



The stories young adults with ADHD tell about the meaning of music in their lives

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ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry sought to explore the meaning young adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) ascribe to music in their everyday lives. My experiences as a young adult classical clarinettist with ADHD shaped and inspired this study. ADHD is characterised by three core symptoms, namely, (1) inattention, (2) hyperactivity, and (3) impulsivity. Attention disorders are comorbid with other diseases, threatening an individual's physical and mental health. ADHD is also stigmatised: those who experience the symptoms are often called lazy. This study involved five participants, each in a different career. Their stories were rich and descriptive as they shared how ADHD symptoms influenced both their upbringing and day-to-day life. The participants included their motivation for musicking in their everyday lives. Literature on ADHD, young adults, music, and narrative inquiry was investigated. These topics were essential elements contributing to the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. In general, the lack of literature regarding young adults with ADHD is surprising as this is not a new phenomenon in human psychology and physiology. The bulk of available literature on ADHD applies to children and music intervention. To date, there has been a gap in the literature on stories young adults with ADHD tell about the meaning of music in their lives. My research addresses this gap by combining research about ADHD, young adults in South Africa, and the meaning they ascribe to music. These topics were essential elements when sought to answer the research question: "What are the meaning-making stories five young adults with ADHD ascribe to music?". The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the meaning-making stories young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. These stories could generally be defined as personal reflections of past, present, and future experiences when engaging with music in their everyday lives. A qualitative research design was employed to understand participants' stories. Data were collected through conducting interviews with open-ended questions. This allowed participants to share their stories freely and without interruption. They talked, and I listened. ATLAS.ti 22 was utilised to organise the data. Codes emerged from the data which I categorised into themes. The following themes emerged from the data: (1) a storiette of belonging, (2) a storiette of emotions, and (3) a storiette of comfort. The key findings from this study emphasise the importance of music in terms of providing a sense of belonging, allowing for emotion regulation, and fostering comfort in life.

Key terms

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), musicking, narrative inquiry, the meaning of music, young adults

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie narratiewe ondersoek was om die betekenis wat jong volwassenes met aandaggebrek-hiperaktiwiteitsversteuring (ADHD) aan musiek in hul alledaagse lewens toeskryf te ondersoek. My ervarings as 'n jong volwasse, klassieke klarinetspeler met ADHD het hierdie studie gevorm en geïnspireer. ADHD word deur drie kernsimptome gekenmerk, naamlik (1) gebrek aan aandag, (2) hiperaktiwiteit, en (3) impulsiwiteit. Aandagversteurings presenteer saam met ander siektetoestande wat 'n persoon se fisiese en psigiese gesondheid bedreig. ADHD word ook gestigmatiseer: diegene met sodanige simptome word dikwels as lui bestempel. Vyf deelnemers was by hierdie studie betrokke – hulle staan in verskillende beroepe. Die deelnemers se verhale oor hoe ADHD simptome hul opvoeding en daaglikse lewens beïnvloed het was ryk aan inhoud en beskrywend. Die deelnemers het hul motivering vir “musicking” in hul daaglikse lewens ingesluit. Literatuur oor ADHD, jong volwassenes, musiek en narratiewe ondersoek is nagevors. Die ondersoek van hierdie sake het 'n belangrike bydrae gelewer om die betekenis wat jong volwassenes met ADHD aan musiek toeskryf te verstaan. Die gebrek aan literatuur aangaande jong volwassenes met ADHD is verrassend aangesien dit nie 'n nuwe verskynsel in menslike psigologie en fisiologie is nie. Die groot gros van die literatuur oor ADHD is op kinders en musiek intervensie gemik. Tot op datum is daar 'n gaping in die literatuur rakende verhale deur jong volwassenes met ADHD oor die betekenis van musiek in hulle lewens. My navorsing fokus op hierdie gaping deur navorsing oor ADHD, jong volwassenes in Suid-Afrika en die betekenis wat hulle aan musiek toeskryf te kombineer. Hierdie sake was belangrik vir die beantwoording van die navorsingsvraag: “Watter betekenisdraende verhale vertel vyf jong volwassenes oor musiek?” Die doel van hierdie narratiewe ondersoek was om hierdie betekenisdraende verhale te verken. Hierdie verhale kan oor die algemeen beskryf word as persoonlike refleksies op ervarings uit die verlede, hede en toekoms terwyl hulle betrokke is by musiek in hulle alledaagse lewens. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is aangewend om die deelnemers se verhale te begryp. Data is ingewin deur middel van onderhoude met vrae met oop eindes. Dit het deelnemers in staat gestel om hulle verhale vry en sonder onderbreking te kon vertel. Hulle het gepraat en ek het geluister. ATLAS.ti 22 is aangewend om die data te organiseer. Ek het die kodes wat vanuit die data na vore gekom het in temas gekategoriseer. Die volgende temas het in klein verhale (“storiëtte”) vanuit die data na vore gekom: (1) 'n verhaal van behoort, (2) 'n verhaal van emosies en (3) 'n verhaal van gerusstelling. Die sleutelbevindinge in hierdie studie beklemtoon die belangrike rol van musiek met betrekking tot die ervaring om te behoort, vir emosionele regulering en om gevoelens van gerusstelling te bewerkstellig.

Sleuteltermes

Aandaggebrek-hiperaktiwiteitsversteuring (ADHD), “musicking”, narratiewe ondersoek, die betekenis van musiek, jong volwassenes

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CHAPTER 1 RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1.1 Introduction

My musical experiences as a classical clarinettist living with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) inspired and shaped this study. As a primary school student, I displayed minor ADHD symptoms such as constantly talking in class and interrupting teachers or peers (Wilde & Welch, 2022:3). I have never been formally diagnosed with ADHD. Initially, I excelled in academics and music: I won various music trophies for recorder and piano performances and was a top academic achiever. My life changed when I left primary school. I attended a new private high school, lost all but one of my best friends, and continued to struggle to build new relationships in my new school setting. I enrolled in piano and clarinet lessons and worked hard to become a member of the school orchestra. I did well in sports, too, but my academic scores started plummeting. I struggled with mathematics and almost failed grade nine. When my parents learned about my sub-par academic performance, they were both shocked. This resulted in me quitting sports and only focusing on academics. Music became an afterthought during this time—it was a struggle to practice and prepare for examinations. I started losing my passion for music as I spent most afternoons with a private mathematics tutor. It was also during this time that I began to experience anxiety symptoms, which had my parents concerned that it might lead to depression. This was indeed the case, and my mental health plummeted. Shortly after that, it was time to apply to university. I applied for BMus in 2017 and enrolled as a full-time music student in 2018. Happy, but not thrilled, I moved almost 2,000 kilometres away from home to start a new chapter in my life. I still struggled academically, but it went much better than during my school years.

Only during my third year of studies did I rediscover my love for music. I did not realise what music meant to me at the time. I could almost describe my undergraduate studies as I would characterise younger siblings: they always find new, innovative ways to annoy you and bring you down, but you cannot imagine your life without them. As my life as a student continued, I learned about attention disorders in one of my classes. I remember reading about the symptoms of these disorders and noticed that I related to what I was reading. I then realised that I might be experiencing ADHD symptoms. I discovered that other young adults experienced similar symptoms and their stories paralleled mine. This observation piqued my interest in learning more about the musical experiences of other young adults living with attention deficit disorder. I have not yet received a formal diagnosis.

Young people are surrounded by music in their everyday lives as the soundtrack of their day-to-day living (Beckmann, 2013:95; Frith, 2004:360). My generation was born into a digital world. We

can interact with music by the touch of a finger. This study may provide insights for teachers, parents, and peers of individuals who do not necessarily have a formal diagnosis, as music is celebrated for bridging boundaries (Vadén & Torvinen, 2014:210). Music will continue to have an impact on the lives of young adults because it conveys the meaning we give it. Individuals engage with music for many different reasons and the meaning ascribed to music is personal to each individual. According to research, young adults participate in music at considerably higher rates than middle-aged adults (Kirby and Burland, 2022:563). This increased level of engagement coincides with significant life transitions from youth to young adulthood and maturity. Because music can modify mood, express emotion, and communicate identity, it may benefit young adults as they mature. Wilde (2018:60) supports these findings and suggests that music may improve physical and psychological health, self-regulation, cognition, social inclusion, and academic performance.

1.2 Problem statement

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the meaning-making stories that five young adults with ADHD tell about music. While research has explored the role of music in the lives of children with ADHD, there is a gap in understanding its significance for young adults. Music can serve as a tool for motivation and emotional expression (Morris, 2012:580) and carries meaning based on the ways individuals engage with it (Vadén & Torvinen, 2014:210). For young adults with ADHD, music may contribute to well-being by fostering self-esteem, emotional regulation, a sense of acceptance, and self-awareness. This study addresses the gap in the literature by investigating how young adults with ADHD experience and make meaning of music in their daily lives, offering potential insights for future research in this underexplored area.

1.3 Literature overview

Young adulthood is a unique developmental period in the age group 18 to 25 years. It is characterised by self-exploration to construct a personal identity and belief system whilst gaining independence and autonomy (Upadhyay, 2014:37). Young adults differ from adolescents and middle-aged adults because the transition from adolescence to a phase with new responsibilities and independence may be daunting. Although change is inevitable, the rapid pace of change may be scary, even shocking. Positive experiences for young adults, whether personal or social, are consequently vital because they build a sense of belonging with others (Beckmann, 2013:96). This enables individuals to develop a broad perspective on life and create meaning in their lives (Higley, 2019:3-4). The reassuring implication of developing a broad perspective and creating meaning is that one can reflect on and question life experiences (Upadhyay, 2014:37).

ADHD is caused by a dysfunction of chemical substances, structural deficiencies (neurological pathways), and connectivity in the brain (Sholeh & Supena, 2021:94; Tran, 2021:202). Despite scientific findings, several myths exist regarding ADHD, such as factors associated with failed parenting, traumatic events, watching television, a diet with high sugar content, and aspects of social environments. These misunderstandings could also be a consequence of the disorder not being physically visible (de l'Etoile, 2005:37). Still, observable behaviour is often deemed inappropriate by others and regarded as an excuse for not wanting to do something.

The literature currently provides multiple definitions of ADHD, although most sources agree on its basic description: a disorder characterised by a pattern of core symptoms, including inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity caused by abnormalities in the prefrontal cortex (de l'Etoile, 2005:39; Jackson, 2003:303; Leconte *et al.*, 2019:20; Nunes-Silva *et al.*, 2018:88; Parker, 2020:119; Sholeh & Supena, 2021:94). Diagnosis is prevalent in 3-6% of children and predominantly in males (Leconte *et al.*, 2019:20; Rickson, 2006:40).

Attention disorders are also often genetic (Nunes-Silva *et al.*, 2018:88; Sholeh & Supena, 2021:94; Tran, 2021:202). Authors such as Leconte *et al.* (2019:20) argue that both environmental and genetic factors contribute to the cause of ADHD. Symptoms continue into adulthood and can cause various impairments in social, academic, and occupational settings (Sholeh & Supena, 2021:95). Substantial research since the 1980s has failed to identify both a specific cause and a cure for attention disorders. The most common treatment is stimulant medication (Leconte *et al.*, 2019:20). Even though there are many negative connotations regarding ADHD, such as being susceptible to academic failure, low self-esteem, and difficulty completing tasks (Sholeh & Supena, 2021:95), existing literature supports benefits associated with attention disorders.

Benefits can include elevated levels of energy, determined effort, creativity (Wilde & Welch, 2022:12), and selective hyper-focus. These consistent strengths are utilised by verbal creativity (Crappell, 2011:12), flexibility, and originality by facilitating divergent thinking—a crucial aspect of the creative process (McBride *et al.*, 2021:3534). These benefits may assist young adults to determine their future goals, values, and personal beliefs, and to see the greater meaning of life (Beckmann, 2013:96). Active participation in musical activities is an important aspect of the lives of young adults. Kirby and Burland (2022:563) present the following as potential benefits of engaging with music: stress relief, mood management, identity formation, and emotional expression. Music provides a means of non-verbal self-expression and fosters emotional expression, social interactions, and relationships (Sholeh & Supena, 2021:96).

The use of music to assist in learning has also received attention in the literature (Jackson, 2003:305), stating that playing a musical instrument may benefit healthy cognitive function in

adulthood (Parker, 2020:119; Upadhyay, 2014:38). Some studies have shown that music can be used to facilitate attention by reducing the presence of distractions (Nunes-Silva *et al.*, 2018:88). Other benefits of learning music (such as learning to play an instrument or music theory) include gains in behavioural and socio-emotional skills, refining motor abilities and auditory memory, improvements in reading and mathematics, self-regulation, and enhancing spatial skills (Nunes-Silva *et al.*, 2018:89). Learning music can thus promote social inclusion, emotional well-being, and better academic performance of students with symptoms of ADHD (Rose *et al.* 2018:3).

Music is so widely used as an emotional instrument that it can be abused if it is profoundly disturbing which is why it may be objectionable to some individuals (Frith, 2004:46). Self-selected music can facilitate mood enhancements, regulation of state of mind, reducing stress, and contribute towards creating valuable memories (Beckmann, 2013:96; Wilde, 2018:62). Individuals employ self-selected music to identify private territory, which contributes to the offensive character of such music when it invades the private area of others. Music is so inextricably linked to an individual's identity that it can be abused, for example, when imposed on others in public spaces, used to assert dominance, or even as a tool for exclusion or psychological manipulation. Research emphasises the several ways in which music can play a key role in and facilitate different aspects of life for young adults while being a most enjoyable activity (Upadhyay, 2014:37). DeNora (2000) broadly presents the meaning of music in everyday life as follows: (1) music as a device of social ordering, (2) music and collective occasions, and (3) music as a touchstone of social relations.

Music can be viewed as a social ordering instrument since it develops a whole new aesthetic dimension of ordering activities. It demonstrates how music may be utilised to govern and structure social interactions by acting as a resource for regulating feelings, mood, concentration, and energy levels. In other words, because modern music frequently articulates political themes and strives to establish the parameters of social scenarios in real-time settings, it is vital to evaluate music's role in the structuring of agency in real-time settings (DeNora, 2000:109-111).

The function and meaning of music in collective events are sometimes disregarded because people are unaware of how they are responding to and interpreting music. One tends to "fall" in with the music, which may necessitate a realignment of one's bodily posture, emotional state, or social behaviour. Individuals feel empowered because music does more than just stimulate bodily action. The tendency to "fall" in with the music emphasises people's ability to accept and adapt to musical resources in collective events, whether consciously or unconsciously. Because of the impact music has on social organisation, movement patterns, and social roles, it is appropriate to view musical material as a method of collective social events (DeNora, 2000:123-125).

Music can be utilised to convey messages that cannot be expressed in words, therefore giving the music the meaning of a societal touchstone. Music can be used to identify behaviours, values, style, and musical orientation, and as a prescriptive device or a trigger for social agency. For instance, a participant in DeNora's (2000) study described how she used music to differentiate herself from her boyfriend. Through musical practice, she was able to see and consider leaving her partner. As a result, one might gather or "discover" oneself in the structural and sensuous parameters of music (dynamics, sound envelopes, harmonies, textures, and colours) (DeNora, 2000:127-129).

Music and musical experiences provide crucial pathways through life, which explains the significance that young adults with ADHD may place on such encounters (Frith, 2004:46). Music is strong in that it can both balance and upset us emotionally. While music can serve as a tool for self-regulation and comfort, it can also intensify distress, such as when certain sounds or rhythms become overstimulating or when musical associations evoke difficult memories. This duality highlights the complexity of music's role in emotional well-being for young adults with ADHD. Music creates meaning in everyday life because it can be a coping strategy when facing various challenges one encounters in life (Beckmann, 2013:98, 100). A study closely related to mine is that of Beckmann (2013) who presented the narratives of three adolescents concerning their everyday use of music. Beckmann's findings include examples of how music can be used as a medium to regulate and influence emotions and contribute to the construction of self-identity and belonging.

Music, in general, has meaning for young adults as individuals and groups as we are surrounded primarily by mechanically produced, mass-distributed music in our everyday lives (Beckmann, 2013:96; DeNora, 2000:129). Kirby and Burland (2022:562-563) broadly organised the role music plays in the everyday lives of young adults. This includes the use of music to sustain, alter, or induce emotion, and to evoke memories of past events, experiences, or people. The social function of music includes the use of music to build and maintain relationships and facilitate identity development (DeNora, 2000:130).

Music is also used to convey emotions beyond the reach of words and plays a leading role in the development of identity. Narratives of musical experiences convey different meanings for everyone, whether you are a musician or not. Musical experiences never occur in isolation but are always part of a bigger whole (Beckmann, 2013:97-98). As a result, it is difficult to describe the meaning of music using linguistic terms (Vadén & Torvinen, 2014:210). In other words, music can carry any meaning we choose to ascribe to it, and facilitating meaning depends on the person who uses it. Meaning has a tripartite definition, including purpose, significance, and coherence (Martela & Steger, 2016). Those who live meaningful lives experience their lives making sense

(Li *et al.*, 2019), evaluate their lives as significant (Van Tongeren & Van Tongeren, 2021), and are motivated since they have a purpose and reason for living. Simon Frith (2004) emphasises that music has the mysterious power to both help manage and disrupt our emotions. He states that there is no greater way to be shocked by life than through music (Frith, 2004:46-47).

In his paper *Music and everyday life*, Frith (2004:36) reflects on technological advancements and the impact thereof on music, suggesting that “music is the soundtrack of everyday life, and no law is going to change that”. Frith (2004:36) writes about how music seems to stream from open windows of apartment buildings and cars driving down the streets as though humans are incapable of living without it. Perhaps it was Hollywood that taught us to demand background music or a constant melodic commentary on the movie of our lives. Even if that were true, a soundtrack would never have been successful because life moves at a fast pace, especially for young adults with ADHD (Frith, 2004:36-37).

According to research (Frith, 2004), the need to be in control through the integration of emotional and aesthetic control is the driving force behind people’s everyday use of music. By doing so, an individual can set the stage for appropriate emotional expression, whether to oneself or others. Furthermore, according to Frith (2004:44), people are more likely to listen to a certain type of music while performing chores and duties. This is something I can relate to—the music I listen to on my way to work is determined by my mood after waking up. I listen to different genres depending on my mood, whether it is to distract or help me concentrate. The easy availability of music in everyday life encourages individuals to use music to optimise their sense of well-being, especially for young adults with ADHD (Frith, 2004:44-45).

1.4 Purpose statement

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the meaning-making stories five young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. Music can have meaning for young adults with ADHD by utilising music as a tool for motivation or conveying emotion (Morris, 2012:580). Music carries the meaning that we ascribe to it—even the search for the meaning of music contributes to its meaning (Vadén & Torvinen, 2014:210). The meaning of music is characterised by healing and developing self-esteem, feeling accepted by yourself and others, having positive attitudes and a positive state of mind, and self-awareness (Sholeh & Supena, 2021:100).

1.5 Research question

The research question is formulated as follows:

What are the meaning-making stories five young adults with ADHD tell about to music?

1.6 Procedures

It is generally acknowledged in the human sciences that the researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in their creation (Riessman, 2008:27). I utilised a qualitative research approach and a narrative strategy of inquiry. The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people ascribe to them (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:240). I did so by using appropriate linguistics that aligns with the use of narrative as a strategy of inquiry.

1.6.1 Research approach and method

Individuals interacting with their environment create meaning socially (Merriam & Grenier, 2019:3). According to Bresler (2006:2), stories have an aesthetic purpose and are analogous to Dewey's concept of experience. Without stories, life and history would be meaningless. Qualitative research is therefore characterised by the search for meaning and understanding where the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam & Grenier, 2019:6). Human beings both live and tell stories about their lived experiences. These stories about lived experiences create meaning in their lives and foster a sense of community, hence my use of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006:44, 45).

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience (Clandinin, 2006:46) because of the specific focus on stories individuals tell. Stories are spoken or written texts giving an account of the event(s) and action(s) which are chronologically connected (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:240). The term "narrative" refers to texts at several levels that overlap stories told by participants, interpretive accounts developed by the researcher based on interviews, and the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with participants' and researchers' narratives (Riessman, 2008:14). Individuals and groups are thus able to construct identities when engaging in storytelling, especially narratives regarding musical experiences and the meaning individuals ascribe to music. The collaborative nature of narrative inquiry is aligned with the collaborative endeavour of participants in qualitative research design (Merriam & Grenier, 2019:3) as it is a way of characterising the phenomena of human experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:2).

The primary reason for using narrative inquiry is that humans are storytelling organisms that live storied lives both individually and socially (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:2; O'Neill, 2009:25). The term "narrative" is synonymous with "stories" because the participant connects narrative events in a way that is important for later action along with the message the narrator is trying to get across (Riessman, 2008:12).

Later action refers to future behaviour in the participant's life and indications for further research and advances in pedagogical practice. My study focussed on the latter aspect. To better understand these narratives, the social role of the participants' stories was an important aspect of this study because of the purpose narratives serve to individuals and groups. For example, individuals often use narratives to remember, argue, justify, persuade, engage, and even mislead audiences, whereas groups use stories to mobilise others and foster a sense of community (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:2-4; Riessman, 2008:16). It is therefore essential to take into consideration how the stories are told by drawing attention to the plots and storylines (O'Toole, 2018:176).

1.6.1.1 Data collection

Qualitative research approaches and methods rely on texts and images as data sources. The data collection procedures will consist of studying individuals' musical experiences and the meaning thereof by gathering data through collecting the stories of participants, reporting on their individual experiences, and ordering the meaning of those experiences chronologically (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:240). Data collection included semi-structured interviews, utilising open-ended questions which, in turn, allowed participants to tell their stories (Bresler, 2006:4). By avoiding set questions along with interruptions, each participant could feel free to share whatever musical experiences they chose to. I recorded each interview to have verbatim representations of every participant's musical experience to ensure that my findings were as accurate as possible (Riessman, 2008:177). I adhered to my interview protocol (Annexure A), which focussed on the role of music in the everyday lives of young adults with ADHD to answer the research question. This allowed for a better narrative analysis.

Apart from what has been argued about narrative inquiry in the paragraph above, it further entails a process of collaboration that involves mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:4). Restorying is a process of gathering stories, analysing them for key elements (time, place, plot, scene), and rewriting them to place them in a chronological sequence (Clandinin, 2006:46; Creswell *et al.*, 2007:243-244). I, therefore, collected raw data from participants' stories in the form of field texts or interviews, analysed these stories, and restoried them in chronological order to comprehend these experiences (O'Toole, 2018:177).

1.6.1.2 Data analysis

Stories present diachronic data that can be arranged into chronological order (Bresler, 2006:2). The data analysis methods, therefore, produce rich, descriptive data that can be interpreted through the identification and coding of themes and categories, leading to findings that can

contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical use. Narratives or stories can structure perceptual experiences, organise memories, and purpose-build the events of life. Connecting biography and society becomes possible through the close analysis of participants' stories (Riessman, 2008:17-18). Narrative analysis refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have a story's form in common.

Thematic analysis was applied to stories that develop in interview conversations: it illustrated how stories can have effects beyond their meaning for individual storytellers, creating possibilities for social identities, group belonging, and collective action (Riessman, 2008:54). I used the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti 22 to analyse the stories by employing a multi-layered approach as presented by O'Toole (2018:177). This involves a focus on *how* the story is told, *what* is said, and the *context wherein* the story is told. This allowed me to illustrate the previously mentioned three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), namely, temporality, sociality, and place.

The process of data analysis can be based on Linde's work as presented by Riessman (2008:177). The application of Linde's theory requires that discontinuities in any story must be explored by the researcher and that fully demonstrated connections are substantial to the analytic interpretation of findings. During the process of data analysis, I will aim to unfold important insights from the stories participants tell and reveal facets in each story to attract different readers (Riessman, 2008:181). By doing so, those who read this study will form their own opinion about the findings.

