Agency and creative problem-solving through music therapy with unemployed women

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Abstract

South Africa faces a significant unemployment crisis. The largest percentage of those unemployed are young Black females and the issues they face are complex and pervasive. There is extremely limited research with this population looking at creative ways to solve these difficult problems and enhance their perceived sense of agency within a South African context. In this qualitative study, I invited young women at a shelter in Johannesburg to participate in a music therapy process centred around the topics of creative problem-solving and agency regarding the social issues relevant to them. This was a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study and consisted of eight music therapy sessions with varying membership, where 15 women participated in total. Together (through group members' articulation of what was meaningful, combined with my interpretation of what they had said), we developed the following findings: group members could more effectively appropriate the affordances of music as their understanding of music's helpfulness grew; the beneficial byproducts of a music therapy process can create intention for action; they developed their understanding of how they could benefit from connection to community; awareness of community systems is crucial to understand power to act; and the experience of agency is a dynamic one. These insights show the importance of a contextually situated approach to work in these spaces and the richness of the subjective insights that emerged through the PAR process. Participants' articulation of their experience has implications for music therapists working in these contexts, researchers, and non-profit organisations.

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1. Introduction

This study took place in a South African context at a women's shelter in Johannesburg. The shelter is in an urban, low-income area of Johannesburg where issues such as poor service delivery and crime are common. The shelter relies primarily on donations from corporations and other foundations to operate. The context and physical location of the shelter are important parts of the system within which the study was conducted.

Hess (2021) describes the current state of many countries across the world as being at the "nexus of multiple crises" (p. 270). The world is plagued by ancient, transcontinental, and pervasive issues. These notorious problems—such as poverty, climate change, and racism—are known as "wicked problems" (Yankelovich, 2014, p. 5). Yankelovich describes wicked problems as complex and multi-faceted issues that permeate multiple spheres of life. They require innovative solutions that approach the matter from multiple angles within a specific context. These problems need solutions that have the potential to "resist inequities and injustices across multiple contexts" (Hess, 2021, p. 271). Hess views the COVID-19 pandemic as the agent that laid bare the extreme social inequities already present. She claims that the COVID-19 pandemic motivated society to begin tearing down the systemic strongholds of inequity plaguing countries worldwide. The pandemic was a catalyst that sparked an impulse to address entrenched and systemic issues urgently.

Unemployment is a wicked problem. The causal factors of unemployment are highly complex, differ from one situation to the next, and interact. Many countries worldwide (so-called developed and developing countries) struggle with high levels of unemployment (Callioni, 2003). Almost half (44%) of South Africans aged 15-60 are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (DHET, 2021). This figure accounts for around 17 million South Africans. This percentage is higher for women than it is for men (55.8% of the NEET population is women. According to Mahlakoana (2022), Black women are most affected by the unemployment crisis, contributing 40,6% of the national unemployment rate. More than half of these 17 million South Africans are under the age of 35 (i.e. youth). The unemployment and school dropout statistics reported by the Department of Higher Education and Training give a somewhat dismal portrayal of what life looks like for youth in South Africa. It is vital to access the skills and resources of this portion of the population within the national workforce (DHET, 2021).

Entrepreneurship is widely viewed as a solution to unemployment. However, the precursor to entrepreneurship is entrepreneurial intent, which entails the motivation to begin a new business venture. For an entrepreneurial intervention to be effective, entrepreneurial intent must spark action. This intent is determined by both personal and contextual factors (Hughes & Schachtebeck, 2017), including

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financial opportunities and support (Ervesti & Venetoklis, 2010). In addition to this, a sense of agency has been identified as crucial for the progress of unemployed youth.

In this study, I used the provisional definition of agency given by Laura Ahearn (1999) (a linguistic and sociocultural anthropologist informed by feminist theory). She defines agency as "the human capacity to act" (p. 12). Ahearn notes that agency is not synonymous with free will. This notion of agency acknowledges the cultural, social, economic, and other constraints that may apply to various individuals. This formation of the definition also alludes to systems theory thinking. Fryer (1986) proposes a theory of agency restriction where he asserts that possibilities to exercise one's agency in periods of unemployment are strongly restricted, which can have a devastating effect on well-being.

