feel 'good enough' for others, was intense and important. It certainly led to a clearer perspective. Furthermore, looking at anything from various points of view is part of our growth into maturity, and helps us to learn to accept and move on. This is what I experienced in Wolf's last theme.

Theme 4: Perspective and self-insight

In some sessions, I ask clients what they see when I turn their images upside down. This helps with their own perspectives. In one such instance with Wolf, she said: "One needs options. When it [the picture] is that way around, I can see I need to release things from my past, not cling to it. And I see I've got so much love and compassion". With another turn of the image: "The other way around it becomes clear that I need to draw a line, put a boundary in place". In the interview, Wolf referred back to these occasions: "But when you turned the picture upside down, it helped me to get to my own analysis. It was very empowering. It is good to turn it in all directions, as it gives different perspectives".

After the intense session about her relationship, and the drawing of the heart, she mentioned that “in the purple there is passion, but it became less, because there are dark places in one’s life...that is in the grey, but the grey is realistic! So, along with passion there is also pain”. This process helped Wolf to see things from various points of view:

Yes, the session where I drew the heart, because I realised how deceitful, deceiving the heart can be. You know, no matter how much you love someone, you can get angry at them too. I remember the grey lines in my heart, but red was very much the blood that keeps the heart pumping. And all the colours are significant because they show different perspectives of the same heart. AND I realised that I must guard my heart. It is a ‘sound mind’ decision! Like having a dog that you love, but he eats your stuff, stuff that you also love!! You have to balance this. I need to stand my ground and know what I have to offer. I don’t always know what is going on in my heart.

There was a further valuable realisation when Wolf said “...so the passion is still there. Here [pointing at her heart image] it is quite soft and fluid, and then hearts break and becomes harder, which is not a good thing, because hearts should stay soft...”

Listening to Wolf almost felt as if I was in an intimate space where she was trying to make sense of her relationship with her husband. I was thankful that she could see the realistic ebb and flow inherent in relationships, but even more for her realisation that a heart ‘should stay soft’. Furthermore, she could empathise with both her husband and herself.

Figure 5*Wolf's glance through the window*

In another session, she referred to her own image (figure 5) as “this picture shows how I look at it from a distance. I am safe here and I am watching from a distance”. The music chosen for this session was ‘Presque Rien’ by André Gagnon. She has learnt in these sessions that it was helpful to see things from various angles, and in seeing that, she could also become more realistic and kinder to herself. She also referred to one of her images as “a picture of wholeness”. It was wonderful to hear that she experienced what happened in the sessions as follows: “How long does it last? I go back to my pictures and I relive those moments. It is valuable”.

Wolf certainly took away from this process the understanding that, through her passion for music and her creative input, she could let go of unnecessary heavy feelings. She could allow herself to bear things less heavily and live more lightly. With the ability to look at things from a new perspective, she could change perceptions and be more empathic, most of all towards herself.

Appendix F

Figure 1

Emergent themes in the autoethnography



Appendix G

Figure 1

Emergent themes in the trioethnography