1.6.2 The participants

The research process aimed to understand the meaning of the musical experiences of young adults with ADHD. I therefore recruited five participants by posting an advertisement on four social media platforms, namely, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram. Individuals participating in this study did so voluntarily, which helped clear researcher bias. I chose my five participants based on the following inclusion criteria: participants must be ages 18 and up and use and have used in the past prescribed medication for ADHD. Formal diagnoses are also accepted. Participants from any occupation or background can participate. The following participants will be excluded from this study based on the following criteria: children and adolescents younger than 18, young adults older than 28, and young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 without ADHD. I am aware that other researchers' range of age for young adults differ; my range differs because I wanted to include those who are older than 25, as per Higley's (2019) definition. The participant who was 28 years old when I recruited participants really wanted to be included in this study. Thus, I made an exception. Participants were allowed to choose pseudonyms that do not necessarily correspond to gender (Habron & van der Merwe, 2020:1)

and will sign an informed consent form as prescribed by BaSSREC, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University (Ethics number: NWU-01097-22-A7).

1.6.3 The role of the researcher

David Carr (1986) claims that narrative inquiry pervades our experience of time and social existence. My interest thus revolved around the continuity between everyday life and the lived, multi-sensory aspects of musical experiences of young adults living with attention disorders (Bresler, 2006:5). As this study was based on a process of collaboration, my role as a researcher was to describe, collect, and construct narratives of participants' musical experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:2). I analysed and reported on the stories the participants with ADHD told about their musical experiences whilst actively collaborating with the participants, studying their individual experiences (Clandinin, 2006:46). I also participated in this study by telling my own story, true to the nature of narrative inquiry (Habron & Van der Merwe, 2020).

Personal connection in narrative inquiry included the conceptualisation of narratives as a way of understanding the world empathetically. This allowed for the exploration and negotiation of polysemic meanings of musical experiences of young adults with attention disorders (Bresler, 2006:2-3). If the stories of the participants interweave with my own, our collaborative reflection about them could lead to more insight into my world and those of my participants. Personal connection and orientation of emotions enable perceptions, conceptualisation, and making meaning (Bresler, 2006:2). I negotiated the meaning of these stories with the participants which contributed to the validity of this narrative inquiry (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:244-245). I intended to be a congruent narrative analyst by prompting the readers to think beyond the surface of the text in this study and to facilitate a move toward a broader understanding of the meaning (Riessman, 2008:20) of music for young adults with ADHD

1.7 Validity

Riessman (2008:172) states that there are two important aspects regarding the validity of a study such as my own: the story told by the participant and the restoried analysis of the researcher. It is, therefore, important that all participants have a voice within the relationship, indicating that I, as the researcher, should listen to the stories of the participants first, allowing them to take the time and space they need to tell their stories. This fostered a sense of greater validity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:3-4). I, therefore, implemented strategies that ensured my research was trustworthy, including peer review, member checking, and providing rich, thick descriptions (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:250-252). My study supervisor served as a peer reviewer of this dissertation. Rich, thick descriptions were supported by researcher transparency, stating how

methodological decisions were made and describing how interpretations were constructed, including the consideration of alternative interpretations (Riessman, 2008:182).

Member checking facilitated credibility in this narrative study as presenting my findings to the participants was a crucial step to promote validity. Participants must be able to recognise their narratives and agree with their representation for the findings to be credible (Riessman, 2008:184). Riessman (2008:184) postulates that member checking contributes mostly to aspects of ethical considerations and not directly toward the validity of findings.

1.8 Ethics

Creswell (2013:132) emphasises the need for researchers to anticipate extensive ethical issues that may arise during the research process, especially as I “collected data from people, about people”. It was thus essential to protect those who participated in this study by fostering trust within researcher-participant relationships. By doing so, I could promote integrity and guard participants against misconduct.

Before beginning the study, I completed the TRREE (BaSSREC, 2010) ethics training to ensure my study adhered to the necessary guidelines. I considered my code of ethics as a researcher and submitted an application to my institution’s review board, BaSSREC. Informed consent forms (Annexure B) presented the standard set of elements that acknowledged the protection of the human rights of participants. Such elements included (1) identification of the researcher, sponsoring institution, the purpose of the study, benefits for participants, and the level and type of participant involvement; (2) notification of risks to the participant; (3) guarantee of confidentiality to the participants; (4) assurance that participants can withdraw at any time; and (5) provisions of names of persons to contact if any questions arise. Interviews took place virtually if participants did not reside in Potchefstroom.

Ethical considerations when beginning to conduct the study included identifying the potential benefits of the research problem and disclosing the purpose of the study to avoid deceiving participants. I did not pressure participants into signing consent forms. During data collection, I respected interview settings by causing minimal disruptions. During the data analysis process of the narrative inquiry, I avoided taking sides and disclosing positive results only.

When presenting results after collecting and analysing data, I avoided falsifying authorship, evidence, and data and disclosing information that could potentially harm participants. Furthermore, I communicated through straightforward and appropriate language when I talked to participants and presented my findings to them. The four major aspects of research integrity of the BaSSREC code of conduct that I adhered to, were: (1) honesty in all major aspects of

research, (2) accountability in the conduct of research, (3) professional courtesy and fairness in working with others, and (4) good stewardship of research on behalf of others (BaSSREC, 2010).

Although ADHD is a neurodevelopmental and mental disorder, this study was a low-risk study as the interviews did not explore ADHD but rather the musical experiences for meaning-making. Furthermore, young adults are not a vulnerable group of people as they can make independent life choices and participate voluntarily. The participants have no vulnerabilities in terms of cognition which contributes to the minimal risk of this study.

1.9 Summary

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the meaning-making stories that five young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. Despite the growing body of research on music's role in well-being and ADHD, there is a notable gap in understanding how young adults with ADHD personally interpret the meaning of music in their everyday lives (Saarikallio, 2011). While existing studies focus largely on clinical interventions or generalised effects of music on attention and emotional regulation, few explore the subjective, lived experiences of this demographic (DeNora, 2000). This study addresses that gap by employing narrative inquiry to delve into the personal stories of young adults with ADHD, offering new insights into how music shapes their identities, coping mechanisms, and overall well-being.

The interviews emphasised the meaning-making stories that young adults ascribe to music (see Annexure A). This study could offer contributions to further research on the meaning young adults ascribe to music as there is a gap in the literature. There are consistent strengths of ADHD which can be supported by musical experiences, such as elevated levels of energy, determined effort, creativity, and selective hyper-focus (Wilde & Welch, 2022:12). Musical experiences along with these consistent strengths that come along with ADHD may benefit young adults with ADHD by helping determine their future goals, values, personal beliefs, and to see greater meaning in life (Beckmann, 2013:96).

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

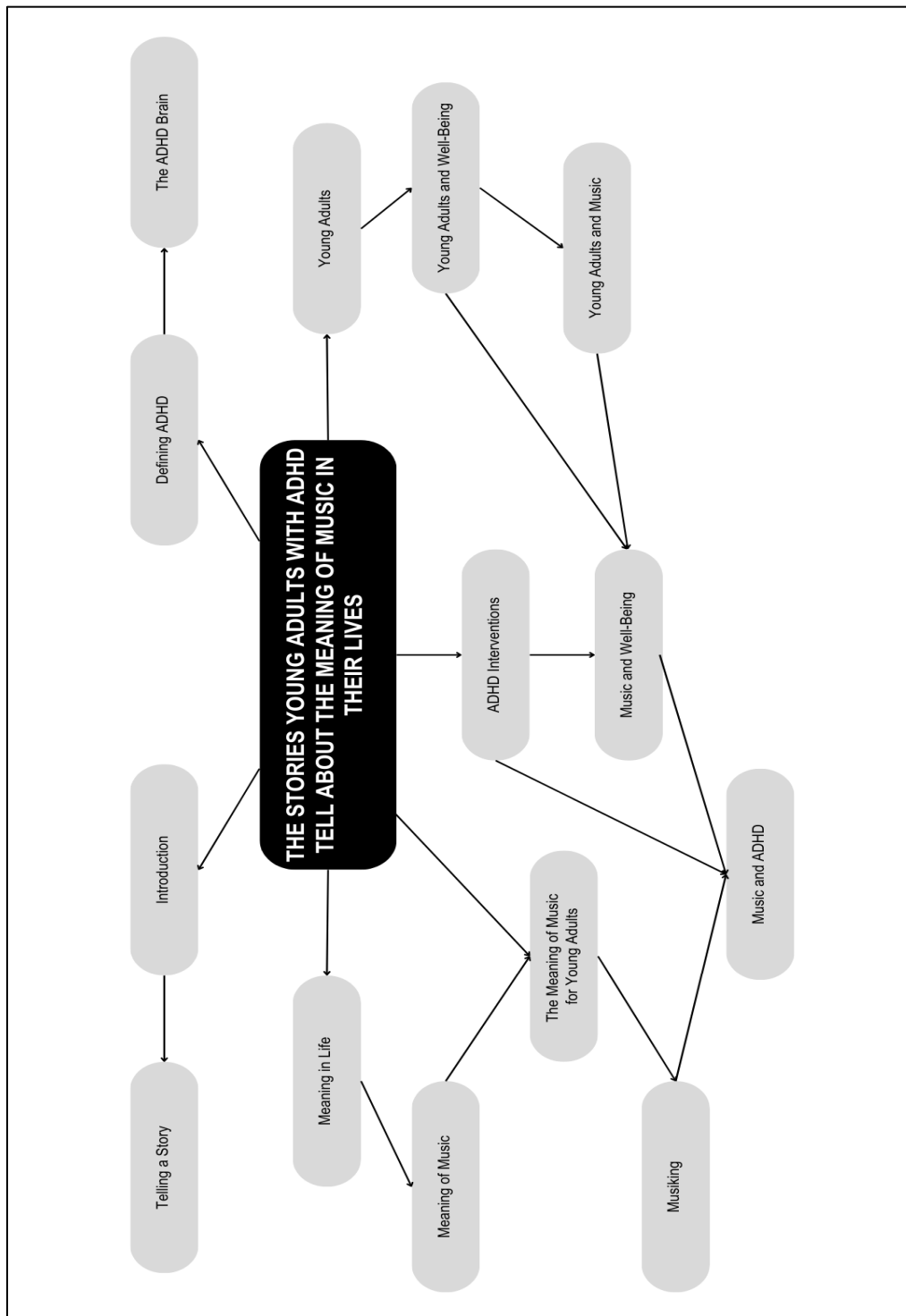


Figure 2.1: Literature Map

2.1 Introduction

A literature review summarises and evaluates a body of publications on a certain topic (Knopf, 2023:127). The focus of this literature review was not only to explore the vast amount of literature

on music and ADHD, but also the meaning, how it is constructed and the importance thereof in our everyday lives. Identifying the goal of literature reviews helped me comprehend why and how researchers perform such evaluations, as a large quantity of material is gathered and presented so that the reader can properly understand the subject (Green *et al.*, 2006:102). Kaminstein (2017) wrote an article that I found helpful in my preparation to conduct this literature review, stating the main goals of a literature review. First, to improve my understanding of the issues explained to ensure that the academic writing is both informed and thorough. Second, to present the reader with a critical review of research related to the topic. The third goal is to identify and highlight gaps in the literature. The goals provided various benefits to the literature review by critically examining the findings and assertions derived from past research and determining how reliable and complete such previous research is (Knopf, 2023:127).

As the literature review identifies and organises the many concepts discovered in the accessible literature, research must be informed by current knowledge in a specific topic area (Rowley & Slack, 2004:331). This helps to reveal what has already been done so that time is not wasted reinventing the wheel (Knopf, 2023:127). Consequently, it is critical that researchers employ peer-reviewed papers and journals that meet specified scientific, philosophical, theoretical, and ethical standards (Kaminstein, 2010:7:4). Rowley and Slack (2004:32) suggest that literature reviews help find literature that offers contributions and contextualisation and help evaluate where there are weaknesses in existing research (Knopf, 2023:127). This aids researchers in developing a grasp of theoretical topics and language. By presenting an overview of the main topics discovered in the research, I was able to construct frameworks to help connect other aspects of my dissertation during my review of the literature (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009:112). It took a few months to gather all the sources cited in my dissertation. I used a combination of keywords, such as music, musicking, ADHD, meaning, the meaning of music, young adults, and narrative inquiry. I gathered the literature from peer-reviewed academic journal articles, books, master's dissertations and PhD thesis. I also conducted another search for new, more recent literature before I wrote the findings and conclusions chapter. Almost two years had passed since writing the literature review, so I wanted to ensure that I included the most recent available literature that aligned with my topic.

The study on methodology practices to review the literature available explored the many functions that a literature review might involve (Kaminstein, 2017:5). A good review does not simply summarise what has been said in existing literature, but rather critically evaluates what has been said, identifies methodological issues, and finds gaps in such literature (Byrne, 2016:1; Kaminstein, 2017:5). The literature on a specific issue is studied to lay the groundwork by identifying and arranging essential ideas (Byrne, 2016:1). This enables researchers to demonstrate how their research increases knowledge and aids in the identification of gaps in the current literature (Knopf, 2023:127; Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009:112; Rowley & Slack, 2004:37). By

researching the process surrounding literature reviews, I advanced my research by putting it in a broader context and demonstrating what new conclusions could be drawn from this study (Knopf, 2023:127).

2.1.1 Telling a story

The literature review, according to Kaminstein (2017:7), is analogous to narrating a story. Headings can be compared to the numerous chapters in a storybook; they can thus be used to analyse existing materials to facilitate the distillation and understanding of diverse topics (Rowley & Slack, 2004:37). This correlates with the methodology of my dissertation because the tales told may have different meanings for different people. Many academics employ narrative inquiry as a study approach because the stories reveal facts about the human experience (Riessman, 2008:17). According to Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009:122-123), a literature review supports the research design and methodology to be used by researchers. Clandinin and Connelly (2000:2) posit that presenting the literature review narratively can assist researchers in characterising phenomena of human experience, in this case, the meaning young adults ascribe to music in their daily lives. A narrative review of the literature aids in providing the best potential contributions to the area while fulfilling the demands of readers (Byrne, 2016:2).

2.2 “Being” ADHD

In recent years, ADHD has received significant attention in a range of study domains, including medicine, psychology, neurology, and education (Wilde & Welch, 2022:2-3). Thus, understanding attention disorders is important because they can overlap and be comorbid with other physical and mental health diagnoses, namely, substance use disorders, higher rates of gambling behaviour, oppositional defiant disorder, disruptive behaviour disorder, conduct disorder, mood disorder (unipolar and bipolar), anxiety disorders, depression, and developmental learning disorders (Ben-Dor Cohen *et al.*, 2021:2; Chamberlain *et al.*, 2017:22; Dursun *et al.*, 2021:4220; Mushtaq *et al.*, 2021:143; Nunes-Silva *et al.*, 2018:88; Rickson, 2006:40; Tran, 2021:203).

Children with ADHD are more prone to develop conduct disorders in adolescence and antisocial personality disorders in adulthood according to the DSM-5-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2022:62). According to Tran (2021:203), ADHD is frequently coupled with a medical burden due to numerous health concerns such as obesity, smoking, and non-adherence. Ghetti *et al.* (2024:2) put forward the idea that people with substance use disorders are often linked and diagnosed with ADHD with a reported prevalence of 7.6-32.6% in Nordic countries. Coetzee *et al.* (2020:1) reported that 64% of adolescents with ADHD were likely to engage in alcohol and drug use, making exposure to substances one of the most important health-related issues for youth and young adults with ADHD.

Some children can outgrow ADHD as they get older since adults have significantly more choices in picking the location in which they live and the type of work they do to better match their cognitive style and reward preferences (Rojas *et al.*, 2023:161). As a result, I present a broad overview of the current literature on the significance of music for young adults with ADHD.

2.2.1 Defining ADHD

ADHD is the most common psychiatric disorder in children, and it lasts into adulthood in roughly 60% of instances (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2017:22). ADHD is a syndrome that disrupts cognitive abilities that are crucial to fear and response to the present environment, with executive control of inhibitory inadequacies being the predominant deficiency (Gilden & Marusich, 2009:265). As a result, ADHD is defined as a multifaceted and persistent pattern of inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity that is frequently associated with developmentally inappropriate behaviour patterns. Rojas *et al.* (2023:161), on the other hand, contend that ADHD is defined by the inability to correctly regulate the application of attention to tasks that are not intrinsically gratifying and require effort. ADHD is strongly linked to anxiety, despair, emotional difficulties, and a lack of social skills (Henry, 2017:32).

ADHD in young adults is estimated to affect 2-5% of the global population (Ben-Dor Cohen *et al.*, 2021:2; Chamberlain *et al.*, 2017:22; Mushtaq *et al.*, 2021:143). ADHD is believed to affect 3-6% of children and is more frequent in boys (75%) according to Rickson (2006:40). In contrast, Mushtaq *et al.* (2021:143) argue that it is more common in girls. However, Rickson (2006) emphasises that although the disorder's manifestation may fluctuate over time, it affects children from infancy through adolescence and into maturity. These contrasting perspectives highlight the complexity of ADHD, suggesting that both gender differences and developmental changes play significant roles in how the disorder presents and persists.

According to Coetzee *et al.* (2020:1), the lifetime occurrence of ADHD in South Africa is unknown. The anticipated number of adults with ADHD, aged between 20 and 50 years, would be between 3-5% of the population. Unfortunately, people with ADHD are more vulnerable to negative opinions held by peers, family, and educators (Henry, 2017:13). Furthermore, negative opinions associated with cultural circumstances also influence how behaviour was evaluated and whether it was considered developmentally appropriate or not. Behavioural patterns associated with ADHD is frequently regarded as unsuitable and abnormal (Henry, 2017:38).

Furthermore, ADHD primarily impairs attention and executive processes (working memory, inhibitory response, and self-regulation) and is linked to lower performance on time perception and phonological skills assessments (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2017:23; Nunes-Silva *et al.*, 2018:88).

Emotional dysregulation, as a component of self-regulation, is perhaps the most noticeable characteristic of ADHD, as individuals are unable to adjust their emotional state to promote adaptive, goal-oriented behaviour (Ben-Dor Cohen *et al.*, 2021:2). If untreated, ADHD can cause major social and psychological problems for people throughout their life (Henry, 2017:39).

Many sources agree that ADHD is defined by three key characteristics: inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, as well as an underlying collection of symptoms (Ben-Dor Cohen *et al.*, 2021; Henry, 2017:39; McBride *et al.*, 2021:3534; Mushtaq *et al.*, 2021:143; Redshaw, 2022:20; Wilde & Welch, 2022:3). ADHD symptoms change with age, with adults exhibiting less evident hyperactivity and impulsivity and more inattentive symptoms (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2021:143). The prevalence of ADHD does not decrease with age but instead increases (Rojas *et al.*, 2023:160).

2.2.1.1 Inattention

ADHD relates to a lack of focus, which affects cortical arousal and executive performance (McBride *et al.*, 2021:3534). Inattention manifests itself behaviourally as a tendency to wander off task, a lack of tenacity, difficulty keeping focus, and disorganisation (American Psychiatric Association, 2022:62). Inattention can also express as appearing drowsy or distracted, as well as failing to listen to directions (de l'Etoile, 2005:39). While inattention primarily affects cognitive focus and task persistence, it often coexists with hyperactivity, particularly in younger individuals with ADHD. The struggle to maintain attention can contribute to restless energy, leading to excessive movement and difficulty remaining still. As mentioned in 2.2.1, ADHD is reported to be less common in females (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2021:143), which contrasts with findings presented by Rickson (2006), who argues that the disorder's manifestation in girls is often underdiagnosed due to differing symptoms compared to boys. While boys tend to exhibit more overt hyperactive and impulsive behaviors, girls may display inattentiveness and internalised symptoms, leading to fewer diagnoses. These contrasting views underscore the ongoing debate around gender differences in ADHD presentation and diagnosis, suggesting that prevalence rates may be influenced by diagnostic criteria and societal perceptions.

2.2.1.2 Hyperactivity

Hyperactivity emerges as physical behaviour, such as climbing and sprinting at a considerably faster and more intense rate than expected. This involves excessive fidgeting, tapping, difficulty sitting, jitteriness, restlessness, and irritability (American Psychiatric Association, 2022:62; Rojas *et al.*, 2023:161). Hyperactive people are described as always on the go or as being propelled by a motor (de l'Etoile, 2005:39). Hyperactivity is most prominent characteristic seen in children with ADHD. Hyperactive adults may be agitated or exhaust others with their enthusiasm (American Psychiatric Association, 2022:62). Hyperactivity, characterised by constant movement and

restlessness, frequently overlaps with impulsivity. The difficulty in regulating physical activity can extend to impulsive decision-making, where individuals act quickly without considering long-term consequences.

2.2.1.3 Impulsivity

The inability to delay gratification and the tendency to act without thinking are both definitions of impulsivity (de l'Etoile, 2005:39). Impulsive behaviour might manifest as social intrusiveness, impatience, and making key decisions without thinking about the long-term consequences (American Psychiatric Association, 2022:62; Chamberlain *et al.*, 2017:23). Impulsivity is more likely to manifest during the transition phase from adolescence to adulthood (i.e., young adulthood) and can manifest in diverse ways, such as a proclivity for substance abuse (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2017:23; Higley, 2019:3).

2.3 Young adults

Redshaw (2022:22-23) conducted a study exploring the effects that ADHD had on people's sense of self from childhood into adulthood. After reading the preceding article, I felt compelled to conduct additional research on young adults with ADHD because adulthood can be a sensitive period in an individual's life (Li *et al.*, 2019:122). The challenges they face may increase their risk of mental health and substance use problems, which can have serious consequences (Ghetti *et al.*, 2024:2; Mushtaq *et al.*, 2021:143).

The subsequent transition to adulthood is typically difficult, taxing young persons' coping capacities and increasing their likelihood of developing mental health issues (Papinczak *et al.*, 2015:1120). Unemployment, interpersonal troubles, societal problems, low self-esteem, communication problems, poor concentration, and poor academic performance are some of the repercussions (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2017:22; Mushtaq *et al.*, 2021:143; Sholeh & Supena, 2021:95). Furthermore, this period is marked by self-exploration to cultivate personal identity and belief systems while attaining independence and autonomy (Higley, 2019:3). The situations in which people find themselves vary dramatically at this age. The transition to adulthood is especially noticeable in this regard, as people find themselves in occupational and educational surroundings that are very different from school settings (Rojas *et al.*, 2023:161). Redshaw (2022:22-23) continues by emphasising the fresh perspectives that maturity can provide, particularly as people with attention issues learn more about ADHD, "find their niche", and value being different.

ADHD persists into adulthood and can negatively impact relationships, professions and academic performance and is associated with learning difficulties, adjustment concerns, and interpersonal

conflicts (Leconte *et al.*, 2019:20; Mushtaq *et al.*, 2021:143). Because of their peculiarities, young adults with ADHD frequently feel alienated from society and are more likely to develop an antisocial personality disorder, making them feel even more distant from their peers (American Psychiatric Association, 2022:63). Individuals can reflect on and question life and life experiences (Upadhyay, 2014:37), allowing them to connect with their real selves and accept the difficulties of life with ADHD (Redshaw, 2022:25).

2.3.1 Young adults and well-being

Wakelin *et al.* (2023) conducted a literature review that emphasises a multimodal treatment approach for young adults with ADHD. They aim to inform clinicians and researchers about the most effective, up-to-date management of ADHD symptoms for enhancing well-being. By addressing the emotional, social, and cognitive challenges associated with ADHD, a holistic approach to well-being in young adults is promoted, helping them lead more balanced and fulfilling lives. The psychological functions of music-based interventions serve a wide range of beneficial personal and social purposes, including social expression, social bonding, and the creation of identity and values (Upadhyay, 2014:38). Music is also widely used as a mood regulation strategy, particularly for maintaining or changing moods (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:576).