Fouché and Stevens (2018) argue that agency holds potential for individuals' self-empowerment. Daveson (2001) defines empowerment as gaining control over one's own life or circumstance and shifting from feeling powerless to being more motivated. Radebe (2012) further includes a sense of self-reliance, enhanced access to resources, and enhanced rights in their definition of the term.

Emeh (2012), a researcher in Nigeria, found promising evidence that youth empowerment programmes have a significant and measurable positive effect on youth unemployment. Out of all the programmes they evaluated, the ones that focused on leadership, training and skills development, and entrepreneurship development were the most effective.

Ezzy (2001) discusses how unemployed individuals narrate their situations and how this has the potential to affect how they perceive the power they hold within a context of unemployment (for example, the belief in their agency and their ability to find a job). Drawing on narrative therapy literature, Ezzy's comment can be compared to the idea of reframing or re-authoring. Narrative therapy maintains that the way a story is told (including who is telling the story) gives meaning to the story itself. If a participant can change the way they tell their story, it is possible that the meaning of their story will change altogether (Madigan, 2019). This is a step towards creative problem-solving.

Creative problem-solving refers to clarifying and establishing a problem, conceiving potential solutions, and then fine-tuning those solutions for implementation (Isaksen et al., 1993). One can propose new solutions to old problems by changing perspective and reframing a problem. Sawyer (2013) describes how all people have creative potential and highlights how important creativity can be in all spheres of life (including being successful in one's career, learning, making good decisions, and solving difficult problems). Further, he mentions that one can grow and nurture creative capacity. Through this study,

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the participants and I observed and explored the interaction between music therapy and creative problem-solving.

According to Daveson (2001), empowerment is both a natural consequence and a vital component of the process of music therapy. In group music therapy, empowerment emerges when a client has a genuine sense of being able to contribute equally to the group process. According to Hunt (2005), participating in group music therapy facilitates empowerment by providing enhanced peer support through group participation in music-making and discussion.

After reading case studies about the beneficial role of music-making for community upliftment in community music and community music therapy initiatives (by, for example, Black (2019), Fouche and Stevens (2018), Oerhle (2013), Pavlicevic (2010), and Veblen (2013)), it is clear that community music therapy interventions (and community music initiatives) fostering community empowerment can be very effective. I did, however, notice a lack of research into community musicking and community music therapy as a potentially empowering medium for those who are unemployed or NEET, especially when looking through the lens of creative problem-solving and agency. In this dissertation I will be discussing how I attempted to contribute to this gap in the literature through a participatory action research (PAR) process with young women in a shelter.

1.1 Aims and Research Questions

In this PAR study, the aims and research questions were broadly stated upfront but were specified and refined throughout a process of collaborative interaction with the participants, who were also seen as co-researchers. My initial preliminary sense of questions that could be proposed were as follows:

1. How do young women who are unemployed use a music therapy process for creative problem-solving regarding social issues relevant to them?
2. What are their experiences of agency throughout the process?

Through this study, I sought to explore how young women who are unemployed used a music therapy process for creative problem-solving regarding relevant social issues and their experiences of agency throughout the process. I sought to explore experiences of being unemployed from the perspective of young women, hoping to amplify their voices. Through collaboration with the participants, the research questions were further refined in terms of the specific social issue they deemed relevant.

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2. Literature Review

In this review, I discuss literature concerning the following themes: South African youth who are NEET and the everyday psychosocial stressors faced by this population; community music and community music therapy in South Africa; and the use of music therapy to foster creative problem-solving and enhancing agency.

2.1 Youth and Unemployment in South Africa

In the first quarter of 2023, the South African unemployment rate was 32.9% (Stats SA, 2023). As of January 2021, the unemployment rate for youth (those aged 15-34 years) accounted for 63.3% of the national unemployment rate. Approximately 60% of South African learners drop out of school before achieving their National Senior Certificate (Hartnack, 2017). Dropout results from a long process of learners becoming discouraged and detached from their education (Mahamba, 2021). The causes of this considerable dropout rate can be attributed partly to the legacy of the oppressive apartheid regime (the dropout rate is significantly higher amongst Black youths). However, the network of causal factors contributing to dropout statistics is complex and includes systemic, institutional, and individual factors (Hartnack, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these statistics. For example, in Gauteng, 1008 students had still not returned to school by April 2021 or could not return due to schools being ill-equipped to facilitate the safe returning of their students to in-person tuition (Mahamba, 2021).

2.1.1 Common Psychosocial Stressors Faced by NEET Youth in Gauteng Communities

The effects of the legacy of the racist apartheid regime have had a significant effect on South African youth. Many of the psychosocial stressors experienced by South African youth are racially charged (Jackson et al., 2010). Exposure to sexual violence is another significant stressor confronting South Africans. South Africa has the highest rate of incidents of gender-based violence worldwide. According to South African Police Chief Bheki Cele's quarterly crime update, 9518 cases of rape were reported between January and March 2021 (Ismail, 2021). In particular, youth exposure to violence (including but not limited to sexual violence, crime, gangsterism, victimisation, and racial violence) is especially high in South Africa (Choe et al., 2012). In 2016, researchers in the United States of America found an association between exposure (through either witnessing or directly experiencing) violence and feelings of powerlessness (Thomas & Hope, 2016).

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG, 2018) statistics on suicide from 2017 showed that over 20% of those over 18 years had attempted suicide once or more. Dlamini et al. (2019) report that those who are NEET are especially susceptible to discouragement, depression, and anxiety. They also identified links between idleness caused by unemployment and substance abuse. The

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COVID-19 pandemic potentially worsened these statistics. A study into the mental health of young South Africans shows a significant increase in depressive symptoms during periods of lockdown (De Lannoy et al., 2020).

Unemployment statistics are higher for women than men in almost every country worldwide (DHET, 2021). Researchers in Botswana found that young women are more affected by unemployment and related social issues. In this context, many women become engaged in criminal activities to provide for themselves and their dependents (Diraditsile & Ontetse, 2017). Dessie (2015) found that unemployed Ethiopian women are susceptible to many negative consequences. These include (but are not limited to) domestic violence, isolation, unwanted pregnancies, hopelessness and anxiety, divorce, and prostitution. Dessie also stated that vocational training and family planning are two factors that can help decrease the population of unemployed women in Ethiopia. Both researchers in the two African studies above stated that further, well-articulated research is needed into young unemployed women's experience. Although these studies were conducted in a similar context (in Africa and low-income countries), the South African context is distinct and coloured by different factors and thus requires context-specific research.

De Lannoy et al. (2019) mention the heterogeneity of the population who are NEET and emphasise how knowledge of the diverse experiences within this group is crucial for engagement. By understanding this group's experience, more effective engagement options can likely be explored. In a study by Baldry et al. (2019), researchers synthesised the information from many qualitative studies on the youth population who are NEET in South Africa. They found that quality of schooling and post-school education, family and parenting, financial exclusion, health and safety, lack of information and connection, transport and mobility, and belonging and social networks were some of the most notable challenges for the population of youth who are NEET.

Various studies show links between unemployment and apathy. Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea (2017) discuss the impact of poverty on decision-making and behaviour and how people in situations of poverty are less likely to believe that their actions influence the course of their lives. In addition, it is often observed how people in these situations might make decisions that many believe might impact their lives negatively. The authors, however, encourage outsiders to view these actions as necessary responses to difficult circumstances as a means of survival instead of pathologising the thoughts and behaviours of those in poverty. Dalton et al. (2016) link an inhibition-oriented stance (with decreased motivation to pursue one's goals) with decreased proactivity in ambiguous circumstances. A large area of research amongst this population focuses on political apathy. For example, Chuake (2020) links unemployment and voter apathy in South African youth, highlighting how factors such as lack of involvement in policy-making, lack of accountability in politicians, as well as general cynicism about