For young adults, the cultural relevance of music is often tied to their experience of emotional and behavioural challenges, such as anger, depression, happiness, and nostalgia (DeNora, 2000:129; Hallam & Himonides, 2022:347; Pan *et al.*, 2021:41-49). Those who have stronger relationships with family, school, and peers are more confident and exhibit greater character and kindness (Travis, 2012:146). This is supported by Mushtaq *et al.* (2021:143), who note that young adults facing the transition to adulthood encounter challenges that may lead to social problems, low self-esteem, and poor academic functioning. These functional deficiencies contribute to individuals with ADHD suffering high levels of daily stress, despair, and substance abuse disorders (Wakelin *et al.*, 2023:2).

As humans, we are constantly seeking happiness and fulfilment, looking for ways to better our quality of life and our physical and emotional well-being (Cruywagen, 2018:5). Carter and Andersen (2022) and Cruywagen (2018) reported on the concept and importance of well-being, specifically in educational settings by providing a deeper understanding of the differences between hedonic and eudemonic well-being. According to the hedonic perspective (feeling good), well-being is linked to the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of suffering, with a focus on happiness and satisfaction. In contrast, the eudemonic perspective (functioning well) emphasises the relevance of meaningful involvement, personal progress in well-being, and living a satisfying life (Carter & Anderson, 2022:13; Cruywagen, 2018:5). For young adults with ADHD, achieving

both hedonic and eudemonic well-being is particularly challenging, as daily struggles with focus and impulsivity often disrupt their sense of pleasure, happiness, and meaning.

Papinczak *et al.* (2015:1120) offer two definitions of happiness: (1) the presence of positive emotions and positive psychological and social functioning, and (2) a state of well-being. In this context, Carter and Anderson's (2022) analysis suggests that happiness and well-being are not always synonymous. While pleasurable events can lead to happiness, well-being refers to a larger sense of life fulfilment and purpose, which may or may not coincide with happiness. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines well-being as "a state where the individual realises his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community". Carter and Anderson (2022) extend this by emphasising the relationship between subjective feeling and the external conditions that shape well-being in educational settings.

Music participation might facilitate emotion management in educational settings, where young adults frequently turn to boost happy mood, diminish bad mood, and induce nostalgia or solace (DeNora, 2000:129). This implies that young adults use music for the "expression of feelings, reinforcement of sentiments, and discharge of feelings" (Travis, 2012:142) and that actively participating in music promotes healthy development in young adults (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:319).

2.3.2 Young adults and music

Music has always been and will always be an essential element of life (DeNora, 2000:129). The relationship between young adults and music has been studied from various scholarly perspectives. Music is used to claim cultural space (both in public and in private) such as when people choose a genre and volume of music to establish boundaries between themselves and others (Papinczak *et al.*, 2015:1119). Social psychologists have studied how music is used to explore and build identity, and they discovered that people attach personality traits to others depending on their musical tastes (Papinczak *et al.*, 2015:1119).

Pan *et al.*'s (2021) study is particularly relevant to my research due to the increased stress experienced by many groups of individuals in today's day and age. Graduate students are the group examined most closely in this study. Many of the psychological and behavioural issues that graduate students face are the result of daily pressures. It can have an impact on deeper aspects of people's personality, such as their self-confidence (Pan *et al.*, 2021:41). Music-based therapies can improve young adults' mental health and well-being by assisting them in recognising and controlling coping reactions to tough and emotionally charged situations (Hallam & Himonides,

2022:347). For young adults with ADHD, music provides a unique and accessible way to manage mood and focus, bridging gaps left by traditional interventions.

Travis' (2012) study focuses on the deconstruction of rap music for personal growth, development, well-being, and redressing inequalities, as well as how music can be used as a personal resource to overcome the different curveballs that life throws at young adults. Rap, hip hop, and rhythm and blues, according to Hallam and Himonides (2022:347), provide a cultural prism through which many people build identities or express themselves. Bogt *et al.* (2021:2498) support the preceding statement by stating that music is important to young adults because it is a benevolent force that combats emotional and interpersonal distress fosters mood improvement, soothes when one is in trouble, energise at parties, and helps you find friends—it may be key to your identity(Hallam & Himonides, 2022:347).

2.4 Music and ADHD

“Music is more than a thing or a collection of things; it is an action in which we participate” (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:162). Music is a potent sensory stimulus with physiological, psychological, and social consequences (Kasuya-Ueba *et al.*, 2020:1). Participation in musical activities may contribute to stress reduction, mood management, identity creation, and emotional expression (Kirby & Burland, 2022:563). Music elicits a psychological reaction through modifying mood, which leads to better health results. The impression of music eliciting an emotional reaction indicates that the limbic system is processing music inputs. As a result, music has a considerable impact on individuals' emotional responses, which impacts human emotions in general and thus psychological and physical health (Pan *et al.*, 2021:46-47). The findings of Dursun *et al.* (2021:4220-4221), show that the auditory system is linked to “speech and language development, social development, attention, and neurocognitive functions”. Working memory, inhibition, planning, and information processing are examples of these musical activities (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:42).

Long-term structural brain differences between musicians and non-musicians are evident in neuroimaging investigations of musical training (Rose *et al.*, 2018:4). Research by Hallam and Himonides (2022) shows that specific cerebral areas become more active based on the tones of musical experiences, which affects auditory processing. Musical tones assist in connecting brain areas, improve working memory skills, and build new connections because of a joyful activity (Dursun *et al.*, 2021:4221; Hallam & Himonides, 2022:152).

Evidence that dopamine pathways are disrupted in ADHD and that “dopamine neurons are tuned into event salience”—a critical stimulating feature in the onset of reward-based learning—suggests that “there may be a link between ADHD and rhythmic expression” (Gilden & Marusich,

2009:266). According to Kasuya-Ueba *et al.* (2020:2), rhythmic patterns promote attention or concentration, whereas melodies and harmonies may alter focus and flow of attention. Learning to play an instrument or to sing commonly necessitates hours of practice, usually alone. This dedication to music may build motivational traits in a sense of self-efficacy and can be employed in non-musical circumstances (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:322-323). This is especially beneficial for young adults with ADHD since music improves motivation, well-being, self-esteem, focus, organisation, and healthy interactions with others.

2.4.1 ADHD interventions

Research implies that one employs music consciously to achieve specific psychological goals which are aspects of well-being (Upadhyay, 2014:39). Extensive research has been conducted to investigate the difficulties and benefits of diagnosis, ADHD characteristics in various circumstances, and the implementation and effects of pharmaceutical and behavioural therapies (Redshaw, 2022:20). As stated in Chapter 1, some of the advantages of ADHD include increased energy, determined effort, inventiveness, and selective hyper-focus (McBride *et al.*, 2021:3534). Individuals with ADHD can use medications that improve their capacity to stop and regulate impulsive behaviour by slowing down the dopamine transporter (Rickson, 2006:40). Through the use of appropriate medication, individuals with ADHD have more time to ponder their options before replying. Many people, on the other hand, are wary of medication due to concerns about diminished creativity and divergent thinking (McBride *et al.*, 2021:3534). Research by Ghetti *et al.* (2024:2) suggests that young adults with ADHD and substance use disorders often tend to self-medicate as they find it helpful for their emotional functioning.

Cognitive neuroscientists evaluated the effects of music learning programmes with special interest in music perception and production. Music plays a significant role in neuroscience, enabling the study of brain plasticity (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:16). The results of such studies demonstrate general gains in a variety of cognitive, behavioural, and socio-emotional skills, motor abilities, auditory memory, literacy, nonverbal reasoning, intellect, and how music learning can improve spatial skills (Rose *et al.*, 2018:3). This is because music facilitates movement such as dancing and hand motions—music makes us want to move (Henry, 2017:47).

Music therapy is becoming increasingly popular and successful as an intervention tool (Kasuya-Ueba *et al.*, 2020:1). It is commonly characterised as the deliberate and planned exploitation of musical qualities to achieve non-musical aims (McFerran, 2009:72). Making music requires a wide range of brain activities, “including those associated with perception, action, cognition, emotion, learning, and memory” (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:16). Non-pharmacological interventions may help identify constructive ways to regulate feelings and emotions and pin-point

destructive patterns that in turn foster motivation for the development of healthier lifestyles (Ghetti *et al.*, 2024:2). Musical engagements allow for more balanced connections between the hemispheres of the brain, and research suggests that this helps with working memory improvement which researchers deemed beneficial to those with ADHD (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:134-135).

Musical instruction enhances pitch, timbre, chords, rhythm, and melodic discrimination. Musicians often have highly developed auditory cortices with better functional activation, enhanced auditory information processing, and more effective pre-attentive functions, particularly in response to the sounds of trained instruments (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:16,38; Seither-Preisler *et al.*, 2014:10937). “The use of music to aid learning” has garnered attention in the literature, such as the use of music combined with visual signals to increase memory, auditory perception, and language skills (Jackson, 2003:305). According to Henry (2017:47), the required stimulation, such as presenting learning material in an aural, visual, and kinaesthetic manner, was supplied to help those with ADHD stay on task.

Furthermore, musical training has been shown to benefit clinical conditions such as stroke, tinnitus, Alzheimer’s disease, dementia, and learning impairments (dyslexia and attention problems) (Frith, 2004:44; Kasuya-Ueba *et al.*, 2020:1; Seither-Preisler *et al.*, 2014:10397-10398). For instance, music can be used to treat issues including motor, emotional, attention, memory, self-regulation, and communication deficiencies (DeNora, 2000:160; Kasuya-Ueba *et al.*, 2020:1; Nunes-Silva *et al.*, 2018:88). Musical training has also been shown to improve verbal, visuospatial, and reading skills according to McFerran (2009:73-74) and Rose *et al.* (2018:4). Furthermore, Henry (2017:47) noted that individuals can successfully employ music-learning processes in non-musical circumstances, allowing young adults to navigate their daily lives. Overall, research suggests that “active participation in music has a considerable impact on brain structure and function, particularly impulse regulation” (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:19) and attentive and impulsive behaviour in people with ADHD (Kasuya-Ueba *et al.*, 2020:2). Music as a therapeutic tool complements these traditional interventions by addressing well-being through fostering focus, motivation, and emotional resilience.

2.4.2 Musicking

The following section discusses the concept of musicking versus musicing. It is important to understand the difference between these terms as they have different meanings and applications. It is also important for the context of this study, as these terms cannot be used interchangeably. Along with my motivation for using the term “musicking” instead of “musicing”, I also draw on three components of musicking, namely, (1) participating through music listening, (2) participating

through music making, and (3) participating through rhythm. The three components of musicking stated above were the most common in the research, and I thought they were more relevant to young adults with ADHD who engage with “music”.

Odendaal *et al.* (2014) and Small (1998), musicologists who investigated the concept of “musicking”, were crucial sources of information for me during my research journey. I have decided on the use of the term “musicking” instead of “musicing” based on the research presented by Odendaal *et al.* (2014) and Small (1998). The phrase “musicking” can be used as both a verb and a noun. Small (1998) coined and defined “musicking” as any music-related action, such as performing, listening, rehearsing, or even creating an environment for music to occur. When used as a verb, “musicking” refers to the engagement with music in any way, while as a noun, it encompasses all music-related activities. In contrast, David Elliot (1995) coined the phrase “musicing” which emphasises the active process of engaging with music rather than viewing music as a static product. He argues that “musicing” encompasses performing, listening, composing, and improvising, shifting the focus to music as an action rather than an object. In other words, Elliot emphasises music as an activity while Small emphasises music as a process (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:164).

Furthermore, music is described as an “event in which people explore, affirm, and celebrate relationships to confirm their identity” (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:172). Based on the research presented by both musicologists, I find it most appropriate to use the term “musicking” in both formats throughout my thesis. Odendaal *et al.* (2014:163) suggest that musicking can be seen as an “educative process in the sense that those who music learn new things of themselves and of the contexts in which they music”. Therefore, I can continue to explore the relationships between musicking and the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to such “events”.

However, Upadhyay (2014:37) states that we know little about why people utilise and perceive music daily. This, however, is not the case according to North *et al.* (2004). They conducted an exploratory study about the value of music in people’s everyday lives. They reported that the function of music listening varied according to “who an individual is with, what music was involved, when the music was heard, and where the music was heard” (North *et al.*, 2004:20). Because of modern technology and streaming platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and iTunes, music is now widely available and accessible for speedy and unfiltered consumption (Frith, 2004:36; Hallam & Himonides, 2022:573; Travis, 2012:140). Given its prevalence and importance, it is worth considering the role of music in everyday life (Rentfrow, 2012:402). North *et al.* (2004:20) and Rentfrow (2012:405) reported that when individuals chose to listen to music, the most common functions were for straightforward enjoyment, passing the time, habit, creating atmosphere, aiding in attempts to complete tasks, and bringing back certain memories.

In contrast, Travis (2012:140) and Rentfrow (2012:404) stated that a worrisome byproduct of music's widespread availability is the excessive violence, misogyny, and substance use evident in popular music lyrics and visuals. In addition, Rentfrow (2012:404) reported on the effects of violent and misogynistic music on aggression and stereotypes, indicating that violent lyrics trigger aggressive thoughts and feelings. He emphasises the harmful consequences of misogynistic music as males tend to behave more aggressively toward women in music. The research by Travis (2012), Rentfrow (2012), and Frith (2004) highlight that the above are thought to be more than just harmless entertainment, but also barriers to quality of life and well-being. While music is often employed to boost happy feelings, it also explores negative subjects such as distress, suicide, and death. Mainstream social psychology has little to say about music, and the rare cases of such research only emphasised mood manipulation (Rentfrow, 2012:402). As a result, studies on music's psychological impact, particularly on an individual's mental health, will always be relevant (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:576) as such studies highlight how we can learn about social behaviour through music (Rentfrow, 2012:402).

Despite the dearth of research on music in mainstream social psychology, more and more studies are examining the strong links between music and relationships, emotion, personality, and self-identity (Rentfrow, 2012:403). Music listening is popular all around the world and is a favourite pastime for many young adults (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:574) because it allows for the nonverbal expression of emotion (Papinczak *et al.*, 2015:1119). A desire for aesthetic experience can drive music listening (DeNora, 2000:110), the management of moods and emotions, the promotion of well-being in persons with chronic illness, or the facilitation of access to new ways of being (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:576). Music can touch people's innermost thoughts without putting them in danger, and it can be used as a tool for emotional catharsis (Pan *et al.*, 2021:47).

Whatever its technical or aesthetic aspects, "live music is music as a social event and an aspect of social situations: it is an organic, living aspect of public life" (Frith, 2004:39). Compared to recorded music, live musical events demonstrate a greater level of devotion to music and are frequently motivated by listening to a specific artist or genre, discovering new music, or social and personal factors. Compared to recorded music, live musical events demonstrate a greater level of devotion to music and are frequently motivated by listening to a specific artist or genre, discovering new music, or social and personal factors (for example, going with friends or being part of a community). Live music provides the most intense musical sensations (Frith, 2004:39). Music festivals offer unique opportunities for in-depth musical experiences, close closeness to the artists, forming social bonds, and enjoying the music. The festival environment can promote a feeling of belonging and support identity formation (DeNora, 2000:111). Festivals are distinguished from other musical events by their sense of isolation from ordinary life, prompting attendees to reflect on their lives (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:577-578).

Music often serves as the soundtrack for young adults' transition into maturity (Beckmann, 2013:95; Frith, 2004:36). People rarely listen to music as an isolated activity because it frequently goes with other pursuits. At the same time, listening to music can make you feel more alert, cheerful, and focused, especially if you choose it yourself (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:581). According to research, the need to be in control is the motivating force for people's daily use of music (Frith, 2004:44). Individuals define and finetune their ideas about who they are, who they want to be, and with whom they want to associate by identifying within a specific body of music and their producers. This could be because music can aid in the definition and resolution of problems (Bogt *et al.*, 2021:2487).

Music has been shown to have a positive effect on mood and quality of life, as well as being a very rewarding leisure activity (Frith, 2004:44; Upadhyay, 2014:37). An increased sense of self-confidence and emotional well-being, particularly in young adults, is fostered (Rose *et al.*, 2018:3; Caló *et al.*, 2020:995). Music-making establishes a network of "relationships between and among musical sounds and people who live in the physical and cultural arena of musicking" (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:162). The creation of organised music, particularly with peers in a group, necessitates a great deal of attention and self-control, which encourages social inclusion (Rose *et al.*, 2018:3). Furthermore, according to Hallam and Himonides (2022:215), research has shown that collaborative music-making promotes the development of emotional intelligence.

Rose *et al.* (2018) conducted a mixed methods study to evaluate how music can aid a child with special educational needs. The findings emerging from their study could also be valuable for young adults, as the study demonstrated that rhythmic entrainment could improve low motor competencies in people with ADHD. Musical learning may be impacted by sensory, memory, cognitive, motor, and language impairments, yet musical interventions have been beneficial in developing the competencies (Rose *et al.*, 2018:4). There is widespread agreement that doing rhythmic tasks improves internal organisation, impulse control, and social connection (Beckmann, 2013:109; Rickson, 2006:41).

In contrast to the benefits of rhythmic entrainment, Rickson (2006:42) reported that students with ADHD struggled with the complexity of rhythmic training in a group context as the creative music-making environment may overwhelm them. The feeling that occurs when we perceive rhythm is an underlying feature of timing behaviour that is universally experienced and suitable for psychological examination (Gilden & Marusich, 2009:265). According to research on ADHD and neuroplasticity, musicking powerfully engages limbic and paralimbic systems via metabolic pathways (Dursun *et al.*, 2021:4221). This is significant because it suggests that musicking may have a direct impact on the emotional regulation and cognitive processes of individuals with ADHD, potentially offering a therapeutic avenue for improving attention and emotional balance.

By engaging these neural systems, musicking may help enhance neuroplasticity, facilitating adaptive changes in brain function that support better management of ADHD symptoms.

Practical musical performance necessitates the creation and use of metronomes that mirror true human timekeeping abilities (Gilden & Marusich, 2009:266). Nevertheless, having a steady rhythm and musical beat can assist young adults develop a sense of security and inner stability, which promotes order, emotional regulation, well-being, and psychological well-being (Dursun *et al.*, 2021:4230). A constant impulse could enclose and retain a person, and rhythm has been utilised to promote body awareness and motor coordination (Rickson, 2006:41).

Rhythmic entrainment, in turn, can facilitate emotional catharsis, especially for individuals with ADHD who struggle to articulate their feelings verbally. This is particularly significant in the context of my study, as it suggests that musicking, through rhythmic entrainment, might offer a means of expression for young adults with ADHD who often face challenges in verbal communication. By facilitating emotional release and providing an alternative mode of self-expression, rhythmic entrainment could be a valuable therapeutic tool for supporting emotional regulation and communication in individuals with ADHD. Participating in group musicking is particularly beneficial for young adults with ADHD because of social connectivity, even though it can overwhelm some individuals. Developing social skills and emotional intelligence through interpersonal relationships is apparent for those with ADHD in their attempt to navigate a sense of belonging in life. Furthermore, musicking enables young adults to explore their identities and reflect upon life in safe environments. While existing research touches on these aspects, there is a noticeable gap in understanding how young adults with ADHD personally experience these benefits through musicking. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of these individuals through narrative inquiry.

2.4.3 Music and well-being

We as humans are “constantly evaluating the quality of life, seeking happiness and fulfilment to improve our physical and emotional well-being” (Cruywagen, 2018:4). Throughout history, music has been used as a therapeutic intervention. According to Travis (2012:1423), research on music engagement has evolved beyond emotion regulation to investigate affect regulation, cognitive, emotional, social, and physical functioning, health, and quality of life—all of which are desired coping methods among young adults. The theory of music, mood, and movement seeks to explain the effect of music on a human’s psychological response. Listening to relaxing music reduces stress hormone secretion and improves general mood changes, as well as language, speech, and communication skills (Dursun *et al.*, 2021:4221). Music has emerged as a potential means of favourably influencing people’s physical and psychological health (Papinczak *et al.*, 2015:1129).

Music utilised as a tool for increasing social inclusion has been linked to improved well-being (Caló *et al.*, 2020:988).

Upadhyay (2014:39) divides listening tactics into four categories: (1) identity development and agency, (2) mood control, (3) relaxation and company, and (4) enjoyment. He contends that music can aid in the development of a person's true potential and well-being. Odendaal *et al.* (2014:168) address how music may be viewed as a political medium for building agency (forming a sense of awareness in life) as well as musical agency development (the use of one's musical skills for self-regulatory methods and social coordination and interaction). The agency is defined as the presence of internal powers and the ability to act during events (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:170). The preceding is reinforced by DeNora (2000:110) who claims that music is a tool for emotional and physical management.

Papinczak *et al.* (2015:1129) offered numerous affect-related regulatory mechanisms after reviewing prior research on the psychological functions of music and the uses and gratifications of music listening. These include using music to help with problem-solving and changing arousal levels (DeNora, 2000:111), especially when considering the psychological and emotional responses that music evokes. It is possible that listening to music, a non-pharmacological and non-invasive technique of affecting one's mood, may help alleviate depression (Pan *et al.*, 2021:42).

Music is growth-promoting to the extent that a musical event portrays ideal social interactions (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:160). Music promotes social relations by giving possibilities for bonding with others (Beckmann, 2013:109) while also controlling and shaping such interactions (DeNora, 2000:110). Young adults with ADHD may face challenges in forming personal relationships, making resilience an essential factor in navigating these difficulties. However, connection remains a vital dimension of well-being, as it is intricately linked to other crucial aspects of personal growth, including emotional stability, social functioning, and identity development.

The function of music in alleviating obstacles in forming personal relationships is clear in research such as Pan *et al.*'s (2021) investigation of graduate students, which found that listening to music reduced levels of depression. This shows that music can improve well-being by reducing symptoms of depression, perhaps protecting against more severe outcomes like suicidal behaviour and future mental diseases (Papinczak *et al.*, 2015:1120). For young adults with ADHD, such mood regulation through music can provide a valuable outlet for managing the stress and social challenges commonly associated with the disorder.

2.4.3.1 The meaning of music

According to Small (1998:207), “everyone is born capable of musicking because the gift of music is as universal as the gift of speech”, implying that music is a “common tongue” that unites people. Morris (2012) published a paper in which he supports a cognitivist view of the purpose of music as an art form. This viewpoint has two challenges: first, it needs all music to represent the world; second, it renders music appreciation too impersonal and disconnected. Morris (2012:556) emphasised how music as art helps us understand the world, which appears to give justice to the seriousness of the value we believe music has—what music facilitates depends on the person who uses it and the circumstances (Beckmann, 2013:97).

Kirby and Burland (2022:562-563) investigated the purposes of music in everyday life, which can be broadly classified as (1) emotional function, (2) social function, and (3) cognitive function. Music serves a variety of roles that are beneficial to personal and social life, such as social expression, social bonding, and identity and value creation (Beckmann, 2013:113; Upadhyay, 2014:38). DeNora (2000:151) suggests that music can be used as a resource in everyday life and as an active ingredient in social settings. Music, according to Beckmann (2013:96), can assist in the purposes and roles of music listed above, as well as contribute to the formation of powerful and resilient memories that ground one’s life in values that provide meaning. Music can be viewed as part of the process in that a person who “musick” learns new things about themselves and the context in which they “musick” (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:163). Thus, the meaning of music can be defined as self-esteem development and healing, self-acceptance, feeling accepted by others, being conscious of oneself, and having positive attitudes toward life (Sholeh & Supena, 2021:100).

2.4.3.2 The meaning of music for young adults

Quality of life is a multidimensional notion that reflects an individual’s subjective impression of his or her place in life in terms of objectives, expectations, standards, and worries (Ben-Dor Cohen *et al.*, 2021:2). McFerran (2009:81) suggests that individuals with ADHD have a lower perceived quality of life than those who do not have ADHD (McFerran, 2009:81). Quality of life can aid in young adults’ search for and identification of meaning in life. Meaning is described as “the extent to which people see their lives as intelligible and significant and have a sense of purpose or mission in their lives that transcends the banal conceptions of daily existence”. The search for meaning is defined as “the dynamic, active effort people exert in establishing and expanding their understanding of the meaning, value, and purpose of their existence” (Li *et al.*, 2019:122).

Meaning in life is a broad term that is regarded to include three distinct but connected concepts: (1) coherence, (2) purpose, and (3) importance (Li *et al.*, 2019:122). The paper by Martela and

Steger (2016:531) provides a conceptual examination of these significant characteristics of meaning in life: “To survive in a world as reflecting beings, humans require three things: they must comprehend the world around them, find direction in their actions, and find meaning in their lives.”.

Meaning in life can be separated into two dimensions based on what people experience and the meaning they ascribe to those experiences. The two dimensions are the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. Developing a sense of meaning is an important effort for young adults since they often encounter many life-changing events from which they explore, make meaning, and find purpose in their lives (Li *et al.*, 2019:122-123). Meaning in life can thus be based on one’s knowledge and sense of life, as well as one’s basic life goals and objectives (Martela & Steger, 2016:531). To see greater coherence and significance in life, young adults must have positive emotional experiences that help create a sense of belonging with others (Beckmann, 2013:96). A sense of coherence arises from the need to regard one’s existence as purposeful, understandable, and managed (Beckmann, 2013:112).

Under the guidance of meaning and music, young adults with ADHD can transcend fleeting desires and override the more basic and impulsive way of life, allowing one to control emotions and strive toward long-term goals and social standards. As a result, life purpose can potentially guide young adults in recruiting and maintaining self-control (Li *et al.*, 2019:123). Music can thus be used as a protective resource against poor life quality for young adults with ADHD (Beckmann, 2013:112; Frith, 2004:44).

Music is more than just decorative art; it pervades every part of our existence (Frith, 2004:45; Hallam & Himonides, 2022:573). It is not uncommon for individuals with ADHD to “face challenges that hinder their ability” to function to their best potential; their symptoms may interfere with many aspects of their lives. These include daily functioning, work productivity and academic performance (Spiewak, 2023:2). Music appears to coincide with the key life shift to maturity (Kirby & Burland, 2022:563) and may play a particularly crucial role in the lives of young people, who report much higher levels of engagement.

Korošec *et al.* (2022:1) provide insight as they report that through thoroughly reviewed literature, findings show that music has 129 psychological functions. These functions were distilled into three main categories, namely, (1) arousal and mood regulation, (2) self-awareness, and (3) social relatedness. Music represents a lot to people as individuals and groups; it is played in supermarkets, shopping malls, restaurants, places of worship, on radio and television, and through recordings (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:573). DeNora (2000:130), Frith (2004:43), and Rentfrow (2012:404) report on the business sector’s use of music to manipulate clients. As a result, there is no doubt that music has a profound impact on our moods, emotions, and arousal

levels, and that, as awareness of music increases, it may promote the development of emotional understanding (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:221,373).

Music is more important than other media in life (Frith, 2004:46). Music is not just “significant, touching, or moving, but it also has specific meanings” (such as generating emotions) and represents and guides our “being” (Vadén & Torvinen, 2014:210). It is also crucial to mention that people nowadays habitually utilise music to alter their moods and plan their activities (Frith, 2004:43). Individuals who consume music in their everyday lives testify that they “listen to music to support their well-being, face challenging demands of day-to-day life, feel aesthetic enjoyment and connectedness, and experience a safe space to facilitate reflection and self-development” (Korošec *et al.*, 2022:1). Music has a significant impact on behaviour when it is chosen for a specific purpose; thus, it can distract, invigorate, and improve meaning in life (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:581). Ghetti *et al.* (2024) conducted a hermeneutic phenomenological study on music and music therapy for co-occurring ADHD and substance use problems and presented the following findings: “...music therapy can increase motivation for treatment and change, regulate emotion, reduce hyperarousal and improve attention, and reduce substance craving...music and music therapy enabled salient experiences of motivation that afforded social belonging”.

Musical experiences never happen in isolation but rather as part of a more significant notion created by the artist or listener and the context in which they occur (Beckmann, 2013:97). Having performed or listened to music that makes you feel as though you’ve been in touch with the meaning of things and feeling a little wiser as a result, helps us understand what music means (Morris, 2012:556). Music provides a medium for experiencing a constructive and shared focus for young adults with ADHD without the need for substances (Ghetti *et al.*, 2024:11). Thus, music generates meaning in ways that reading, writing, speaking, and listening cannot (DeNora, 2000:127). Some songs seem to speak directly to our basic identities, providing comfort during difficult times. Music also brings people together and mobilises them to work for social justice (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:168).

Music impacts our emotional responses to language in the same way that language shapes our emotional experiences of music (Chrisholm *et al.*, 2021:45). Musical signification modalities are “elusive and dynamic”, and their verbal depiction is necessarily “metaphorical and ambiguous” (Vadén & Torvinen, 2014:210). According to Odendaal *et al.* (2014:164), aesthetics is a widespread idea in music and musical works can have a variety of meanings and musical understandings. All of these must be considered to explain the importance of music in human life.

Music can transmit and impact diverse emotions to varying degrees of intensity. Music, according to Beckmann (2013:113), can be used as a structuring resource for young adults’ processes of

knowing themselves, their emotions, and their social relationships. “Although music is a temporal experience with varying moment-to-moment emotional intensity”, listeners can swiftly generate retrospective evaluations of overall emotional intensity for musical encounters. Listeners making retrospective assessments must rely on their memories of their encounters (Svanås-Hoh *et al.*, 2022:1). Still, there is a need to discourse about music and its significance—the meaning is precisely in our search for it. The never-ending search for musical significance, “spurred by the obviousness of music’s meaningfulness”, is regarded as an inevitable characteristic of musical experience (Vadén & Torvinen, 2014:210).

Music and young adults’ studies are numerous and eclectic, encompassing various aspects of music, practice, and discipline, specifically how musical interventions might promote social connectivity and self-esteem among young adults with mental health and behavioural difficulties (Caló *et al.*, 2020:988). Musical interventions serve a variety of purposes in everyday life, including (1) emotional modification (relaxation, meditation, and making social events livelier), (2) cognitive modification (music listening for concentration and focus), and (3) relationship-building (using music for social interaction through memory and shared experiences) (Papinczak *et al.*, 2015:1129; Rojas 2023:41).

Meaning is linked to one’s cultural identity (Cruywagen, 2018:6) because music is constantly performed in a social setting—its significance has both a “social and an individual dimension”. Music is a universal social activity that reflects local cultural norms and relationships between young adults, sounds, and physical space (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:166). Korošec *et al.* (2022:1-2) posit that actively participating in music-making supports mental well-being by facilitating the expression of emotions and self-development, offers respite and promotes connecting with other people, their heritage, and their past. Young adults employ music in their daily lives to alter their moods, relieve boredom from monotonous chores, and create an atmosphere suitable for various social functions (Frith, 2004:44). Thus, music has a fundamentally social aspect and is used as a resource for supporting the formation of meaning in everyday life (Beckmann, 2013:100), as it can provide order to life and opportunities for friendship development and social belonging (DeNora, 2000:111; Ghetti *et al.*, 2024:11).

Young adults participating in a musical ensemble can foster sentiments of belonging and trust (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:579). Music is a human endeavour that cannot be separated from life (Sholeh & Supena, 2021:97). Frith (2006:46) attributes the meaning of music to its emotional role for individuals, but it is also significant as a form of communication and sociability for young adults. Music provides crucial life routes, particularly for young adults, and is quite distinctive. It is a technique for one individual to reach out to another without any barriers and make meaningful changes on a spiritual plane (Rojas, 2023:44). Music as a form of intervention for young adults

with ADHD can improve the quality of life for those who cannot afford therapy or medications (Spiewak, 2023:45).

2.5 Summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the available literature as a foundation to answer the research question on the meaning-making stories young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. My literature map (Figure 2.1) allowed me to construct a thorough and concise literature review containing background information about the phenomenon of my study. By conducting a literature review, I could start thinking about possible interview questions and how the findings parallel the available literature. In the following chapter, I discuss the research procedures of this study.

CHAPTER 3 PROCEDURES

3.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter was to introduce the research methods for this qualitative narrative inquiry about the meaning-making stories that young adults with ADHD share about music. This approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the interpretative experiences of young adults immersed in a musical milieu. The basic premise for using narrative inquiry was that people, by nature, live storied lives and tell stories about them. Furthermore, anyone who has participated in any area of music education and had an impact on the lives of music students may benefit from exploring their personal histories (O'Neill, 2009:25). This aligns with the methodological approach of my study, which emphasises the importance of narrative inquiry. By exploring the personal histories of young adults with ADHD, I aimed to gain deeper insights into how their experiences with musicking shape their identities and well-being, thereby shedding light on the meaningful role music plays in their lives.

Narrative researchers characterise lifestyles, gather, and share tales about them, and write about their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:2). This chapter also includes the research plan, methodology, researcher positionality, study participants, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. This chapter aims to enlighten readers on the narrative research methodology while reflecting on my role as the researcher, employing precise protocols for data collection and analysis through numerous processes (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:232).

3.2 Research question

This study sought to answer the question:

What are the meaning-making stories young adults with ADHD ascribe to music?

3.3 Research methodology

Storytelling has been a part of the human experience since antiquity (O'Neill, 2009:25). The term narrative is synonymous with "stories": in everyday storytelling, a speaker connects events into a sequel of variables that are significant for meanings that the speaker wishes to convey (Riessman, 2008:12). When people reflect on life and explain themselves to others, they are both living their stories and retelling them in words (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:4). This does not imply that the stories are false nor that they are neutral kinds of information. Rather, they comprise our realities about what we consider meaningful (O'Neill, 2009:25).

Qualitative approaches rely on text and visual data, involve distinct data analysis stages, and employ various strategies (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:232). Narrative inquiry is driven by the researcher's curiosity about how a speaker organises events and the language used to transmit their meaning (Riessman, 2008:19). Every time we tell stories about our experiences; we obtain new views on them.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the meaning-making stories five young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. The primary notion behind narrative inquiry is that stories are collected to understand better how people build their experiences as they live and tell them (Kartch, 2017:2; O'Toole, 2018:177). Narratives and life are inextricably linked and the appeal of narrative as a method stems from its ability to depict life events, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways (O'Neill, 2009:25). Kartch (2017:2) links narratives to stories and goes on to say that humans are by nature storytellers: "Narratives are essential to human life. By telling stories, one does not just narrate his or her experiences for others; one also makes sense of those experiences. If one cannot narrate an experience, it may mean he or she is unable to understand that experience ... a coherent narrative has many benefits for the individual, such as increased emotional and psychological wellbeing."

Empathetic understanding motivates narrative inquiry, as it does other types of qualitative study (Bresler, 2006:8). Because the goal of this study was to discover what significance young adults with ADHD attribute to music, a qualitative technique seemed the best choice. Narrative inquiry assumes that humans make sense of random experiences by imposing story frameworks, for example, stories to make sense of the world (Bell, 2002:207; O'Neill, 2009:25). Individuals constantly tell stories about occurrences in their lives; it is one way people make sense of their lives (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:2). What makes the study of narratives interesting is the fact that levels of storytelling overlap. Riessman (2008:14) describes these levels of storytelling as follows: "... stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives". This distinction is particularly relevant to my study, as narrative inquiry relies on multiple layers of interpretation. The experiences shared by young adults with ADHD are not only shaped by their own meaning-making processes but are further interpreted through my analysis as a researcher. Additionally, readers of this study will engage with these narratives in their own ways, adding another level of meaning construction. Acknowledging these layers reinforces the importance of reflexivity in my research approach.

Narrative is a broad term that is frequently interpreted as conversation and articulates personal meaning (Bresler, 2006:1). The standardised methodology facilitates interaction in which

participants and researchers collaborate to develop narratives and meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:5; Riessman, 2008:29). Researchers are driven to tales by framing events as narratively generated, and stories are analysed to comprehend such experiences (O'Toole, 2018:177). Empathetic connections, goals and methods allow people to describe their experiences while reflecting on significance (Bresler, 2006:8).

Narrative inquiry is a disputed concept about how we perceive the world and the relationship between stories and everyday life (Bresler, 2006:4) which refers to the study of how people experience the world (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:2). The stories that young adults told about the significance of music in their lives were more than just personal narratives; they were actively influenced by social dynamics, with participants reflecting how they saw themselves, particularly in the setting of ADHD.

Stories can also be described as “narratives that have a sequential and temporal ordering that include an unexpected action that provokes a reaction from the listener” (Riessman, 2008:14). Narratives are thus interpretive by nature: there is no ‘true’ narrative that puts reality into words, but rather imposes order and meaning on occurrences (Kartch, 2017:2). In their most basic form, stories contain endings that satisfy some of the tensions created by their beginnings (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:3). As a result, they can alter the listener’s affective orientation toward events, people, and ideas (Bresler, 2006:1).

Narrative is more than just a list of events; it is an attempt by the narrator to connect these events in both time and meaning (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:3). The goal of narrative inquiry is to obtain more than just textual information (Bresler, 2006:6). The gathering of stories is emphasised in narrative inquiry to make sense of how participants attribute meaning to lived experiences (Kartch, 2017:2). Our narratives gradually evolve throughout our lives, influenced by our knowledge, values, beliefs, and feelings, as well as the cultural, historical, and institutional context in which they occur (O’Neill, 2009:25). Personal narratives can inspire others to act or speak up, which can often serve many objectives for individuals and organisations and is an essential aspect of narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008:16). When individuals participate in storytelling during research, it is because they recognise that narrating offers special social interaction rarely found in other forms of communication. The outcomes achieved through narrative can serve as a starting point for both the researcher and the individuals or groups involved, as they construct identities through storytelling (Riessman, 2008:16).

When we study individuals, observe their experiences, and strive to comprehend their lives, narrative inquiry may convey the “context and integrity of those lives better than questionnaires and graphs” (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:2). Participants’ life tales are never just personal; they

are always told in historical contexts. They tend to live in the unquestioned background assumptions of ordinary life (Bell, 2002:209). My aim as the researcher was to question those backgrounds and delve deeper into the role of music in their daily lives and the meaning every participant ascribes to music. Personal stories can motivate others into action—when individuals share their experiences, it fosters political mobilisation and brings about change, as seen in how stories inevitably spread within spaces where social movements take shape (Riessman, 2008:16). By allowing my participants to relate their own experiences, they learn that they have value in this world because young adults with ADHD are sometimes overlooked. In my experience, as a young adult with ADHD and a musician, there are times when I feel alone in navigating life. I shared my story with the participants, hoping that they felt safe to share their stories with me.

The study of narratives may also aid in the building of a community, for comprehending ourselves requires an awareness of others' important life experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:2-3). Stories allow us to bring to light details of our experiences that were previously neglected, buried, or taken for granted (O'Neill, 2009: 25). I used to be a closed book; I never shared my feelings and worries with anyone around me. At that time in my life, I believed that no one but myself could help me solve whatever struggles I was facing. I could not have been more wrong. I learned that talking to friends and family lightened my mental load, allowing me to live a more positive life. By sharing my story, those around me had a better sense of who I was as an individual and a friend. Narratives are also inextricably tied to identity; it is through narratives that an individual can "cultivate a sense of belonging and discursively develop his or her own identity" (Kartch, 2017:2).

Personal narratives are primarily defined by how people, things, and events hold special meaning for each of us; this makes our narratives distinct and profoundly related to what we regard as good and valuable to ourselves and our community (O'Neill, 2009:25). Part of my motivation behind this study was because I learned that my story parallels with that of other young adults whom I have spoken with regarding ADHD. I realised that I was not the only one who faced certain obstacles, for example, struggling to make (and keep) friends, keeping track of time, overstimulation, and feeling overwhelmed by insignificant occurrences. I felt immense relief when other young adults shared, they experienced life as I did. That was the first time I truly felt part of a community; one that I find relatable and where I can share my sentiments in a safe space. In this way, our shared experiences and stories create a narrative that resonates deeply, shaping our understanding of what feels valuable and comforting within our community.

In conclusion, narrative inquiry enables the researcher to present events as a whole, in all their complexities. The cultural traditions of telling, the teller's intentions, the audience, and the social

settings all impact tale development (Riessman, 2008:16; O'Toole, 2013:178). The participants were all honest and genuine when sharing their stories with me, although I believe that some were nervous because of participating in a research dissertation. The social settings were chosen by participants based on where they would feel most comfortable sharing their stories. Finally, stories are gathered, analysed, and unpacked to comprehend how meaning is “discursively generated through storytelling and to investigate the story as a meaning-making technique” (Kartch, 2017:2).

Narrative inquiry enables the use of stories to bring insight into human life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:2-3; Riessman, 2008:16), which is particularly relevant in this study about music and the lives of young adults with ADHD. The concept of storytelling is important to music as songs frequently express narratives and emotions. Understanding how cultural traditions, objectives, audience, and social settings influence storytelling can shed light on how music works as a narrative medium for young adults with ADHD. Music may help young adults with ADHD shape their narratives and identities.

3.4 The role of the researcher

As the researcher, I interviewed participants to collect data (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:234). When conducting a narrative inquiry, the process becomes “even more difficult since, as researchers, we become part of it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:4). My role was that of a listener, following where the participant leads while avoiding the impulse to manage the dialogue and discard parts of the narrative as irrelevant (Kartch, 2017:4; Riessman, 2008:29). Qualitative research is also interpretive research in that the researcher is usually involved in a long-term relationship with the participants (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:235). I have been working with my participants for more than a year, from recruitment (March-April 2023) to member checking (June-July 2024), and will maintain the relationships until I have graduated to share the completed dissertation with them. The two narratives of the participants and the researcher form, in part, “a shared narrative construction and reconstruction during the inquiry process” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:4). This, however, was the case in my study: I did form a shared narrative with the participants. Their stories were my only focus during data collection, data analysis, and presenting my findings. The researcher’s narrative only engages with those of the participants, emphasising the significance of genuine involvement with a narrative, wherein I immersed myself in the story and allowed it to permeate my understanding (Bresler, 2006:12).

Researchers are not simply passive listeners but also have an impact on the interview as a meaning-making process (Kartch, 2017:4). Both Clandinin and Connelly (1990:10) and Riessman (2008:29) support this assertion as they view the research interviewing process as a collaborative

approach where two participants jointly develop a story and its meaning. Because it focuses on the impact of events rather than the outcomes, narrative inquiry aids my knowledge of experience (Bell, 2002:209). My interviewing and transcription procedures contributed significantly to the narrative data that I analysed. My presence and listening critically affected the stories that participants chose to tell (Riessman, 2008:53). Narrative researchers are compelled to “go beyond telling the lived experience” and communicate the research story. By doing so, I created a space for myself, and my voice as a researcher was central but less defined—my goal was to make room for each participant’s voice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:10). I achieved this by employing open-ended, conversational interviews that allowed participants to guide the narrative, ensuring their stories were shared in their own words and from their unique perspectives. Additionally, I used reflective journaling to remain aware of my positionality, ensuring that my interpretations did not overshadow the participants’ lived experiences. This approach fostered an environment where their voices remained at the forefront of the research.

The relationships between the researcher and the participant, as mentioned previously, are critical since the interview is a collaborative effort that requires active participation by both listener and facilitator (Kartch, 2017:4). Relationships often grow and strengthen as we share our experiences with others. As a result, even if you find it tough to communicate about yourself with others, you will learn more about yourself and benefit from the experience (O'Neill, 2009: 26). I found the interviews both fulfilling and inspiring as I found common ground and relatedness to the participants. Being able to have such conversations with like-minded individuals who share a love for music was truly satisfying. I received feedback from the participants stating that they shared the same enjoyment and sentiment as I did.

Furthermore, Kartch (2017:4) noted that through the story, the researcher and participant “negotiate a co-constructed meaning”. As a result, the researcher is part of the meaning generated by the participants’ narratives and cannot be separated from the meaning (Riessman, 2008:929). I agree and disagree with the above statement: as a researcher, I did not ascribe the meaning of music to the participants. The participants ascribed their meanings that, in some cases, differed from mine. What I do agree with is that I reasoned the meaning ascribed by each participant and worded it in such a way that it is emphasised and clear.

As the researcher, my function had to be aligned with reflexivity: I had to reflect on the participant’s role in the study and the impact of their background (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:235). Before, during, and after the interview, I had to engage in self-reflection to analyse my worldviews, experiences, and qualities. This affected how I read, comprehended, and interpreted meaning through data analysis and presentation of findings (Kartch, 2017:4). My responsibility extended beyond

pushing values and prejudices during the study. Instead, I considered how my background could influence the study's course (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:235).

As a musician and researcher, my interactions with musical narratives exposed me to dimensions of experience that “are not visible in verbal or visual languages” (Bresler, 2006:6). A skilled narrative analyst encourages the reader to “think beyond the surface of a book”, resulting in a shift toward larger commentary (Riessman, 2008:20). As I retold our collaborative stories, the question of who I am became less important (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:10). As a result, my role as a researcher was to shed light on the meaning that young adults with ADHD attribute to music, which is consistent with the purpose of this narrative study.

3.5 The participants

The participants volunteered to participate in the study as a response to an online post I made in which I stated that I was looking for people with ADHD to participate in my study. My research focused on young adults aged between 18 and 28, encompassing both musicians and non-musicians, with the age limit set as flexible within this range to capture diverse and representative data. Participants contacted me after reading the web post, and I sent them an e-mail containing all the study's pertinent material. I then scheduled interviews with the participants at a location of their choosing. One interview was conducted online via Zoom.

The stories shared by participants served an aesthetic purpose: all kinds of artistic expression are ultimately types of storytelling that give a vision of the world and oneself (Bresler, 2006:3). Participants were crucial to the research process because I was interested in knowing what participants believe about the research phenomenon (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:2). The collaborative character of this research process ensured that all participants considered themselves as members of the community, specifically concerning young adults with ADHD (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:4).

Narrative as an inquiry tool demands collaboration with the participant and it might be challenging to embrace the facilitator position (Kartch, 2017:4): in other words, avoiding interruption or asking questions to direct the conversation in a certain direction. The meaning that scholars bring to the study or what other writers express in the literature is not important (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:234-235). The relationship between myself and participant(s) is empowering and grows over time because of feeling linked in conditions of equality, care, and mutual purpose and intention (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:4). Such feelings were fostered because I am also a young adult with ADHD who engages with music in my daily life.

While researchers focus on understanding participants' perspectives and experiences, it is essential to recognise that the meaning derived from the narratives transcends the interpretations imposed by scholars or existing literature (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:234-235). The significance of narrative inquiry in research becomes evident through its capacity to delve beyond surface outcomes and illuminate the intrinsic value of personal experiences, shedding light on hidden assumptions and acknowledging the dynamic nature of human understanding and interpretation. The value of narrative as a research approach is presented by Bell (2002:209-210):

Narrative allows researchers to understand experience. People's lives matter, but much research looks at outcomes and disregards the impact of the experience itself...narrative lets researchers get at information that people do not consciously know themselves. Analysis of people's stories allows deeply hidden assumptions to surface...Narrative illuminates the temporal notion of experience, recognising that one's understanding of people and events changes...other research methods would have captured understandings at certain points, not at the important intervening stages.

The narrative approach prioritises the meanings that people attribute to their tales and places them at the centre of the research process (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:2). Although this study is based on collaboration with the participants do explore the meaning they ascribe to music, their narrative is the main focus of the study. My role is not to co-establish the meaning they ascribe to music, instead, I report their meaning in my findings.

3.6 Data collection

In this study I, as the interviewer, and the open-ended interview questions served as data collection instruments (Annexure A). This standardised technique enhanced communication by allowing participants to construct narrative accounts through collaboration (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:5). The data was collected in a natural setting. These places are referred to as "narrative landscapes" by O'Toole (2018:177): "the legendary terrains in which stories are constructed and told".