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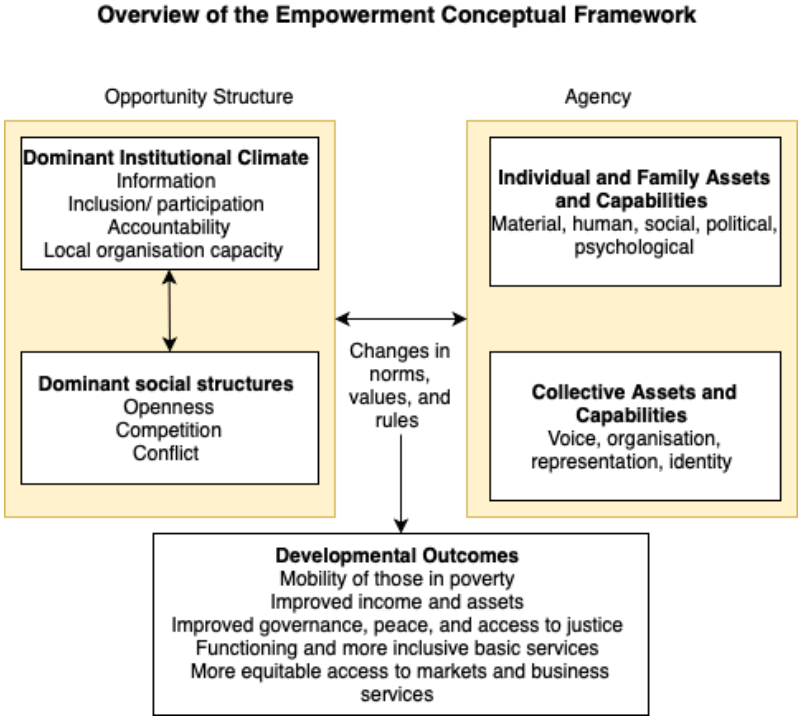
politics are the most significant contributors. In addition, they critique how youth are educated and spoken to regarding voting with modern young people often being treated as homogenous with the youth in newly-democratic South Africa, as if their ideals and values would be the same. Cudd (2014) directly links the development of agency with poverty alleviation, and states that it is something that should be developed in every person.

Narayan and Petesch (2007) outline a framework for thinking about the various factors that influence agency and poverty-escaping actions. They detail two main factors. The first is the opportunity structure, including both social and institutional factors that create the environment in which individuals can act. How individuals act within this environment is influenced by both their individual and collective assets and capabilities. It is important to note that these two factors both influence and interact with each other and are not mutually exclusive. The authors further highlight how changes in both arenas can lead to positive outcomes on both individual and societal levels (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Overview of the Empowerment Conceptual Framework (Narayan & Petesch, 2007)



In addition, it is worth mentioning some of the literature on the scarcity mindset, which was originally outlined as an economic phenomenon by Mullainathan and Shafir (2013). A scarcity mindset refers to how perceptions and conditions of scarcity create specific psychology and consequently specific behaviours relating to the perceived paucity of resources. The individual's focus is almost exclusively

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on the scarcity experienced. This is beneficial when managing urgent issues that require immediate solutions, but the consequence of this is limited cognitive capacity for other tasks. This means that individuals have lower capacity to deal with other issues that may seem less urgent but do indeed require as much attention. Again, it is important to see this as an often-necessary response to a difficult situation, rather than neglect or incompetence to deal with other issues.

2.2 Music as an Agent of Change

Bertold Brecht (as cited in Askew, 2003) wrote that "art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it" (p. 233). The arts in South Africa have long been used as an agent of social reform and revival (Schumann, 2008). In the apartheid era, musicians such as Dorothy Masuka, Miriam Makeba, and Hugh Masekela used music as a catalyst for political change in the popular sphere. Music has also been used in churches, prisons, and by guerrilla warriors. Music has been used traditionally as a healing tool; for example, the Zulu Thembeka gospel choir, consisting only of choir members who were HIV positive, attempted to change the discourse around HIV/AIDS into a more informed and compassionate one with less stigmatisation (Black, 2019).