The interviews took place in a quiet café and were digitally captured on a smartphone. One of the interviews was conducted via Zoom and I recorded it on my personal computer. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to express their thoughts and ideas freely. No interview was done without obtaining the participant's written and verbal consent. Each participant was interviewed in a single interview session and each interview's duration was between 45 and 90 minutes. There was also no need for follow-up interviews as the stories were clear. Upon starting data analysis, I realised that I was unable to hear what the participant said. Then I contacted the participant via WhatsApp to clarify. Memos were utilised to record any study ideas that came up

throughout each interview. I took notes of concepts that were repeated or seemed like possible core concepts from the various narratives during the interviews. For instance, most participants spoke of engaging with music through listening whilst doing mundane tasks. This, for example, speaks to a type of music-engagement, but not yet meaning. Another example included the joy of participating in music-making.

According to Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2017:3), the abilities required to be an effective story interviewer include developing “excellent rapport and trust early in the interview, being a good listener throughout, and avoiding interruptions”. One story can lead to another. When this happens, it is useful to study linkages and meanings that may connect several stories. According to Kartch (2017:3), rapport can be formed by attentiveness, respect, and genuineness, implying that the researcher should communicate both vocally and nonverbally and show real interest in what the subject has to say. To indicate to participants that I was listening attentively, I nodded my head to show interest, or I would say things like “okay”, “I understand”, “that makes sense”, or laugh when they say something funny. My facial expressions also changed according to what they were talking about. For instance, if it was a fond memory I would smile or if they shared experiences of hardship or intense emotions, I would frown to show that I understand.

Transcribing the interviews was a tedious and time-consuming process. Detailed transcriptions helped with the interpretation and display of data gathered during interviews. Transcription included slowing down the recordings to 0.5x speed and typing what was said in a blank Microsoft Word document. The only conversations excluded from the interviews were (1) conversations with the waiter/waitress, and (2) whenever I lost connection via Zoom. To fortify the credibility and validity of the research, I utilised techniques such as member checking to ensure accuracy and uphold ethical integrity. It is best practice to return the transcribed narrative to participants for review and to confirm that the participant agrees to authorise the use of the content after review (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:4). The transcribed interviews were distributed to the interviewees for evaluation. While each interviewee had the choice to reject any interview content, they were also asked if there was anything they’d like to add after reflecting. Following the participant’s approval, the transcription was edited as needed, including recording any reflecting comments following the interview. Participants were somewhat involved in the creation or revision of the analysis and outcomes. I shared possible analysis outcomes with them and some did request revisions.

The goal of my interviews was to understand how people freely construct their experiences as the research was more interested in the participants’ stories than in answers to questions (Kartch, 2017:3). The main focus of the stories participants told were descriptions of their daily life, for

example commuting to and from work, what they do in their free time, and when/where/why they engage with music most frequently. According to Riessman (2008:29), one of the purposes of narrative interviewing is to elicit detailed narratives rather than generic remarks or brief answers, which is why open-ended questions are used. This, in turn, helped to facilitate the process of generating narratives through conversation.

Setting the parameters for the study, such as how information would be collected and the technique for collecting information, was the first step in data collection methods. Before data collection, the number of participants and the locations where data collection would take place were established as boundaries (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:238). The number of participants (five) set a boundary on the size of the sample population while determining the location where information (wherever the participant would be most comfortable) was acquired set a boundary on the geographic scope of the study. Before participating, the informed consent form was discussed with and signed by each participant (Annexure B).

The backdrop of the interview was critical to the types of stories given and the stories collected. Contexts include the conduct of the interviews, interview style, and the researcher's and participant's positionality (O'Toole, 2018:180). The participants chose where they would feel most comfortable for our interviews. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016:3) provide a model in which interviews are separated into four sections: (1) the interview's introduction and explanation, (2) the narrative, (3) the questioning phase in a combined narrative and/or semi-structured interview, and (4) the conclusion. This model was present during the five interviews. Before the interviews took place, I sent each participant a copy of my research proposal, informed consent forms, and the interview protocol (Addendum A). Even though this was not requested, I deemed it helpful for participants to familiarise themselves with my study and what to expect from the interviews. In my experience, this puts the participants at ease and fosters a more relaxed environment.

Researchers conducting narrative interviews let the interviewee determine the direction, content, and pace of the interview—it is the interviewee's perspective that is important, and they choose what to say and what not to say (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:3). Creating alternatives for a longer narrative involves the researcher to give up control, which may generate anxiety (Riessman, 2008:29). As a young adult with ADHD, I tend to feel the need to be in control most of the time. Letting go in that sense can be quite intimidating because you don't know what to expect. The preceding is significant because all participants had to have a voice in the interactions and I provided the participants with the time and space they required to share their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:4). Therefore, I acted as a facilitator, assisting the participants in talking about their experiences (Kartch, 2017:3).

Personal accounts of musical experiences promote resilience, motivation, and a stronger sense of self-identity (O'Neill, 2009:25). Therefore, the semi-structured interviews commenced with open-ended questions on the participants' becoming aware of the presence of ADHD in their lives. Open-ended inquiries encouraged participants to share their experiences (Kartch, 2017:3). The interviews concluded with more open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to contribute stories about memorable musical experiences. Narrative inquiry entails going beyond tales as a rhetorical structure to analysis of the participants' stories, underlying insights, and assumptions (Bell, 2002:208). Following participants at their pace promotes better equality in discourse and the creation of meaningful stories (Riessman, 2008:29). If participants feel rushed or pressured, they might not tell stories as a whole and important information could be left out. This would produce stories that aren't saturated and rich in the meaning they ascribe to music.

3.7 Data analysis

Qualitative researchers rely on a variety of data sources, including interviews, records, and audiovisual materials. I utilised all of the above sources to ensure that no data was left uncaptured. Interviews allow for personal connection through having a conversation and carry more meaning and depth in comparison to written questions and answers. I did utilise written records to take note of possible themes, but I found this to be distracting as I could not focus on the conversation at hand. Recordings or audiovisual materials of the interviews ensured that I had access to our full conversation as it would be impossible to write everything down without interrupting the participant.

All the data were coded by using ATLAS.ti 22 to make sense of it and identify categories and themes (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:234). Narratives are confusing and partial portrayals of people's experiences, and researchers play an inadvertent role in framing the narrative when they conduct interviews and analyse data (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:4). Thematic analysis is the most popular type of data analysis when conducting narrative inquiry and according to Riessman (2008:54), it is also the easiest and most appealing in applied narrative situations.

Analysis entailed recognising a story within the dataset and constructing coding frameworks to divide the data into more understandable portions (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:4). Transcript coding was completed as more interviews were being conducted, allowing me to reflect on the interview questions as initial themes emerged from the data. Coding was utilised to assist the researcher in comprehending the participants' viewpoints and analysing their combined experiences. Coding was done both manually and with CAQDAS (computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software), ATLAS.ti 22, to help with data analysis (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:244).

Coding allowed interview sections addressing the same topic to be grouped (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:4). Data analysis took place on a holistic level, capturing multiple perspectives and portraying the broader picture that emerged (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:235). For me, this was part of the complexity of narratives because life is also about growth towards an imagined future, which requires retelling tales while also attempting to relive memories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:4). Coding enabled me to avoid emphasising one issue early in the study and ensured a thorough review of the entire interview. A holistic approach aimed to preserve the narrative in its entirety and appreciate the value as a unified whole (O'Toole, 2018:181).

All narrative research designs are concerned with content or what is said. By way of theme analysis, "content is the exclusive focus" (Riessman, 2009:54). The analysis' defining feature is the realisation that "people make sense of their circumstances based on the narratives available to them through stories moulded by personal and community narratives" (Bell, 2002:208). In general, story analysis entailed a multi-layered approach focussing on form, content, and context (O'Toole, 2018:177).

Stories serve as artistic expression in that they represent a moment when we attend and organise our feelings. Sharing tales stimulates our emotions, heightening our curiosity, and expanding our capacity for comprehension (O'Neill, 2009:28). Emotional orientation provides a personal connection, allowing perceptions, cognition, and meaning formation (Bresler, 2006:3). Data was analysed inductively and deductively, allowing for the organisation of data into more abstract units of knowledge. Inductive analysis involved identifying patterns and themes within the data without preconceived categories, allowing the participants' stories to emerge organically. Deductive analysis, on the other hand, was used to test existing theories and concepts against the data, guiding the interpretation of specific phenomena in relation to the broader literature on ADHD and musicking. To create patterns, classifications, and themes, I analysed and organised the data inductively. I then deduced possible themes from the organised data to see if other evidence may support such patterns, classifications, and topics (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:234).

Grasping narratives requires an understanding of arrangement: narratives are often assumed to contain some type of chronology. Strong narratives require rich data that provide detailed descriptions of lived experiences or real-life phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990: 5). Riessman (2008) draws on the work of Charlotte Linde, which was helpful when it came to the analysis of data. Linde theorised from a background in linguistics and an interest in social practices; she defined coherence as a "property of texts or a relation of parts to the whole and to other texts". She argued that coherence is "both a social demand and an internal psychological

demand... [a] subjective sense ... that organises a speaker's understanding of his or her past life, current situation, and imagined future" (Riessman, 2008:177). This suggested that I had to include aspects of discontinuity in any life stories told by participants, as well as fully demonstrate connections when presenting my findings in Chapter 4.

Narrative inquiry assisted me in obtaining knowledge that people do not consciously know about themselves, which means that analysing stories allows deeply buried assumptions to surface (Bell, 2002:209). Thematic analysis can thus be used to deconstruct and reconstruct stories presented during interviews: various exemplars mentioned by Riessman (2008:54) indicate how stories can have "impacts beyond their meanings and individual storytellers". In turn, possibilities are generated for building social identities and group belonging.

Furthermore, because of the way I wrote the stories, the order of occurrences was not random. The plot connects events in a meaningful way and is frequently built around a certain point or meaning that the narrator desires to convey to the audience (O'Toole, 2018:178). In my study, the plot was based on similarities and differences between the participants' narratives, namely, music and emotions, the purpose of music, musicking, musical dislikes, music and relationships, music and personal growth, music and memorable moments, and music as a constant companion. Together, these elements allowed me to convey the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to music through storiettes.

When the coding was completed, I could look at what everyone had to say on a specific issue and compare accounts (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:4). In narrative inquiry, the data analysis process illuminates the temporal concept of experience, acknowledging that one's perception of life develops through time (Bell, 2002:209). Riessman (2008:55) also highlights the above by drawing attention to how data are constructed into text for analysis with attention to language and form. By paying close attention to detail and the possible insights that may emerge from the many-sided, complex, and "sometimes conflicting stories" (Riessman, 2008:181), I could present findings in such a way that different readers can decide for themselves what meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to music.

While presenting the findings, I faced many challenges, especially balancing academic and narrative writing. I had critical key points to consider, such as presenting honest restored narratives and presenting positive and negative findings. I aimed to maintain a story-like flow between what the participants said and how their stories related and differed in comparison. I started by employing free-writing exercises in blank documents. By doing so I could organise and categorise my thoughts as I spent a few days "flirting" with the data in my mind (Kim, 2016). I

found that doing so while completing mundane tasks, such as washing dishes or folding laundry, I was able to see the bigger picture behind the participants' stories and relate theirs to mine. I believe this allowed for deeper insight and understanding as a researcher. I present the participants' stories in Chapter 4.

3.8 Validity

In the pursuit of qualitative research, the journey began with a dedication to ensuring the integrity and trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:251). As previously stated in section 3.5, the participants had a voice in this narrative study and were given the time and space they required to tell their story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:4). As a result, the authority and validity of the findings increased. This dedication is encapsulated in the concept of qualitative validity. Riessman (2008:172, 177) emphasises two levels of validity: (1) participants' stories, and (2) researcher analyses or stories. The coherence of the participants' narratives and the researcher's interpretive work with them was an essential aspect of trustworthiness in my study.

After completing the analysis of the data, I presented the findings to the participants. I sent them their restoried narratives and allowed them a few weeks to read and reflect. I encouraged them to reach out at any time with questions or concerns, without any hesitation. I received valuable feedback. Megan was pleased with her findings. She stated that she had a really good time reading through her findings. Lucas's feedback included clarification on some of his statements as I did not fully comprehend the context of some of his statements. Frikkie was satisfied and didn't request any changes, except for a few details regarding his academic career. After pointing out that I related the incorrect musicians and music to his interview, Christopher gave me the correct names. Other than that, he was satisfied with his restoried narrative. Nadine was also satisfied with her restoried narrative. After reading their findings, they were able to recall our entire interview and thoroughly enjoyed seeing how the various themes emerged from their narratives. They shared my excitement about completing this study and are eager to read this dissertation after examination.

Within this exploration, sensitive ethical concerns were navigated with precision, adhering to the guidelines of confidentiality outlined in the BaSSREC standards (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:237-238). Participants chose their pseudonyms after signing informed permission forms (Addendum B). I kept all information confidential, only sharing my research with peers, friends, and family using the participants' pseudonyms and not disclosing any identifiable personal information. The interviews, memos, recordings, transcriptions, data analysis, and findings were all password protected on my personal computer and backed up on my OneDrive account.

As previously stated in section 3.6, there was a risk that needed to be mitigated when plotting the restoried narratives associated with the emplotment and restorying of tales, which Clandinin and Connelly (1990:10) refer to as “The Hollywood Plot”. This expression refers to a plot in which everything goes smoothly in the end. Because narrative inquiry involves collaboration between the researcher and participant(s) from start to finish, plot ideas were constantly revised as written materials were reviewed and additional data were gathered to build points of relevance in the revised story. Riessman (2008:177) also underlines the significance of capturing interview conversations. This helped me accurately represent what was stated.

Through member checking, the participants’ voices resonated authentically within the broader narrative, guarding against the imposition of external meanings onto their lived realities (Bell, 2002:210). Member checking also increased credibility if the represented stories were familiar to the participants, as well as their reactions to these representations (Riessman, 2008:184). Moreover, I employed strategies to mitigate bias, engaging in rigorous self-reflection to cultivate transparency and honesty throughout the storytelling process (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:251-252).

As the narrative unfolded, it was enriched by dense descriptions that illuminated shared experiences, fostering a sense of authenticity and realism in the outcomes. Clandinin and Connelly (1990:10) remind narrative investigators of the risks, perils, and misuses of narrative inquiry. First, lying can be “substituted for meaning and narrative truths” using the same criteria determining significance, value, and aim. Second, one can falsify the data and write fiction, or utilise the facts to communicate a lie as readily as a truth. Finally, “dismissing criticisms of the personal and interpersonal in inquiry runs the risk of narcissism and solipsism” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990:10). Through this intricate dance of inquiry and introspection, I strived to create a narrative that not only resonated with the readers but also embodied the essence of human experience.

3.9 Ethical considerations

I obtained ethical clearance at the onset of this study (Ethics number: NWU-01097-22-S7). During the study process, a variety of methods and ethical and personal difficulties may develop (Creswell *et al.*, 2007:235). I encountered no personal ethical difficulties during this study. Clandinin and Connolly (2000:3) state that many accounts of qualitative inquiry entail negotiation of a shared narrative unity: “Negotiation entry is commonly seen as an ethical matter framed in terms of the principles that establish responsibilities for both researchers and practitioners.”. I ensured that ethics were the highest priority throughout the study because it was the most important issue to address (Bell, 2002:210). Following the methodologies provided in this chapter was critical in guaranteeing the study’s validity and reliability.

Clandinin and Connolly (2000:4) describe three key difficulties concerning study relationships: (1) participant equality, (2) caring situations, and (3) a sense of connectivity. The dangers to human volunteers in this investigation were minor. All subjects were over the age of 18 and did not have diminished mental capacity. They were eligible to participate in this study because they met these requirements. Furthermore, after final clearance by BaSSREC, all recorded materials will be wiped after five years, minimising any future issues related to confidentiality. Exchanging tales are frequently regarded as part of a wider story of friendship, which means that researchers may find it difficult to detach at the end of the research process (Bell, 2002:210). Detaching from participants was not challenging for me. Although this was a collaborative process, they shared their stories that did not focus on any sensitive or traumatising topics. The participants could decide what they wanted to share which mitigated possible negative or bad experiences for them while participating in the study. Participants also had to approve their findings. Member checking also contributed toward ethical considerations where participants agreed or disagreed with my findings. The techniques were closely followed to ensure that ethics remained a high concern.

3.10 Summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research strategy used to answer the research question. The qualitative technique and story design were ideal for this investigation. Explaining the technique, study participants, data collecting, and interview questions provided information about how the study was conducted and who participated. I did not change the participants' stories because they contained a wealth of information. The data analysis of the participants' stories was done before their interpretation. The findings were generated using the data provided by the study's participants. Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the findings of each participant's perspective of the meaning of music in their daily lives.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

As described in Chapter 3, data analysis entails recognising a story within the dataset and constructing coding frameworks to divide the data into more understandable portions (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:4). The purpose of this chapter was to answer the research question, What are the meaning-making stories five young adults with ADHD tell about music? The order in which I present my findings corresponds with the order the interviews took place. The following sections present each participant's findings separately in narrative form.

4.1 Megan's story

Megan, aged twenty-five, is employed in the hospitality sector. Megan received formal music education through guitar lessons in primary school, which sparked an interest in singing through choir participation. She only became aware of ADHD symptoms throughout her high school years; however, she was never formally diagnosed with ADHD. She attended a large school and noticed that her attention would often be interrupted by any movement outside the classroom windows. She frequently discovered that when the study topic did not interest her, she lost focus. Megan had a particularly difficult time studying for tests on "uninteresting subjects" and would frequently delay studying by keeping herself busy with other things (4:76). Her high school curriculum did not offer music as a subject which she sees as a common shortcoming in many schools. After graduating from high school in 2017, she pursued a Bachelor of Consumer Sciences in Business Management. During her university years, she joined Bingle Sêr (an acapella group founded by dormitory members), which was a lot of fun because she enjoys singing with people.

The meaning-making stories that Megan, a young adult with ADHD, ascribe to music are that music is a mental anchor, fosters a sense of control, makes her forget problems and responsibilities, reveals vulnerability through sharing, and promotes self-awareness.

4.1.1 Music as a mental anchor

Music is an important part of Megan's daily routine since it provides mental clarity and prepares her for the day ahead. Music is a mental anchor each morning during her brief journey to work when she chooses a single song to serve as "a mental anchor", allowing her to centre herself and set the tone for the day (4:36).¹ The song selection is purposeful, expressing her attitude and

¹ In this research, Chapters 4 and 5 citations will adhere to the following referencing format: Concurrently, numerical references within the ATLAS.ti 22 software will also be structured accordingly. The initial numeral designates the primary document (PD) identification (PD 4 in this instance), while the ensuing numeral signifies the specific citation located within that particular document (in this case, citation number 36). Employing this citation protocol will facilitate the reader's ability to locate the relevant textual content within the ATLAS.ti 22 software as exemplified by the citation

plans for her duties. As she applies her makeup or gets ready for the day, she considers the significance of the music she has chosen, acknowledging its power to influence her state of mind. No matter what state of mind she is in, she must be “all together” when she steps foot into her place of employment (4:38).

Megan uses music as a companion throughout the day, especially during times of transition, such as commuting to and from work. On the other hand, she cannot listen to familiar or well-known music while working because it distracts her and prevents her from concentrating on the task at hand. “Music obviously has its place at social gatherings”, noting its absence in awkward silences and its power to foster discourse and connection (4:43, 4:45). Megan also recounts a family vacation where her sister suggested she choose “vacation music to generate nostalgia in the future” (4:51), demonstrating how memories and melodies interact in Megan’s life.

Megan’s youth church worship music experiences give her a sense of familiarity and belonging which resonates with her. Reflecting on her past involvement in church music groups, Megan acknowledges the transformative power of communal singing and worship, which she finds both spiritually uplifting and humbling.

4.1.2 Fostering a sense of control

As Megan embarks on her musical adventure, she recalls a time when music was less prevalent in her life, notably during her school years when her phone lacked the huge music library she now has. Megan discovered the convenience of Spotify² during her university years, a platform that altered her music listening experience by putting a vast diversity of tunes at her fingertips. Nonetheless, Megan’s love of music began early, despite her lack of professional music training. She recalls recording herself singing along to melodies on a little radio as a child, inspired by her idol, [Juanita du Plessis](#).³

Megan found herself drawn to certain genres and tunes that inspired her to play guitar and sing, although she couldn’t define the exact aspects that provoked such a response. While many of her peers enjoyed the exhilaration of dancing, Megan felt more at ease singing along in the privacy of her car where she could fully immerse herself in the music without embarrassment: “I like being in control of the music I listen to” (4:74). Megan placed a high value on song lyrics, believing they

(Friese, 2012:66). The ATLAS.ti 22 copy bundle as well as instructions on how to access it, is available in Annexure D.

² Audio and streaming service provider (Spotify, s.a.).

³ Juanita du Plessis is a country singer from Namibia who sings in Afrikaans. She gained fame with her hit song “Ska Rumba” (Du Plessis, 2019).

could dramatically influence her thoughts and emotions; as a result, she was meticulous about her music, gravitating toward songs with important and resonant lyrics. “Music is very meaningful, and I internalise the lyrics” (4:75). Megan fosters a sense of control by choosing the music she listens to and the importance thereof.

4.1.3 Not forgetting problems and responsibilities

Megan reflects on her musical path, delving into many societal circumstances that have affected her relationship with music. She sees the move from “sokkie” music to mainstream pop, catering to the different tastes of the public (4:44). She adapted to listen to what she perceived most people around her were listening to. Even though Megan’s music preferences differ from those of the communities that she finds herself in, she shared how she navigates these differences. Megan recalls her upbringing in the Dutch Reformed Church and discusses the dissonance of hymns accompanied by the church organ. Along with a dislike toward the church organ, others who sang off-key during church services also contributed to her musical dislike. “There is always someone singing much too loud and throwing you off the note” (4:55). These dislikes negatively affected her musical enjoyment.

Beyond church and household settings, Megan navigates the social scene of clubbing, recognising the association of music with alcohol-fuelled environments and the importance of balance in such situations. Megan discusses other dislikes regarding clubbing and the conflict between the attractiveness of the dance floor and the dangers of reckless activity. “Most often it feels like people go clubbing to forget about their problems and responsibilities” (4:65). She does not condone such behaviour. While she recognises the potential for escapism and enjoyment, she is cautious, realising the fine line between succumbing to the music and maintaining control over one’s conduct in a club environment. An awareness of peer pressure allows Megan to stay true to her Christian values in social communities. There is nothing wrong with going out with friends and having a good time, but “there is a fine line regarding how far you can let go of yourself” (4:65). Megan values her relationships with friends and family. She emphasises the importance of music within these relationships.

4.1.4 Vulnerability through sharing music

Megan reflects on her familial and personal relationships with music, recalling the significance of individual songs at critical points in her life. During family holidays, the repetition of a specific song ([“Send me on my way”](#)) caused both annoyance and nostalgia, reminding memories of pleasant days spent on the road. Similarly, the significance of her father playing a song for her mother before leaving on a visit emphasises the function of music in shaping family relationships and traditions. In contrast to these strong familial relationships, Megan observes the absence of music

in her childhood household except for socialising with her siblings. This juxtaposition emphasises the various functions of music in Megan's life, ranging from familial nostalgia to the social dynamics of nightlife. Even during mundane tasks like washing dishes or cooking, music becomes a backdrop for productivity and enjoyment. For Megan, cooking is a particularly enjoyable activity, made even more fun by the inclusion of music, which allows her to embrace her "dorky side" (4:68).

Reflecting on a sensitive moment when a romantic partner asks about her musical preferences, Megan considers the significance of the first song she chooses to give, knowing the impressions it may convey. "He said he wanted to hear what music I listen to ... I felt that I needed a head's-up"—sharing music on a first date caused her to feel exposed and vulnerable and surfaces from the theme of music and relationships (4:70). Megan feels that the music you listen to says a lot about who you are as a person. The first song you choose to play is particularly important because it shapes "his image of you" (4:70). She continues by sharing that "if you play a sad song, he might think you have emotional problems, and if you play a popular song, he might think that you are banal and unoriginal" (4:70).