2.2.1 South Africa and Community Music

Community music is especially difficult to define, with boundaries that separate community music from non-community music being blurry and flexible (Veblen, 2013). The community music "tapestry" is "local, personal, political, multifaceted, and, above all, fluid" (p. 10). It often—but not exclusively—occurs in informal contexts. Although community music can be a group or a personal event, the descriptive facets of community music all rely on the idea of community as a foundational principle.

Oehrle (2013) details a South African case study of community music where the *Ukusa* non-profit programme created opportunities for students who would not have otherwise had the chance to develop their skills in the arts. The students were given the chance to do so at a meagre cost and without exclusion of any form (for example, there were no auditions). The music learnt primarily included jazz and African traditional music, at the request of the students. Another example of community music is the *Diversion into Music Education* (DIME) intervention for juvenile offenders (Woodward et al., 2008). This programme aimed to divert the energy and focus of children away from crime and towards music-making in marimba and drumming ensembles. This programme encouraged self-realisation, self-fulfilment, and enjoyment through group music-making. Although these are two very different examples, they both consist of two things: a distinct community and music. Community music is highly contextually rooted and always situationally defined, and thus it is essential to understand South African society trying to understand South African community music.

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The spirit of community music in South Africa can be captured by the Nguni Bantu term *ubuntu*, colloquially defined as "I am only because we are" and "my humanity is… inextricably bound up in yours" (Ngomane, 2019, p. 13). *Ubuntu* seeks to create harmonious relationships between people living and acting in the same society (Kondlo, 2017). Mngoma (1990) explains how such cultural beliefs are embedded in the communal music-making of African people. South African cultural norms that govern community relations—such as the idea of *ubuntu*—are present in South African community musicking. Anything that enhances the health of a community and strengthens healthy community relations (as the above examples of community music interventions do) is an example of *ubuntu*.

2.2.2 Community Music Therapy

There are subtle differences between community music and community music therapy (CoMT), although both are inseparable from community contexts. Stige (2010) defines CoMT as "collaborative and context-sensitive music-making" (p. 5), focused on amplifying the voices of those who are disadvantaged in each context, while also recognising and working with their strengths and resources. CoMT entails an experience of shared music-making not only for the love of music but also for enhancing health, development, inclusion, and equality. Stige also notes how CoMT interventions can create opportunities for extra-musical issues to be addressed in a musical setting. In these contexts, music is understood as a "social phenomenon" (p. 9). CoMT is highly context-situated and adapts to the specific community, individual, or group it involves (Pavlicevic, 2010).

Van Rooyen and Dos Santos (2020) conducted a study where they looked at the experience of children living in a children's home who participated in a CoMT choir and found an increased capacity for both inter- and intrapersonal communication during musical ensembles. Here, musical collaboration in a group encouraged healthy group dynamics (and with that, healthy community relations) through holistic communication with oneself and others. This also effectively captures the African spirit of *ubuntu* through a musicking experience.

South African music therapists such as Mercedes Pavlicevic, Kerryn Torrance, and Sunelle Fouché have created spaces for the upliftment of people in gang-ridden communities in Cape Town through CoMT programmes. The *MusicWorks* project in Lavender Hill includes music therapy sessions, choirs, marimba classes, and gumboot dancing workshops, with the intention of enhancing and drawing from existing strengths and resources for the benefit of the community as well as to foster social connection and tolerance between individuals (Fouché & Stevens, 2018).

Fouché and Stevens discuss the role *MusicWorks* played in increasing participants' resilience. They draw on Ungar's (2011) definition of resilience as:

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> Both individuals' capacity to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways. (p.225)

Ebersöhn (2017) defines resilience as an adaptive (often better than expected) response to situations of adversity and risk. Similarly to Ungar (2011), she mentions that this adaptation process can be individualist (i.e. finding strength within oneself to cope) or collectivist (i.e. drawing on social capital to address adversity). She lists "protective resources" (p. 3) as assets people draw on to respond resiliently to their circumstances (Ebersöhn, 2017). These include personal traits (such as grit), temperament, environmental resources, cultural capital, social capital, spiritual capital, and natural resources.