4.1.5 Promoting self-awareness

Megan's examination of music's emotional resonance leads her to find peace and strength in selected songs during times of weakness, especially gospel music. The dynamic nature of her playlists mirrors the ever-changing terrain of her emotions, influencing her musical preferences and choices. Megan navigates despair with music by singing along and finding consolation in the shared experiences recorded in song lyrics. She uses music for contemplation, allowing her to confront deeper emotions and manage personal challenges. However, the linkage of memories with songs can elicit both nostalgia and discomfort, so Megan carefully selects her musical repertoire. Megan finds the nostalgia of music slightly overwhelming at times, especially when she is trying to forget certain times of her life. "Music goes hand in hand with emotions" and makes her aware of her emotions (4:62). Megan's sense of self-awareness emerged as part of the theme of music and emotion. Nowadays, she regularly removes songs from her playlist because of the memories she does not want to remember.

Throughout this emotional journey Megan understands the ability of music to elicit specific feelings and promote self-awareness. Specific melodies urge movement and joy, providing a break from life's hardships. Megan admits music's enormous influence on her emotional landscape and identity as she reflects on her music selections. "I think a lot about the music I listen to, along with the influence it has on me and why I choose to listen to the chosen music" (4:69). By listening to sad music, she allows herself to resonate with the music and feel her

emotions. She does not listen to music to make her feel better when she is angry, instead she prefers to talk about it. There are particular cases when she is angry at someone: "... I skip the song associated with the person I am angry with" (4:73).

4.2 Lucas's story

Lucas, who is twenty-nine years old, works as an artillery development, design, and manufacturing engineer. Lucas has shown symptoms of ADHD since he was a toddler and was diagnosed when he was a young boy. These symptoms include hyperactivity, inattention, failure to listen to others, and restlessness. His parents practised healthy eating habits and limited his sugar intake in the hopes of alleviating the symptoms as they were opposed to medicating a developing child. Despite having formal music training, Lucas only became involved with music in high school, when he joined the marching band. After graduating from high school in 2012, he went on to earn a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering. During his academic years he joined a symphony orchestra and is still a member.

The meaning-making stories that Lucas, a young adult with ADHD, ascribe to music are that he conveys emotion through art, music allows him to learn limits in life, aids him in forging a community, fosters focus and enjoyment, and provides him with a way of life.

4.2.1 Conveying emotion through art

As a young adult navigating the challenges of ADHD, music emerged as a guiding beacon, providing both stimulation and expression because "it was something to do ... because there was a lack of attention" (3:2; 25). As a young adult navigating the challenges of ADHD, Lucas experienced music as a guiding beacon, offering both structure and a means of engagement. He described music as 'something to do ... because there was a lack of attention' (3:2; 25). Rather than solely serving as a tool for emotional expression, music also provided a sense of direction, anchoring him amidst the distractions and restlessness characteristic of ADHD. This role aligns with the theme of 'a way of life,' as music became an integral part of his daily existence, helping him focus, cope, and find meaning. In the rhythm of percussion, Lucas discovered "a zone where distractions could be channelled into work amidst the fun chaos of band rehearsals" (3:25). However, the journey was not without obstacles. In the symphony orchestra, Lucas frequently felt like a rookie amidst seasoned musicians, dealing with emotions of failure as he compared himself to those who were confident in playing their instruments. These feelings of not being a good enough musician arose because he never took music lessons, both practical and theory. Therefore, he struggled not to compare himself with other musicians. Despite these doubts, Lucas found refuge in music, where his engineer identity faded, stating "I don't have to do it for a

profession ... or for finances" (3:44), and he could fully immerse himself in the rhythms and sounds surrounding him. For Lucas, music became more than just an auditory pleasure; it was an intuitive experience, a dialogue of feelings that resonated deep within him—"I'm not dependent on it, so I really just do it because it's like a comfort zone ... and a place where I can be different ... for many years in my life" (3:44).

Lucas felt that spending time with musicians is always a special occasion because "they think in music; if they make noise, they make noise at a certain pitch" (3:52). That is where the fun lies. Lucas further discussed that "artists need emotion" (3:54) and that he, as an engineer, does not need emotion. He refrains from it. He acknowledges that every person has their talents and the things they do "requires certain aspects of life to engage in it" (3:54). In correlation with the theme of music and emotion, he sees the arts as emotionally based because "you can convey emotions through art" (3:56). He connects conveying emotions with the use of dynamics in orchestral music: "you can feel your whole body vibrating from the loudness and intensity and it makes you emotional" (3:56).

Lucas embraced the philosophy of continual development, seeing parallels between his musical interests and engineering concepts by stating that "people don't like mathematicians as much as they like musicians" even though "math is an art" (3:58). He continues by discussing these parallels in terms of feelings: "one feels the music by understanding rhythms, notes, and structures contrasting maths where one does not feel math unless you can do it" (3:58; 60). Nonetheless, Lucas emphasises that music is not just a skill, but rather "... the fact that you interpret life through that skill so you can convey how you think and how you feel" (3:60).

In his narrative, Lucas acknowledged the close relationship between music and emotion, recalling instances when the strength of a song moved him to tears or the intensity of the music left him breathless. Standing in the centre of the orchestra, Lucas realised the significance of his job as a percussionist—"Sometimes I like to believe that I am small, but then I hear the songs and then I realise that I am a big part of it" (3:84).

4.2.2 Learning limits in life

Rooted in his childhood, Lucas focuses on the invaluable lessons learned from his musical attempts, recognising how they shaped his resilience because "it teaches you limits in life" (3:14). Lucas faced problems head-on, grabbing opportunities to take charge "because no one was doing anything" (3:18). Playing percussion during his high school years has driven him to do better, and so he reached his goal to be better at playing snare drum. He enjoyed the process of playing to his strengths in understanding rhythms as he correlates mathematics with rhythms. Lucas still struggled to comprehend music theory even though he was confident in his understanding of

rhythm. “I don’t think my ears are so good at hearing different notes – I don’t know how to differentiate between it” (3:4).

Lucas tells the story of a time when the orchestra would play a piece called “[Wrangler](#)”, arranged by Michael Sweeney. This piece was dubbed as “Strangler” by him and his fellow musicians due to the level of difficulty of the piece (3:29). Nonetheless, he was able to understand and play the complicated part of his snare drum—“... it was so difficult, and that helped me to develop, to understand ... music theory to the highest level” (3:29). He emphasised the sense of self-improvement and progress that went beyond the understanding of music theory. Lucas’ attitude reflecting “I believe I can, I am able to learn...” (3:35) led him to take on a new musical challenge: he started taking piano lessons. He continues to describe a special relationship with one of his good friends, a cellist and a music teacher. This friend was also learning piano at that time but at a much higher level than Lucas. Lucas was thus able to receive many pointers and the necessary theoretical training as he learned to play the piano. On the other hand, “he likes to do maths and I’m an engineer ... then I do maths with him and then that’s like our exchange” (3:40). Since then, Lucas had the opportunity to “improve on music and to learn” through playing melodic percussion instruments in the orchestra (3:41). Even though he is aware of not being the best at writing or reading music, he is proud to admit that he is a much better musician in comparison to when he first joined the orchestra. Together with his peers, they learned that music “teaches you limits in life” (3:14).

Playing piano has enabled Lucas to explore how specific notes can set up scenes of calamity or terror, keeping in mind that his “worldview is engineering based” (3:64). Piano lessons open a “new world” for Lucas as he listens to music differently now and tries “to give different emotions to music by colouring in and categorising it” for himself (3:90). Engineering has taught Lucas that an individual has fundamental principles and learned that the same goes for music: “if it’s too complicated you have to break it down” (3:93). He has the same philosophy on life—“you must take things slower and deal with things, fundamentally” (3:94). To facilitate personal growth, one must identify why “something is happening and address that” (3:94). It is easy just to ignore the facts and “run with it” because mistakes were made. Rather than just hurrying along, “you have to start slow and get better” at identifying problems and working on solutions (3:94). Lucas realises that “you’re gonna keep on making mistakes” and emphasises the importance of taking things slow, seeing that growth is a process of trial and error and unwavering willpower (3:95).

4.2.3 Forging a community

was pulled to the snare drum from the beginning of his band career, motivated by the companionship and brotherhood he saw among his peers. Despite the hardships and initiations

that accompanied his musical career, Lucas formed friendships with other musicians, forging a close-knit “community” united by a mutual love of music (3:11). Lucas and all his friends were members of the same marching band where they learned to play music together. They learned to “listen to each other” and to cooperate “because we were friends” (3:23). Music was what connected their friendship outside the classroom. In their free time, Lucas and his friends improvised by selecting solos from the marching band repertoire “and then joining them together with different feelings” to make their music (3:24). Making music with peers allowed for special friendships because “it’s a different part” of him that not many people in his life is aware of (3:38). Lucas reflects upon the aspect and importance of self-discipline “by getting something right and rewarding yourself” when succeeding when taking things slow (3:96). Making music with peers fostered meaningful friendships, as it allowed Lucas to share a part of himself that many in his life were unaware of (3:38). Through these musical interactions, he not only built connections but also developed a deeper sense of self-discipline, reflecting on the importance of ‘getting something right and rewarding yourself’ when taking things slow (3:96). This suggests that music provided both a communal space for shared experiences and a personal framework for growth, reinforcing the interconnected nature of relationships, self-improvement, and musical engagement.

4.2.4 Focus and enjoyment

His first memory of music is his mother’s love for classical music. Though they had a piano at home, it was rarely played: “We had recorders but only messed around with them” and were never taught to play music (3:1). It was only during his high school years that he had a chance to play an instrument. Nowadays, he is learning to play the piano even though he “always thought the piano was too complicated” (3:3). He never imagined himself to have “an ear for music” and be able to hear different notes (3:1; 4). When he learned about rhythms for the first time, it immediately made sense to him as he was good at maths from a noticeably early age. Lucas always found himself gravitating towards the snare drum stating that it “looks like so much fun”, disregarding all other instruments (3:8). Joining the marching band was a breaking point in Lucas’s musical development, giving him a sense of purpose and belonging he had not felt when participating in team sports. Lucas dedicated Wednesdays to musicking since his high school marching band days, and nowadays orchestra rehearsals are also on Wednesdays.

Despite his growing enthusiasm for music, the lack of formal music lessons in theory and practical remained prominent in his narrative. Regardless of these limitations, Lucas strove to broaden his musical capabilities through unusual means. Games like Guitar Hero provided unexpected areas for exploration, allowing him to improve his coordination and rhythm. Lucas’s passion for music became stronger as he became a member of his university symphony orchestra. He discovered

new challenges in his new musicking setting, for instance, being in a seated orchestra versus a standing marching band. Furthermore, “attention is difficult” whilst having to listen to the music and counting on top of that (3:21). Nonetheless, Lucas found that the music itself is “like a place where I learned to focus and learn to enjoy” (3:37), stemming from the theme of musicking.

Lucas enjoys listening to classical music due to his mother’s influence stating that he has an “attachment to the genre” and it influenced what he wanted to play during his high school years (3:82). Lucas does not engage with music around unusual places, but he engages in music where the orchestra rehearsals and performances take place. His favourite places for engaging in music are where he practises music with his peers, such as the university auditorium and the camping grounds of the orchestra’s annual camp. Musicking as part of the orchestra makes Lucas aware of the effects of ranges in dynamics, as well as playing accordingly and together with one’s fellow musicians. When he interacts with music, he is either listening and counting, or listening and playing, and takes the necessary time “to experience the bigger picture” (3:87).

Lucas also enjoys listening to various artists and genres of music, stating that he likes “bands that sing about the things that I see around me” (3:70). Lyrics are important when it comes to listening to music and Lucas specifically mentions an [Arctic Monkeys](#)⁴ album that questions reality. Furthermore, Lucas is a fan of an Afrikaans band named [éF-éL](#)⁵, who makes music about political issues with complex Afrikaans grammar. By focusing on the lyrics of the artists he mentions, he becomes “very aware of certain things when you engage with music” and the deeper meaning of the lyrics (3:76). On the other hand, there are genres of music that Lucas does not particularly listen to because of a specific message it wishes to convey. Such genres include Kwaito⁶ and Metal music, respectively, because “you have to be experiencing crazy emotions to appreciate the genre” (3:80). Lucas prefers Tchaikovsky⁷ and calls it “classical metal” (3:80). He continues by stating that he “can’t listen to death metal unless it’s about the deterioration of my country” as he can relate to the feelings of rage (3:83).

4.2.5 A way of life

Being able to make music has always been a way of facilitating focus in his life, “because if you don’t have anything to focus on, you lose your focus much easier” (3:42). Lucas attends orchestra rehearsals and piano lessons once a week and tends to practice music often during his free time. His goal is to participate in an Eisteddfod. He thoroughly enjoys having something productive to

⁴ Arctic Monkeys is an edgy and articulate indie rock band and arguably Britain's most prominent band of the early 21st century (Arctic Monkeys, 2013).

⁵ An Afrikaans rock band (The Audio DB, 2015).

⁶ Upbeat dance music that reflects the life in South African townships (MasterClass, 2022).

⁷ The most popular Russian composer of all time (Poznansky, 2024).

do in his free time, other than listening to “the same five bands all the time” (3:43). He keeps himself occupied by learning new piano music at home. Lucas is under the impression music is a way of life for musicians and “everything they want to do is rhythmical and it’s musical – they are not athletic. They are not necessarily smart in specific complicated fields but music” (3:53). He believes that musicians dedicate their entire lives to music; they grow and express themselves through music. As he delved deeper into the realm of music, he discovered its transformative power, not only as a vehicle of expression but also as a lens through which he perceives the world. Lucas thought that music was more than just the melodies—he “learned how musicians described their feelings through notes and music by creating atmosphere” (3:59; 62).

Lucas discovered a new language through music which enabled him to communicate life’s difficulties in ways that words alone could not—“that’s what makes them (musicians) special: they think in music” (3:63). It was a language that spoke to his soul, connecting him with others who shared his enthusiasm and understanding. Lucas understood the power of music to convey messages and deeper emotions beneath the surface: “That has a lot of influence in what people try to convey through music, not just melodic but also what they say and how they say it. Sad songs that sound happy because it’s your major tone – you’re singing sad songs in a major tone. You sing happy songs in minor tone” (3:69).

Lucas finds himself thinking, “What the hell?!” yet he loves music that is not “what it seems” (3:69). He is a big fan of music that is not what it seems; he believes that everyone is sad in some way. Lucas finds such deeper meanings “satisfying” because it may not apply to all listeners’ situations (3:69). Every day he finds himself listening to éF-éL, he feels encouraged to explore deeper into his own experiences of the human condition: “I like people (bands) that give a certain message” (3:72). “Recently I figured this guy at one place hopes that whatever he went through is a punishment and not a sign, because if it’s punishment you can just take it but if it’s a sign it means you have to change it. But he doesn’t want to change. It’s so good it’s deep” (3:72). Lucas sees the music of Arctic Monkeys as a platform to speak out against injustice and promote kindness and understanding, evoking a sense of nostalgia about past friendships and “how things change” (3:73).

Despite the beauty and complexity of music, Lucas understands its ability to inspire change and influence politics. Still, life goes on and Lucas believes in change and kindness. Lucas’ “purpose as a musician is self-defined” and has restrictions on his growth, both rhythmically and melodically (3:89). In a group setting, the purpose of music is unified and “needs to be adhered to” (3:91). Lucas is quite serious about making music with a group of other individuals, and by not adhering to their unified purpose he thinks one is wasting the other members’ time and taking away from the shared goal of making memorable music.

4.3 Frikkie's story

Frikkie, aged twenty-two, is a student teacher. Frikkie's parents, both teachers, observed that he had ADHD symptoms from an early age. He was diagnosed at a young age. Frikkie displayed a wide range of symptoms, including excessive talking, hyperactivity, inattention, and difficulties finishing tasks. He used to rely on medication, but as he grew older, the prescription caused sadness, a loss of appetite, and difficulty sleeping. Instead, he treated his problems with physical therapy. Throughout his school years, he was an active and committed choir member. His love for singing persisted throughout university, where he pursued a bachelor's degree in engineering. Unfortunately, he was battling to keep his head above water and decided to switch his major to education.

The meaning-making stories that Frikkie, a young adult with ADHD, ascribes to music are that it allows him to work through his emotions, make him feel that he is part of a family, and that music is sure in an unsure world.

4.3.1 Working through emotions

Frikkie shares the story of how he came about his ADHD diagnosis and mentions that his biggest struggle was regarding maintaining focus and being all over the place, both physically and mentally. He continues his narrative by explaining that not only does music help him regulate his emotions but also keeps external and internal distractions at bay. For Frikkie, music isn't just background noise; the music he listens to at that moment reflects the mood he is in. When he is down, he avoids some songs since they remind him of difficult moments. Because the music he listens to most often reflects his mood, he can figure out what emotions he is experiencing. This enables him to "work through" his emotions (6:15).

He specifically talks about a song called [Demons \(2012\)](#) by Imagine Dragons⁸ as a constant reminder of a time when his heart was broken due to a failed romantic relationship. Unfortunately, he is no longer able to listen to that song. Other than sadness, Frikkie also shares how he typically deals with other challenging emotions, such as anger. There are times when he intentionally listens to certain music that adds fuel to his (angry) flame. He is therefore driven to go to the gym and exercise, and in turn, rids himself of frustration. Frikkie chooses music based on harmonies that fit his mood: "Like I said, specific genres relate to my emotions in that moment" (6:57). He finds it frustrating when he is unable to listen to his music as it is a way in which he expresses

⁸ An American pop rock band (Imagine Dragons, s.a.).

himself. He therefore takes his earphones wherever he goes in case he has no say in what music is playing.

4.3.2 Being part of a family

Frikkie emphasises how passionate he is about music and that very few moments go by where he is not engaging with music—"I listen to music while walking to class ... when I drive ... at the gym ... while I'm studying ... when I play games" (6:16). He jokingly adds that if you were allowed to listen to music while writing exams or tests, he'd be listening to music for sure. In 2023, he spent 36,000 minutes on Spotify, demonstrating how much music is a part of his daily life. He compares his music playlists to "past chapters" of his life, from good times (Afrikaans music) to not-so-good times (punk rock and heavy metal) (6:12).

For Frikkie, music is more than just listening, it is about engaging. Singing is one of his favourite things to do, whether he is driving or taking a shower: "I love it ... it is something that I am good at!" (6:21). His first encounter with a choir was at age 7, where he sang in his primary school choir. This is where his love for music started, even though he was bullied and made fun of for being the only boy in the choir. He was teased by other boys who said, "Choir is for girls" (6:28). However, this did not break his spirit to do what he loved most. He reflects on his favourite musicking experiences as a member of his university choir. His membership in the choir, where he not only sings but also contributes to the creation of harmonies, is especially meaningful to him. He felt that he was part of something bigger: he was part of a team who needed to listen to one another to produce beautiful sounds. Singing in the choir was a means of relaxation for Frikkie as well.

Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Frikkie was forced to move back home. He reflects on his time as part of the choir, explaining the loss he still feels as he cannot be part of it due to circumstances beyond his control. He felt like he "was part of a family, even though it sounds cliché" (6:29). The loss of his musical family leaves him feeling empty until this day. Whenever he listens to music they used to sing in the choir, he is overcome with emotions. He recently had an opportunity to see his former family perform our national anthem and he was overcome with sadness and melancholy. The choir was "all he had", and it was suddenly taken away from him (6:26).

Other than musicking through singing, Frikkie thoroughly enjoys watching musical performances. He fondly shares a story from his childhood: his family attended a live performance of Andrew Lloyd Webber's [The Phantom of the Opera \(1988\)](#) at Montecasino in Johannesburg. It was an "insane experience and one of his most memorable first moments" as an audience member (6:48). Frikkie also attended a few performances by the North-West University Symphony

Orchestra (NWUSO). He mentions explicitly the performance of a medley of film music from the movie [How to Train Your Dragon \(2010\)](#)—"I had goosebumps upon goosebumps!" (6:47). Being able to watch live musical performances is one of Frikkie's most enjoyable activities. For those few hours you "just lose yourself in the music" (6:49). He describes such live musical performances as "insane" (6:49). Whenever he's listening to music, he finds a new appreciation for the music, especially as a vocalist—he listens to the sopranos, or the tenors and all the other elements of the music. In this way, he appreciates both the music and the musicians, praising their techniques and talents, thinking: "Wow, they are so good!" (6:33).

4.3.3 Music is sure in an unsure world

Music is a tool to help calm his overthinking brain and to "drown the voices in his head that tell him he's not good enough" (6:6). "You know the feeling of when you're alone in silence and your brain starts overthinking? Music helps me put a stop to that" (6:6). Frikkie listens to music no matter what he is doing—the music allows him to express himself and his feelings (6:13). Whenever he is exercising at the gym, he listens to heavy metal. Whenever he is trying to relax, he listens to Lo-Fi.⁹ Other than that, music helps him focus and concentrate on the task at hand. He doesn't necessarily listen to the music, but it helps to drown out distractions from outside his focus. Music is "a means of escape" for Frikkie by just concentrating on the music, whether it is through listening or making music and "forgetting about your worries" (6:50). Frikkie feels that music does not lead to significant moments, but that significant moments are connected to music. He relives significant moments in his life when he engages with music.

Furthermore, Frikkie sees music as more than just personal, it is a means of connecting him to others. He always thought of himself as an "outsider and weird" (6:23). This perception, however, changed completely once he was a member of the university choir. He realised that he is not weird and that there are other people he relates to. He found that he adapts easily to friends because he listens to a variety of music, which allows for easy connections with others. Frikkie found himself bonding with his fellow choir musicians in ways he could not express in words, hence his use of the ("cliché") term "family" (6:29). He was able to express himself through shared musicking within the choir.

Frikkie also recognises music's role in the relationships between him and his biological family. He bonded with his mother as she also sang in a choir and teaches choir at her school of employment. "Music brings back many memories that I would normally have forgotten" (6:41)—Frikkie remembers a time when he went on a school cricket tour and his father went along (he was a

⁹ A subgenre of downtempo electronic music (Murray, 2023).

teacher at Frikkie's school). Whenever he hears that music, it takes him back to when he was on the bus holding a can of Fanta. He also tells the story of their family holidays to the Western Cape—his father used to burn CDs with the most popular music of the year. Even though his family shares a love for music, conflict may still arise during road trips nowadays while trying to accommodate everyone's musical taste. He jokingly shares how frustrated he gets when they are all in the same car: his mother prefers silence and not listening to music and his brother always skips music he does not want to listen to. Still, he emphasises the “unified and shared appreciation” of music for all individuals, “no matter your walk of life” (6:45). “There are little things in this world that bring people together the way music does” (6:45).

Frikkie has an appreciation for mathematics, too, and compares it to patterns he can identify in the music he listens to. He expresses his fondness for understanding music beyond a superficial level as he always finds himself analysing music. He finds a comparison between maths and music, stating that “in an unsure world, music is always sure” (6:42). Just like maths, music helps him make sense of life. Frikkie, like many others, struggles to imagine a world without music in it. “Imagine [How to Train Your Dragon \(2010\)](#) without a score?!”, he asks, emphasising how “crappy movies would be without music” (6:46).

4.4 Christopher's story

Christopher, aged twenty-eight, works in accounting. He has had ADHD symptoms since he was a little boy, such as being unable to sit still or forgetting why he entered a particular room. Nonetheless, he did well in school, despite his tendency to postpone until stress set in when prepping for tests. As he sought a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting, he experienced growing symptoms of ADHD, including difficulty concentrating and completing exams on time. This resulted in him being diagnosed with ADHD in 2020, and he takes medication every day. Christopher comes from a musical household and has always enjoyed singing. He sang in the school choir and continued to do so at university. Today, he serves as a worship leader at his church every Sunday.

The meaning-making stories that Christopher, a young adult with ADHD, ascribe to music are that it allows him to convey a message, he becomes part of the music, it aids him in leading people through worship, and motivates him to strive for perfection.

4.4.1 Meaningful memories

Christopher fondly shares stories about the musical influences from both his parents and his grandfather. His grandfather could sing “incredibly without ever having formal training” (7:40). He continues his story by talking about his father's “desire to sing along with him” but struggles to

stay on the pitch when Christopher harmonises with him (7:41). His mother has a beautiful voice but is often too shy to sing around others. Christopher appreciates and values his family's shared appreciation for music. Furthermore, he shares a prominent memory from his childhood that demonstrates his grandfather's influence on his perspective of music. He recalls a chat they had about an old record player that was never used—it just stood there collecting dust. His grandfather promised to show him one day and teach him “what proper music is, how one sings, how decent people sing” (7:37). He remembers his grandfather's commentary of current popular musicians, such as [Kurt Darren](#), and their inability to sing.

The day finally came when his grandfather sat Christopher on his lap and placed a record into the record player. That day, Christopher was introduced to the opera singer Enrico Caruso's¹⁰ performance of [La Donna E' Mobile \(1904\)](#). “We listened to it and then he compared it to someone today playing on TV, then he said this is how one should sing” (7:37). This encounter left a lasting impression on Christopher, shaping his understanding of the significance of musical expression and what it means to be a decent musician. He learned “how your sound can change the feeling of a piece” and the importance of sound to convey a message that carries meaning and impacts the listener (7:38). Christopher emphasises that his early exposure to music not only influenced his perception of musicianship but also continues to impact how he interprets and experiences sound.

Christopher experienced a profound moment that fostered a passion for musicking. Reflecting on his positive memories, he recalls his first assembly in grade 1 where the choir sang a song, [Catch a Falling Star \(1957\)](#). This experience was the “coolest thing in the world” and he “just wanted to be part of this choir!” (7:4). In his childhood, he was part of a group of friends since kindergarten. They also went to the same primary school. One day, the school watched the national rugby team play. Christopher recalls them singing the national anthem. One of his friends sang in the choir. As they were singing, a friend of his turned to Christopher in the middle of the anthem, and said, “Jeez, you sing off-key, could you please stop?” (7:14). Christopher remembers this negative moment as if it was yesterday, saying that it shattered him a little bit (7:14). From that day on, Christopher felt more motivated than ever to prove to his friend, and everyone else that did not believe in his singing capabilities wrong.

¹⁰ The 20th century's most famous Italian operatic singer and among the first performers to record his voice (Britannica, 2024).

4.4.2 Becoming part of the music

Christopher had a passion for music ever since he was a young boy. Christopher had many setbacks in his pursuit of engaging in music, never making it past the auditions for choirs. Nonetheless, he persisted and was driven by his passion for music. Finally, after 7 years of trial and error, he was accepted as a member of his primary school choir. His victory was not without further challenges—he faced social stigmas for his involvement in the choir. He was a member of the rugby team and a soprano in the choir and continues by sharing that it was “super looked down upon” (7:9). No matter what his peers had to say about him, “it was the coolest thing ever for me to be a part of” (7:9). Christopher’s dedication and love for music continued throughout his life, especially in high school where he had the opportunity to collaborate with esteemed choir directors. The valuable lessons and experiences are fond memories that will continue to enrich his career forevermore as “there are certain basic principles about singing that she imprinted on us” (7:11).

Christopher’s musicking experiences extended into his university years, where he found fulfilment and companionship through participating in choirs. He describes his involvement in the choir as being part of something that is “really amazing” (7:13). Working together with his peers and singing in perfect harmony provided him with a sense of unity and purpose where emotional connections were fostered. At this point in his life, Christopher admits that singing in the choir is a leisure activity that he cannot afford right now. He thinks very highly of choirs as “a class of excellence” and respects the group of musicians to commit to them when he knows he is not able to. “I don’t want to be in a group that practices just for an hour a week – how are we going to get everything perfect?” (7:48). Nonetheless, it is most definitely something that he would like to pursue again one day.

Christopher reflects on his days as a choir member and what it meant for him to be part of such a community. He states that “it can be much more expressive” and “bigger and more commercial” (7:17, 18). He finds it is a very personal experience when everyone in the group is in sync with each other, having a common goal in sight. It is not just about “wanting to win, but to elicit certain emotions with music” (7:20). For Christopher, this is “like the best thing ever!” (7:20). “It’s like getting the taste of something that’s the best in the world, and nothing will ever be good enough again to achieve it” (7:21).

Christopher shares the same passion for making music on his own as he does with fellow musicians. When he is making music on his own, he feels that it is more creative, “less perfect” (7:23). He finds that he is constantly “seeking for something that produces a feeling” to foster a sense of nostalgia. Musicking on his own is something that he finds perfect as it only exists at that

moment and cannot be recreated again. He strives for relaxed moments where there is no need to perform and play only the correct notes or use the preferred techniques. Through musicking, he searches for “some golden nugget” (7:26). There are times when Christopher wants to share that with everyone, and there are times when he just wants to treasure such moments for himself. There are many tender moments when what he feels whilst musicking is personal, nostalgic, and even melancholic at times.

Listening to music is somewhat strange when compared to how other individuals consume music in their day-to-day lives. Christopher does not listen to anything while driving to and from places. For longer distances, he chooses a single song to listen to for the duration of the drive. He finds himself fixating on certain elements of a song, especially if it’s something “really cool and what I like” (7:33). It’s not that he wants to replicate what he is hearing and aims to do a better job than the artist or to compare his music abilities to that of the artist. Instead, listening to the song on repeat is “as if you become part of the music at that moment”, especially when you listen to the music for the duration of the trip (7:33). He recalls a prior experience in which a song by [United¹¹ \(Seasons Change\)](#) strongly moved him. During this incident, the intensity of the music caused him to pause and rewind, mesmerised by the emotions he felt at that moment. “The old man’s emotions in the piece – that’s something that sticks with me and it’s something that has an impact” (7:34).

4.4.3 Striving for perfection

Christopher is very aware of how critical he is when it comes to engaging with music, both when it comes to himself and others. His aim for perfection is an apparent theme that emerged from his narrative. He always listens to the recordings of Sunday church services, criticising himself whether he was singing off-pitch. He listens to the recordings for the learning experience and the enjoyment thereof, “even if it’s just horrible” (7:42). Other than being very critical about his musicking, he employs the same for live performances. He recalls when he attended a concert by a university orchestra where he sat in the front row—“It was very bad for me because I sat right in front of the violins” where he was able to hear their out-of-sync pizzicato. He did not enjoy the experience because the violins weren’t playing together as a section. Christopher is aware of the difficulty regarding making music in a group and has lots of respect for the musicians. He believes that if you want to put something on stage, it has to be stage-ready. This is something

¹¹ United Worship focusses on providing the resources to build and enable young Christians to become spiritual leaders in their communities (United Worship, s.a.)

he learned from a distinguished choir director when he was in high school. Christopher strives for perfection because of his past musical influences and memorable lived moments.

4.4.4 Leading people in worship is my destiny

Ever since Christopher was a little boy, he obsessed over everything musical, such as sound equipment, stereos, and instruments—if he had the chance to build his own acoustic guitar, he wouldn't think twice. His involvement in church music became a pivotal aspect of his identity and purpose and influenced by his childhood aspirations. His desire to take part in the world of music intensified: he vividly recalls being mesmerised by the minister playing the guitar and singing in church. This experience fostered a deep aspiration within him, stating that “I wanted to be this guy” and as he stood there, he knew that one day he would be him! (7:6). Reflecting on his journey, he acknowledges the impact of his early experiences: “It was like my destiny to be like the guy in the church with the guitar” (7:16). This experience had a major impact on where he finds himself today as a worship leader in the church. He views his musical talents as gifts bestowed upon him, enabling him to connect with others and convey meaningful messages. Christopher perceives music as more than just a creative outlet as it embodies his purpose and spiritual calling:

My purpose is definitely to make music ... I'm a vessel ... part of my purpose is definitely to lead people in worship, through music, through singing, through playing. I'm a chip that's going to chisel away at a piece, something I'm going to smooth out. Now I have a very specific tool. It's an absolute talent and a gift that I can use for something and as a part of my Christian faith I believe that the Lord can use me through that to say whatever to people! (7:28-30).

4.5 Nadine's story

Nadine, twenty-five, is a postgraduate music student. She has had a passion for music since she was a child, beginning formal music lessons at the age of seven. She spent several years playing recorder and piano before discovering the clarinet, which she continued to play throughout her university music studies. She displayed ADHD symptoms throughout high school as she struggled to function academically—she frequently lost attention and procrastinated to the point that she couldn't keep up with the tough private school curriculum. After graduating from high school in 2017, she pursued a Bachelor of Music. She also had problems studying successfully at university. Although she never obtained a formal diagnosis of ADHD, she took it upon herself to pursue additional information on the subject and learned to cope with the difficulties she had due to her short attention span and emotional abnormalities. She is currently unemployed because she has opted to devote all her time to her postgraduate studies.

The meaning-making stories that Nadine, a young adult with ADHD, ascribe to music are that it is a constant companion, creates a sense of belonging, facilitates personal growth and development, and comforts her.

4.5.1 Music is a constant companion

Music is more than simply background noise; it is a constant companion in Nadine's daily life from the moment she wakes up, setting the pace for her day. Music is not limited to a specific time or place, accompanying her through every moment of life. She grabs any opportunity to interact with music with both hands, no matter if it's through her earphones or a speaker, whether she's lost in her thoughts or discovering new sounds in a lovely café. Even when she is busy with chores, one would rarely find her without the companionship of music: "I would say music is my best buddy, you know. You don't have to talk, you don't necessarily have to share what's going on in your heart, but no matter what you're doing, the music understands me, and I understand the music and what it offers me" (9:9).

For Nadine, music is a constant companion in the flow of life, providing peace and unity during times of reflection. When she listens to music, there are fewer connotations to significant experiences, but rather significant emotions she experiences daily. During anxiety, music serves as a source of comfort and a motivator for self-improvement. Nonetheless, she continues to find herself in tune with her emotions where music is utilised as a tool for emotional regulation. "I wouldn't say I'm a super angry person, but I listen to angry music if I can put it that way" (9:57). She labeled heavy metal as "angry music" because of the stigma surrounding this musical genre. Nadine continued to discuss the stigma surrounding heavy metal and how she uses it to her benefit in times of anger, stating that it makes her feel better. She allows herself to reflect on past mistakes when listening to heavy metal as she describes herself as "someone who's very hard on myself" (9:57). Nadine is very much aware of letting people down and others letting her down based on her high standards, but heavy metal grounds her and reminds her that she is only human and most definitely not the only one that makes mistakes.

Nadine's engagement with music goes beyond just auditory pleasure; it connects with her emotions, recalling memories and serving as a channel for self-expression. She recalls an unforgettable experience when she attended a live performance in South Africa of the band [Imagine Dragons](#). The joy of that moment, shared with friends within the pulsating energy of the crowd, strikes a deep chord with her. She stood amongst the crowd in awe and "even shed tears of joy" (9:6).

Nadine is a fan of heavy metal music and discusses the stigma that is often associated with this genre of music. Contrary to popular belief, her love for heavy metal is not synonymous with

unrelenting rage and wrath; instead, it acts as a means for catharsis and solidarity, reminding her that she is not alone in her battles. She finds listening to heavy metal most enjoyable no matter what emotions she experiences, stating that the intensity of the music stimulates her emotions. Nadine is also drawn to classical music as she is a former member of her university's symphony orchestra. Whenever she can attend live symphonic performances, a sense of nostalgia and pride overcomes her. At times she finds it overwhelming to witness what she describes as "a world where cultural legacy meets with personal adoration" (9:48). For Nadine, such experiences are a different kind of special, not only for her but for others as well. It's a shared experience that goes beyond musical ability.

Nadine fondly reflects upon her time as an undergraduate music student and what it means to her to experience times of extreme anxiety. She notes that she knows how to deal with such emotions in general and that she has gotten better at it. Nadine finds that her anxiety manifests when she finds herself under pressure and adds that she sees it in a positive light: "I function reasonably well under pressure, it's actually enjoyable for me to work under pressure. It tests me, it pushes me to find creative solutions..." (9:59). She developed this sense of resilience and determination mainly due to her having to complete her clarinet concert examination. She is hard on herself and describes events where she would listen to recordings of her exam repertoire and come to the realisation that she is somewhat unprepared. Instead of letting anxiety take control of her, she was able to utilise those recordings to tell her unique version of a story required by the repertoire—"It was all just to improve myself" (9:59). She concludes by saying that these were the only times when she felt extremely anxious because she strives for perfection.

For Nadine, the absence of music is like a void, leaving her feeling uneasy and alienated. She tells a story of when she was invited to someone's house for dinner and describes the entire evening as "awkward and uncomfortable" due to the lack of background music (9:15). The only sounds accompanying their evening were those of the cutlery scraping the plates and chewing sounds, causing her to feel as if though she had "ants in her pants" (9:15). In times like these, Nadine often feels that she is a "weirdo or outsider" when she compares herself to others, especially during social interactions (9:24). Music serves as a stabilising force in Nadine's life, anchoring her ideas and feelings. While she appreciates moments of silence, music provides a breather from the chaos in her mind, offering clarity and direction. She finds herself overthinking, often of situations beyond her control. There are times when she listens to a single piece of music on repeat, grounding her once again. Music is "a lifeline" Nadine can't imagine being without (9:31).

4.5.2 Comfort in life

The final theme that emerged from Nadine's narrative is that of the purpose of music in her life which provides her with a sense of comfort. Growing up as a redhead, Nadine faced a lot of bullying. Her feeling of alienation could stem from such negative experiences during her childhood. Nonetheless, music became her refuge and a source of strength and identity. As someone who has frequently felt like an outcast, music became a place where she can find comfort and self-expression.

More than a year later, Nadine still reminisces about the [Imagine Dragons](#) concert: "There are a lot of good memories associated with that weekend ... there wasn't a bad moment ... just good memories" (9:3). She always finds herself circling back to a particular song "[Peace of Mind](#)" ([2022](#)), adding that this song fosters a sense of hope. It prepped her for the days' work ahead, allowing her to set aside her personal life and do her job to the best of her capabilities. Furthermore, music is a versatile tool that guides her through life's ups and downs and provides comfort in times of need; where each song contains a wealth of memories and emotions, shifting her experiences and perceptions. Nadine discovers hope and drive through the power of song, using music to inspire her to face the hardships of daily life.

She finds herself listening to music first thing in the morning as she wakes up. This daily endeavour is more than just revisiting the past; it's about finding comfort and inspiration in the songs accompanying her daily routine. Nadine emphasises that being able to attend that concert in 2023 was one of the best experiences of her life. Being able to attend a concert by an international group is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and Nadine acknowledges how lucky she was to be part of such an experience. [Imagine Dragons](#) fosters a sense of nostalgia within Nadine and the lyrics reflect her feelings that serve as a guide through the complexities of her internal world.

The places she goes and the things she does are frequently accompanied by carefully crafted playlists, which enhance her surroundings and provide depth to her experiences. Although she describes herself as a creature of habit, she enjoys excursions away from home and outside her regular routine. She explores new atmospheres and, by doing so, discovers new music to accompany her daily life. For her, the purpose of music is to "escape the hustle and bustle of the young adult life" (9:28). Nadine reflects upon a time when she struggled to make friends as she is very picky about who she allows into her inner circle: "...our time on earth is not forever, so the people I spend my time with have a very big influence ..." (9:27). Even in school music was an escape from the stresses of daily life, whether she was fighting with her friends or attempting to

bunk certain classes. Music provided her with consistent peace and company when she wanted to be alone.

Nadine's connection to music is extremely personal, intertwining with her sense of self and identity. Each song has a special place in her heart, from childhood adventures to adolescent anthems, bringing memories of happy days and innocent delights. She still listens to the same albums by [The Jonas Brothers](#)¹² who she first discovered when she was 8 years old, describing the album as "the next best thing" (9:40). A sense of nostalgia overcomes her as she shares stories of how she and her friends came together and danced to the music. Now, as a young adult, she reflects on her positive experiences and how her love for music grew, even though she did not recognise the meaning she ascribed to music at that time.

Music provides a safe space for Nadine, especially when she experiences emotions such as sadness. During these vulnerable times, she uses music as a tool to let those emotions out:

With ADHD and stuff, I always feel like I struggle to pinpoint what I'm feeling. I'm sometimes a bit confused about my emotions, and maybe if I say, angry or whatever, then I listen to music to help me pinpoint what I'm feeling so that I can then use my own methods to work through it. And uhm, step 1 will always be to listen to the music (9:10).

Music became a medium for narrative, allowing her to share her inner world with those around her. She especially notes how she shared this narrative through her playing the clarinet. Nadine finds "comfort and rebirth in music", which prepares her for the upcoming week's trials (9:55). Above all, music serves as a tool for joy and celebration, as well as a reminder of the valuable relationships in her life. Music pulls people together, whether it's at a live concert with a close friend or singing along with loved ones in church.

4.5.3 A sense of belonging

In Nadine's life, music is more than simply a soundtrack; it's a key aspect present in all her relationships. To this day, she cherishes attending an [Imagine Dragons](#) concert with her best friends who played an immense role in her life. She believes that the music one listens to reflects who one is as a person and, therefore, finds more profound meaning in sharing music with others. For Nadine, music connects her with the people who are essential in her life and every song serves as a channel for shared memories that go beyond words.

¹² An American pop band from the early 2000's formed by three brothers (Wallenfeldt, 2024).

Spirituality also plays an important role in Nadine's relationship with music, giving her a sense of connection and belonging. The lovely harmonies of the church organ provide comfort and strength, anchoring her in faith and community. She feels abundantly blessed to be surrounded by like-minded individuals during a church service, even if some people sing off-key. It gives her a warm feeling inside as the Holy Spirit moves her.

For Nadine, music plays a significant role in both romantic and platonic relationships. Specific songs become symbols of the happiness and intimacy shared with loved ones, even if they are not aware of the connections Nadine makes. This applies to all relationships she has where it is often a struggle to articulate her appreciation for loved ones, stating that "not a day goes by where I don't think of someone when listening to music" (9:54). She fondly shares that her brother plays an important role in developing and expanding her musical taste, providing leeway to a more significant relationship with her brother. This means so much to her because of the massive age gap between them that music minimised over time. Music also reinforces family relationships by acting as a bridge between distance and longing. Her father, who lives far away, has a significant influence on the music she enjoys listening to, including [Pink Floyd](#)¹³ and [Smokie](#).¹⁴ By listening to these bands she "feels a little closer to them and ... feel less alone when the longing kicks in" (9:39).

The sharing of music has a very personal meaning in Nadine's romantic relationships too—"I enjoy the idea of sharing music ... I feel it is very personal to when someone shares their music with me" (9:51). She describes it as "a step in the right direction", representing vulnerability and trust (9:51). She reflects upon the time when she and her boyfriend just started dating; he sent her a song which they still cherish as it appears in their playlist from time to time. Beyond personal relationships, collaborative music-making generates a different sense of trust and understanding within her relationships with fellow musicians. She emphasises the importance of give-and-take in such settings and working alongside others toward a shared goal: "It teaches one how to listen to and harmonise with the rhythms and melodies of others" (9:63).

4.5.4 Personal growth and development

For Nadine, music is a lifetime interest that she has fostered from childhood. She shares that her life has never been without musical accompaniment—even when she was a baby, her parents would play CDs, for example, [Baby Mozart \(2000\)](#). She remembers this fondly as she is currently

¹³ An iconic English rock band formed in 1965 who is known for their progressive and psychedelic music (Pink Floyd, s.a.).

¹⁴ An English rock band who achieved popularity in the 1970's known for their catchy tunes and distinctive soft rock style (Smokie, 2024).

on the lookout for those exact CDs that kept her company when she was just a baby. She describes being able to make music “her own place of peace...peace in her heart” and how she finds making music a most enjoyable activity (9:29). Making music for others is something she finds very personal and intimidating: “I’m not the biggest fan of performing for an audience, I feel very exposed...” (9:36). Nadine used to perform in impromptu concerts for their neighbourhood friends whenever her parents invited them over to their house, not realising what it meant for them.

She faced and overcame her fears of performing during her undergraduate studies as she realised that her fellow students’ stories often paralleled with her own. During her private rehearsals, she felt more relaxed and open to the music and, in turn, gained self-confidence. She could face the challenges presented by her repertoire by employing strategies she learned from her professor, breaking the music down into smaller pieces. She applied the same approach she utilised in private rehearsals in her personal life, especially when she faced difficult situations or conflicts. Rehearsing with other musicians fostered a sense of perseverance and joy during the creative process. Nadine feels comfort and fulfilment in both personal and collective musicking where music serves as a vehicle for personal expression and connection.

When Nadine is having “me-time”, she enjoys spending time with friends at bars or nightclubs, having a few drinks, and dancing the night away. Furthermore, she thoroughly enjoys making music with fellow musicians from university and attending live performances whenever she can. Attending live events helps Nadine appreciate the intricacies and complexities of music. Despite her keen ear, she enjoys the shared pleasure of watching excellent performances unfold. For Nadine, music is more than just auditory enjoyment; it is about experiencing the complete range of emotions and sensations. Nadine feels that being a musician is sometimes challenging, facing unexpected hurdles such as unfamiliar performing scenarios. Yet, her passion for music stays constant. Whether musicking alone or in a group, she feels fulfilled by creativity and expression. Still, she is humbled by her musicking experiences, noting that there is always room for growth and improvement. Nonetheless, she loves the sense of community and the shared purpose of working together.

4.6 Summary

The goal of this chapter was to present my findings after data collection and -analysis. All the participants’ stories were written as they were told during our interviews. Some personal information were disregarded if they did not relate to the research question about the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. Every participant had a unique story and meaning ascribed to music in their everyday lives. Even though the stories told was unique to every

participant, there were emerging themes that paralleled across these five stories. In the next chapter, I present three storiettes that emerged from cross-case analysis. The comparisons and connections in Chapter 5 offer insight to the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to music.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

he purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the meaning-making stories five young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. The participants, all millennials and members of Generation Z, have grown up in a digital era where music is more accessible than ever. This accessibility influences how they engage with music and construct meaning from it. While the digital world shapes their interactions with music, the study's contributions extend beyond this context, offering insights for further research, practitioners, and practice in understanding the role of music in the lives of young adults with ADHD. We are surrounded by music everywhere we go—hence the crucial role of music in the lives of young adults. This study may provide insights for teachers, parents, and peers of individuals with ADHD and for these individuals themselves. The study sought to answer the following research question: What are the meaning-making stories five young adults with ADHD tell about music?

For this research, I wanted to listen to the stories of other young adults with ADHD about the meaning of music in their lives and learned that their stories paralleled mine. Before recruiting the participants, I shared my story with each of the participants along with the first chapter of this dissertation. They showed interest in the importance of the study and continued to tell me their stories. Their stories presented meaningful narratives about the role of music in their everyday lives.

After collecting their stories, I transcribed their narratives followed by thematic data analysis with the help of ATLAS.ti 22. Themes emerged from each participant's narrative which I then restoried accordingly. Through member checking I confirmed my findings with participants and asked for feedback or any changes in the restoried narratives before I started writing this discussion section. From the data analysis, it became clear that there are correlations between what is presented in existing literature and the stories that ascribe meaning to music.

5.2 The meaning-making storiettes of young adults with ADHD

The final themes were derived from the analysis of the respective narratives by Megan, Lucas, Frikkie, Christopher, and Nadine. These stories were significant, as each one stands out on its own. Cross-case analysis strategies were employed to emphasise both the similarities and differences between the narratives and the literature. In this section, I synthesised the stories of participants to answer the study's research question, namely: What are the meaning-making stories five young adults with ADHD tell about music?

Three prominent storiettes¹⁵ emerged as themes from the participants' narratives, namely, (1) a storiette of belonging, (2) a storiette of emotions, and (3) a storiette of comfort. Through in-vivo coding or descriptive codes, I was able to better understand the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to music from the stories they told through their narratives. In the following section, I present and discuss the three storiettes that emerged from the participants' narratives in relation to the literature.

5.2.1 A storiette of belonging

Music as a soundtrack for life is the motivating force for one's daily use of music as individuals define and finetune ideas about "who they are, who they want to be, and who they associate with" (Bogt *et al.*, 2021:2487). The young adults who participated in this narrative study have unique experiences, trials, and tribulations prevalent in their lives. Each of the participants is in different fields of study and employment. A single song has the power to set the tone, provide mental clarity, and prepare Megan for the day ahead. Due to her demanding job, she spends little time with her family and friends alike. Nevertheless, the melodies connected with memories evoke a sense of nostalgia even when busy with mundane tasks in the comfort of her apartment, fostering a sense of being part of something. Engaging with music facilitates nonverbal emotional expression, mood management, and well-being (DeNora, 2000:110). All these aspects contribute to fostering a sense of belonging in Megan.

Similarly to Megan, a sense of belonging is fostered within Nadine's relationships, no matter how far or near she and her loved ones are from one another. She shared her narrative from the perspective of an only child who lives 1,300 kilometres away from home. She ascribes meaning to music because it connects her to all who are important in her life and every song serves as a channel for shared memories with her loved ones. Not a single day goes by when she doesn't think of someone while listening to music, providing her with a sense of belonging in the hustle and bustle of her everyday life. For her, the idea of sharing music makes her feel closer to others, especially when engaging in shared musicking experiences. Sharing such experiences with others are times she finds very special as collaborative music-making generates a different sense of trust and understanding in her relationships.

Music as an intervention tool for ADHD is a prominent aspect presented in scholarly literature with an emphasis on using music for social interaction through shared experiences (Papinczak *et al.*, 2015:1129). The themes present in the narratives of both Lucas and Frikkie (below)

¹⁵ A storiette can be defined as a short or shortened story. It is a narrative shorter in length than a novel, especially one that concentrates on a specific theme (Collins English dictionary, 2014).

emphasise that the creation of organised music with peers in a group necessitates a great deal of attention and self-control which encourages social inclusion and belonging (Rose *et al.*, 2018:3).

Even though he never felt like he belonged with his friends or peers in school, Lucas discovered a strong sense of brotherhood and companionship within his school's marching band. Despite the hardships that came along with a challenging repertoire and his lack of formal music education, he prevailed and forged friendships that evoked a side of him he had not known before.

Similarly to Lucas, Frikkie told his story from the perspective of a student teacher who faced many hurdles in his life. He flourished as a full-time student residing in a North-West University hostel. Being part of a musical ensemble fosters sentiments of belonging and trust and is a form of communication for young adults (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:579). Moving back home during the COVID-19 pandemic was a hard time for him as he could no longer be part of his musical family, which was fostered through singing in the university choir. For him, the choir was all he had which was suddenly ripped from his grasp. Nonetheless, he continues to cherish the valuable friendships he formed with his choral peers and continues to experience a sense of belonging. At the time of the study, he was in the final stretch of completing his B. Ed degree and continues to strive for meaningful connections through music in his journey forward.

Christopher grew up in a household where music was all around him and brought forth his love for singing. He is a perfectionist when it comes to music, but music is also a place where he finds fulfilment, companionship, and a sense of purpose. Through leading others in worship, a sense of emotional connections is fostered, which he describes as a "God-given talent" (7:16). Being synchronised with like-minded individuals through musicking and striving for such experiences is very personal to him. They create a space where a sense of belonging is present. Music is of major significance in social dimensions because it is a "universal social activity that reflects cultural norms" and the relationships between young adults, sounds, and physical space (Odendaal *et al.*, 2014:166). He shares the same passion for music at home, where he cherishes moments when it is only him and his guitar. In moments such as these, he feels the intensity of the music in his deepest core and becoming part of the music moves him deeply.

For these five young adults with ADHD, music is a tool for developing self-esteem, self-acceptance, feeling accepted by others, being aware of oneself, and having a positive outlook on life. This is confirmed by Beckmann (2013:96), who believes that pleasant experiences for young people, whether personal or social, are essential because they foster a sense of belonging with others. Music is integral to existence (Frith, 2004:45), and the theme of belonging consistently

emerges across all five participants' stories as a central aspect of the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to music.

5.2.2 A storiette of emotions

Everyone is confronted by a variety of emotions in our daily lives, and for young adults with ADHD the “struggle to regulate these emotions is particularly pronounced” (Ben-Dor Cohen *et al.*, 2021:2). I have found that most people often find difficulty when it comes to sharing their emotional state with friends and family and tend to suffer in silence. However, once you experience a sense of belonging, it becomes much easier to talk about your emotions with friends and family. Music is a guiding beacon for both Lucas' and Frikkie's being and emotions. Musical engagement goes beyond auditory pleasure for Nadine; it connects her with emotions, recalls memories, and serves as a channel for self-expression. For both Nadine and Megan, music creates a safe space where deeper emotions are confronted and conquered.

Like Nadine and Megan, who use music to create a safe space for confronting emotions, Lucas finds solace in music, though his approach is uniquely shaped by his engineering background. His use of music goes far beyond auditory pleasure, and he creates an environment where intuitive experiences resonate with his emotions. He appreciates being emotional when musicking as he connects his emotions with the feel and dynamic of the music. In this sense, he acknowledges the relationships between music and the emotions that are evoked. Lucas' narrative revealed the great emotional depth that art may create, revealing that music became more than just a passion in his story. Music is a lifeline, providing solace, expression, and connection with others. Through the ups and downs, music was “a comfort zone where distractions could be channelled into work amidst the fun and chaos” (3:37) where he could be his authentic, energetic self.

Frikkie, on the other hand, embraces the emotional responses music elicits. His narrative revealed that music acts as both a catalyst and a balm for his emotions. He is often overcome by a flood of emotions and finds it difficult to pinpoint and overcome such times. Music became his most important tool for “working through his emotions and keeping outside distractions at bay” (6:32). Rather than confronting his emotions directly, he allows music to amplify his feelings, creating a space where he can work through them in a controlled manner. “Music adds fuel to the flame” in a sense which allows him to gather his thoughts and feelings and, in turn, rids himself of the frustration (6:55). In his narrative, he shared that the music he listens to often parallels his emotions. He listens to angry music when he is frustrated and calm music when he goes to bed. As Beckmann (2013:133) suggests, music can serve as a structuring resource, helping individuals process their emotions. This is particularly evident in the narratives of participants, who illustrate

how music not only distracts and invigorates but also infuses their lives with meaning (Hallam & Himonides, 2022:581). The stories of Nadine, Megan, Lucas, and Frikkie collectively illustrate the profound role that music plays in the emotional lives of young adults with ADHD. Whether used to evoke, confront, or process emotions, music provides meaning, acting as both a refuge and a tool for self-expression.

5.2.3 A storiette of comfort

For many, a sense of comfort can be elusive, especially during transitional phases of life. In my experience, the transition from adolescence to young adulthood was quite uncomfortable. I ventured into the unfamiliar world of university, where the comfort of home was replaced by the challenges related to a newfound independence. Learning to cook and responsibly navigating the social scene both contribute significantly to the personal growth one experiences when stepping beyond familiar environments. This experience mirrors the journeys of the participants in this study, who also navigated the discomforts of young adulthood while seeking solace in music.

Throughout my own life and in the narratives of the participants, music emerges as a consistent source of comfort amid the challenges of daily life. For each participant, music not only alleviated discomfort but also played a crucial role in their emotional and social well-being. Musical engagement is recognised as a tool for enhancing social inclusion and well-being (Caló *et al.*, 2020:988). Music, on the other hand, can make Megan uncomfortable in some cases. She told a story about being in a church where a group of elderly ladies didn't sing in tune with the organ, making her feel uncomfortable. The off-key singing negatively affected her personal worship enjoyment. The reason is that the meaning of gospel music fosters a sense of peace and strength during times of weakness. Nadine shared a similar testimony regarding music and spirituality, stating that it provides her with a sense of comfort, anchoring her faith and community. This highlights how music's impact is deeply personal and context-dependent, reflecting the delicate balance between comfort and unease.

Navigating the social settings at university can be difficult, especially the nightlife. Megan, for instance, found alcohol-fuelled social settings and the coherent dangers of reckless activity uncomfortable. She does not condone behaviour where one does not maintain control over one's conduct and succumbs to peer pressure. Nadine states that she is as picky with the music she engages with when she is with friends. She realises that her time on earth is not forever, therefore, she chooses wisely who she spends her time with. She found it extremely difficult to see where she belonged and was wary of being too comfortable around her peers. The fear manifested deeply in the sense that she felt like an outsider. She learned that there are wonderful people in this world who will accept you and your quirks. Music is a safe space for Nadine, especially when

she is overcome with emotions. The endeavour of musicking is more than just revisiting her past but finding her past and inspiration for her everyday life. Music became her refuge and source of strength and identity. For each participant, music alleviated discomfort while playing a crucial role in their emotional and social well-being.

Frikkie also struggled with the feeling that he didn't belong. Music as an intervention for ADHD symptoms has received much attention in scholarly literature, stating that the employment of music rather than medication provides a sense of comfort (Upadhyay, 2014:39). Being part of a choir allowed Frikkie to be at ease and be his authentic self. Not only is music a means of escape for him, but music also allows him to express himself and what he is feeling. Music fostered a sense of comfort at times when Frikkie found himself overthinking, especially when he felt he was not good enough.

Frikkie and Nadine's narratives are also supported by scholarly literature, stating that music is a tool for empowerment. This means that music can strengthen an individual to overcome issues and obtain resources to deal with daily life (Beckmann, 2013:105). Nadine found comfort in both personal and collective musicking, as music is a vehicle for personal connection and expression. Both narratives reflect a strong sense of consistent peace, and the company music provides, even in times of solidarity. Music became a medium for narrative, allowing Nadine to share her inner world with those around her. Her connection to music is extremely personal, intertwining with her sense of self and identity. Music is a tool for celebration and a reminder of the valuable friendships in her life.

Frikkie believes that "music does not lead to significant moments, but that significant moments are connected to music" (6:52). Music plays an important role in his family relationships through bonding. For him, few things in this world bring people together the way music does: "Music is always sure in an unsure world" (6:42). Music is not only nostalgic but serves as a guide through the complexities of Nadine's internal world. These narratives vividly illustrate how music fosters a profound sense of comfort. Musical engagement for these participants goes far beyond emotional regulation and cognitive, emotional, or social functioning (Travis, 2012:1423). Life can be difficult more times than needed or necessary; every day is filled with unexpected twists and tribulations. Finding peace and comfort in daily life can be difficult. For Nadine and Frikkie, music became their haven.

I believe we flourish through music. The meaning of music for these young adults encompasses a sense of belonging, emotions and comfort in life—all of which are desired coping methods for young adults with ADHD. I believe music allows for positive well-being, improved quality of life, and the development of an individual's true potential.

5.3 Confessions and trumpets

While writing my study's final chapter, I often reflected on my three-year journey. It was not an easy process. My life took many unexpected turns during this time. As I enrolled for postgraduate studies, I was overcome with excitement and fear, wondering if I had what it takes to complete this degree. Nevertheless, I prevailed. I've always loved to learn. This dissertation lies near to my heart and was a very personal experience as I am a young adult with ADHD.

Some of my struggles writing this dissertation included being distracted because of my job as a waitress and a restaurant manager. There came a time when I had little to no free time to allocate toward my studies. This resulted in me resigning from my position to pursue my degree full-time. I was very hard on myself as I often had unrealistic expectations. I realised that I deserved to take time off to spend with friends and family. Gathering my data through interviews was a fun and insightful part of the research process. During these interviews, many themes appeared to align with my research question. It was a wonderful experience to analyse the data and present the findings along with scholarly literature.

5.4 Implications for policy and practice

I approached this study with a sense of curiosity toward the meaning of music for young adults with ADHD. I learned that there are individuals whose stories align with my own. Until I became an adolescent, I never knew anything about ADHD and what it means to be neurodivergent. I always felt like there was something wrong with me and that I didn't fit in with those around me. The stigma regarding ADHD has many negative connotations and most people are unfortunately uneducated on this topic. My goal was thus to shed light on this topic and inform others that "being ADHD" is not just laziness or being overly energetic, and to emphasise the positive impact music can have on the lives of those with and without ADHD. This study contributes to the field of music education and narrative research because it highlights the importance of storytelling and music in our everyday lives. This narrative inquiry can be a resource for other young adults who struggle with the transition to adulthood, challenges in the workplace, relationships, and emotional shortcomings. This study will inspire the reader to engage with music, whether through music making or listening to improve their well-being, self-identity, and quality of life.

5.5 Future recommendations

There is a need for longitudinal research to explore how music contributes to young adults with ADHD as they navigate their careers and strive to maintain a positive state of mind throughout their lives. Further research that could be considered includes a study conducted over a more extended period that could illustrate whether the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to

music changes or intensifies over time. In addition to a longitudinal study, I would recommend that the interviewer conduct follow-up interviews. It would be interesting to explore how the participants' awareness of musicking changed based on the questions during the first interview.

I've asked myself the question many times during the duration of this study as to the meaning young adults without ADHD ascribe to music in their everyday lives. I am aware that the findings of such a study might be very similar to the findings of my study. All humans want to feel like they belong, that their emotions are valid, and they seek comfort in life. It would be interesting to conduct such a study to compare the meaning ascribed to music by both groups of young adults and how the prominent themes would compare. Nevertheless, this study aims to emphasise the meaning of music for this specific group of young adults as they are, in my experience, often overlooked.

5.6 Conclusion

The young individuals with ADHD who participated in my study gave me glimpses into their daily lives through the stories they told about their connection with music. They talked about how ADHD symptoms they experienced as children have affected their lives as young adults. The significance people place on music in their daily lives is influenced by these tales. Social connections are facilitated by people sharing experiences in a safe environment. The three storiettes come together to tell the story of how music may be a sophisticated lifesaver for young adults with ADHD. All these themes imply that music plays a crucial role in their lives, enabling them to better understand themselves, connect with others, and find serenity in a sometimes-overwhelming world. For them, music is an integral component of their identity and well-being, not merely a kind of art or amusement. It provides a reassuring haven from life's hardships, a sense of belonging that offsets their feelings of loneliness, and an emotional compass that guides them through their inner world.

I wrote an "I poem" as a conclusion to this dissertation. A poem written in the first person is referred to as an "I poem". Such a poem aims to let the reader hear my own voice, including how I describe myself and my relationship to my research after concluding my work (Camic *et al.*, 2003:157).

I am weird

I feel like an outsider

I don't know why

I don't feel like I belong

I can count my friends on one hand

I feel overwhelmed

I can talk about it

I don't know where to begin

I find my place through music

I share in melodies, in rhythms, in moments

I find balance in the chaos

I lift my spirit

I calm my mind

I feel peace in the embrace of music.

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ADDENDUM A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Script prior to interview:

I'd like to thank you once again for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I have mentioned to you before, my study seeks to explore the meaning young adults with ADHD ascribe to music. Our interview today will last approximately one hour during which I will ask you about your upbringing, your life with ADHD (whether in school or university), the role of musical experiences in your day-to-day life, and what meaning you ascribe to such musical experiences.

You completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission (or not) to audio record our conversation. Are you still ok with me recording (or not) our conversation today?

___Yes ___No

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if, at any point, you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record. If no, thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions?

If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, you can feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer your questions.

(Research question: What are the meaning-making stories young adults with ADHD ascribe to music?)

- Tell me a story about the role of music in your everyday life?
- Tell me about your favourite places for engaging with music?
- Can you tell me more about the influence music has on your life?
- Why do you engage with music in your everyday life?
- Can you remember your first memorable musical experience(s)? Can you tell me what happened or how it played out?
- What do you become aware of when engaging in musical experiences?
- Whilst listening to music, have you had any significant experiences?
- Can you give me an example of when you experienced intense emotions during your musical experiences? (Probe: these emotions could include intense joy/sadness/anger/anxiety/worry etc.)

- What are the main differences between engaging with music on your own vs. in a group?

ADDENDUM B: CONSENT FORM

Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that we (the researchers) are conducting research in an ethical manner.

What is this research study all about?

- This study is an investigation of the meaning young adults with ADHD symptoms ascribe to music and will involve the use of narrative inquiry.
- The researcher has been trained to use the methods mentioned in the previous sentence.
- Approximately five participants will be included in this study.
- The objectives of this research are:
 - To understand and explore the meaning-making stories young adults tell and ascribe to music.

Why have you been invited to participate?

- You have been invited to participate because you are a young adult between the ages of 18 and 25 who experiences ADHD symptoms.
- You have also complied with the following inclusion criteria: a young adult who experiences ADHD symptoms.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be invited to participate in the noted study by interview.
- You will have 7 days/1 week to indicate whether you would be willing to participate.
- You will be requested to sign this Informed Consent Statement before the commencement of the study.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- By participating in this research process, you will help fill a gap in the literature. During this process you might have a better understanding of what music means to you and your future endeavours.
- The indirect benefit will probably be contributing to fill a gap in literature regarding young adults with ADHD and music. Your contributions may help others in their search for meaning-making musical experiences.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The possible risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the table below:

Possible risk	Mitigation strategy
COVID 19 risk during face-to-face interviews.	Due to the potential of Covid-19 infection, the researcher will observe the following rules during in-person/face-to-face data collection: • If the current Covid-19 restriction levels do not allow for such in-person meetings, the interviews will not take place.

	• That all persons wear a three-ply mask throughout the interview. • That the researcher takes the temperature of the participants before the start of the interview and FGD. If this is too high, then you will not be allowed to participate. • That hand-sanitizer (with 70% alcohol-content) be used <i>before, during</i> and <i>after</i> the interview. • That social-distancing of 1.5-2 meters be observed between all persons <i>before, during</i> and <i>after</i> the interview. • If the participants do not have a three-ply mask or hand-sanitizer, this will be provided cost-free by the researcher.
Tiredness and discomfort.	Comfort breaks of 15 minutes.

- *However, we do believe that the benefits to you and to science (as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study. We will respect your decision.*
- *Should we learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then we must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.*

Who will have access to the data?

The following procedures will be observed in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA):

Principle	How will this be done?	When will this be done?
Anonymity	Anonymity will be ensured by choosing your own fictitious names/I (the principal investigator) will assign a fictitious name/code to you before the interview starts. Only this name will be used in the research process.	Before the interview commence. After the interview has been conducted.
Confidentiality	Confidentiality will include the use of pseudonyms/codes for participants, organisations and locations. It involves not disclosing any information gained from an interviewee deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual, organisation and location.	During the recruitment process. Before the fieldwork commences. During the fieldwork. After the fieldwork has been completed During analysis and the write-up of findings. During the reporting of findings. During the publication of findings in the form of articles, books, conference proceedings, etc.
De-identification of data	All identifiable personal information will be de-identified to ensure that no	After the fieldwork has been completed.

	information identifies any participants, organisations and locations.	After you, as participant, has signed-off on the interview transcripts/responses/any other relevant information sent to you to check. Before data analysis and the write-up of findings start.
Data storage	All data collected for the purpose of the research will be stored safely in electronic format/hardcopy format for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed. The primary investigator will ensure data that both hard-(printed) and soft copy (electronic) are safely locked away and password-protected, respectively. Only approved people in my research team (<i>if applicable</i>) will/may have access to my raw data where the need arises. At the analysis stage, as will be the case throughout, the use of coding will reinforce participants' non-identification, hence upholding the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.	During the recruitment process. Before the fieldwork commences. During the fieldwork. After the fieldwork has been completed During analysis and the write-up of findings. During the reporting of findings. During the publication of findings in the form of articles, books, conference proceedings, etc.
Privacy	<i>Privacy</i> will be ensured by not probing unnecessarily if you do not wish to discuss particular matters.	During the fieldwork. During follow-up fieldwork.
Transcription/coding of data	I will/will not use a <i>transcriber</i> for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview. I will/will not use a <i>statistician/coder</i> for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview.	<i>If the primary investigator is responsible for transcribing/coding the data:</i> The primary investigator will be responsible for transcribing the data. Therefore, no other person will have access to the data. The primary investigator will be required to sign a NWU Confidentiality Agreement before the study commences. <i>If a subject expert (e.g. transcriber/language editor/coder/statistician) assists with/takes responsibility for transcribing/coding the data:</i> This/These persons /s will be responsible for transcribing the data. Therefore, no other person will have access to the data. This/These persons /s will be required to sign a NWU

		Confidentiality Agreement before the study commences.
Translation/interpreter services	I will/will not use a <i>translator/interpreter</i> for the purpose of the interviews/explaining the informed consent, etc.	This person will be required to sign a NWU Confidentiality Agreement and will not be permitted to share any information relating to the study with anyone else.

Collection of only relevant personal information:

Collection of only relevant personal information	I, the principal investigator and members of the research team (if applicable), will only collect personal biographical and opinion-related data about the topic I/we are studying.	Shortly list the <i>biographical</i> and <i>opinion-related</i> (main themes) information that will be collected for the purpose of the study.
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What will happen to the data?

The data from this study will be reported in the following ways: In all of this reporting, you will not be personally identified. This means that the reporting will not include your name or details that will help others to know that you participated.

This is a once-off study, so the data will not be re-used / Data may be re-used in the form of citations.

Will you be paid/compensated to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be paid/compensated to take part in the study, but pre-packaged refreshments will be provided before/during/after the study.

How will you know about the findings?

- The general findings of the research will be shared with you via email.
- If you would like feedback on your personal results, then I can share them with you via email.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact me at 082 822 8269 or nadjageldenhuis@gmail.com if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the chair of the Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof Erharbor Idemudia) at 018 389 2899 or Erharbor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in a research study entitled: "The stories young adults with ADHD tell about the meaning of music in their lives".

I declare that:

- I provide *informed consent*.
 - Thus, I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
 - Thus, I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I provide *voluntary consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
 - Thus, I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
 - Thus, I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I provide *specific consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
 - I provide *specific consent*. Thus, I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the interviews.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of participant

Signature of witness

- | | |
|--|--|
| • You may contact me again | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| • I would like a summary of the findings of this research | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| • I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed | ☐ Yes ☐ No |

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: _____

Postal Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Cell Phone Number: _____

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: _____

Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: _____

Declaration by person obtaining consent (if not the researcher/primary investigator)

I (name) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 ____

Signature of person obtaining consent

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher/primary investigator

I (name) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged them to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that they adequately understand all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 ____



Signature of researcher

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher and participant

Personal face-to-face interviews during Covid-19 restrictions (if applicable)

Additional declaration by participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I _____, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding Covid-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:
 - I consent to the researcher taking my temperature before the interview using a thermometer. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I confirm that my temperature measured at _____ degrees. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before the commencement of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 ____

Signature of participant



Signature of researcher

ADDENDUM C: ETHICS CERTIFICATE



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)

Faculty of Humanities Ethics Office for Research,

Training and Support

Tel: 018 285 2457

Email: Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za

09 May 2024

APPROVAL FOR CONTINUATION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Ethics number: NWU-01097-22-A7

Study title: The stories young adults with ADHD tell about the meaning of music in their lives.

Study leader/supervisor: Prof. M. van Vreden

Student: N. Geldenhuys

Application type: Single study

Risk level: Low risk

Dear Researcher

You are kindly informed that this application was reviewed for monitoring at the meeting of the North-West University Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC), Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, held on 08/05/2024. Following the review of the application, it has been decided that the study is approved for continuation.

Suspension	
Continuation	X
Termination	

Approval date: 08/05/2024

Expiry date: 08/05/2025

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact BaSSREC.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Erhabor Idemudia', is written over a horizontal line.

Professor Erhabor Idemudia Chairperson: NWU-BaSSREC

ADDENDUM D: INFORMATION GUIDE TO ATLAS BUNDLES

To open the ATLAS.ti 22 bundles that I have used for the coding of Chapters 4 and 5, follow the following steps (internet access is necessary for both these steps):

1. Install the free version of ATLAS.ti 22 <https://ATLAS.ti.com/free-trial-version>
2. Once the application is installed, follow the next link to the Google Drive where the ATLAS.ti 22 bundle can be downloaded and opened
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_V1QgAOxfWmoH60f9MTZXbUSe7fSAqb7