The definitions of resilience and agency (as the human capacity to act) are closely linked. Ungar's definition of resilience enforces the idea that resilient individuals and groups can alter their circumstances and that the resources required to do so are contained within that individual or group. An active sense of agency is the consequence of realising inner resilience.

Most importantly here, CoMT frames participants as active agents in their own stories and acknowledges their agency as a vital force among community members. Rolvsjord (2015), for example, stresses the importance of service user's experiences of agency during music therapy processes, stressing that therapeutic outcomes can be strongly linked to individuals' perceptions of agency during the process, as the service user is ultimately the one who generates change.

Hughes and Schachtebeck (2017) mention the importance of interventions that spark action when approaching unemployment. A case study in the South African community music therapy literature specifically discussing a link between cultivating agency through music therapy and the self-empowerment of young unemployed women is yet to be seen.

2.2.3 Music Therapy for Creative Problem-Solving

Creative problem-solving aims to establish one's understanding of a problem clearly, create possible solutions, and then refine those solutions for implementation (Isaksen et al., 1993; Madigan, 2019). Hess (2021) mentions the importance of creative problem-solving when dealing with wicked problems. When individuals face complex issues (such as poverty and unemployment), it is important to think creatively and innovatively about solutions that encourage resistance in the face of systemic inequities.

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Lesiuk (2010) conducted a quantitative study where she measured the positive affect of participants in high-cognitive demand jobs when listening to music. She noted how participants often experienced positive affect when listening to preferred music. Positive affect was shown to improve creative problem-solving skills and systematic thinking. She also found a significant increase in the cognitive performance of individuals listening to preferred music.

There is abundant research on employing a creative problem-solving approach in music education (DeLorenzo, 1989; Hickey & Webster, 2001; Kuzmich, 2008). Thus far, the link between music therapy and creative problem-solving has not been well researched. One example is offered by Jahedi and Khoi (2016). They conducted a quantitative study investigating how the mathematical creative problem-solving skills of young children from Tehran were impacted by music therapy. The researchers found that the children who attended the music therapy sessions showed a significant increase in creative problem-solving skills, as measured by the Wechsler's Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI). This study is the only research specifically investigating the link between problem-solving and music therapy. I did not find research in the literature regarding music therapy as a tool for creative problem-solving related to social issues.

2.3 Creative Problem-Solving Through Music Imagination

Greene (1995) emphasises the importance of imagination in solving social issues. Imagination allows for challenging the status quo and expanding one's thinking beyond what is considered normal within social structures. Imaginative solutions could be on the level of large-scale policy change or small-scale solutions to individual problems (for example, coming up with an idea for an entrepreneurial venture).

Music is an effective medium for evoking imagination as it offers insight into the experience of others, the possibility of multiple realities, and visions into "alternatives to embedded habits of daily living" (Hess, 2021, p. 275). Ebersöhn (2017) mentions that individuals whose thoughts are constantly occupied by the stressors they face are less inclined to identify their resources and experience a lack of capacity for imagining alternate solutions and realities.

Reichling (1997) discusses the relationship between music, play, and imagination. She asserts that imagination is an essential ingredient in play and emphasises how imagination is essential to all musicking experiences. She outlines imagination as either fantasy (make-believe, imagining something that is not there, imagining something that does not exist), figurative (imagination through metaphoric comparison), or literal.

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Music lends itself to fantastical imagination in various ways, such as when composing a brand new melody, interpreting a pre-composed piece in a new way, exploring mental imagery that is evoked when listening to music. These are all ways of imagining and bringing into being what was previously non-existent.

Figurative imagination in music can include representation, through metaphor, of something that exists but is not part of the current experience of the performer/composer/listener. For example, a singer does not necessarily have to be heartbroken to express feelings of heartbreak in a song. A composer using figurative imagination could select a specific instrument or instrument family to evoke certain imagery (for instance, in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, each instrument represents a character in the story).

Lastly, literal imagination is grounded in a real, sensory experience governed by the rules of that particular experience. Reichling (1997) uses the example of a chess game. One is restricted by moving pieces of one's colour on the board in ways determined by the rules of the game but can imagine the various moves one can make within that context. In music, the example of a performer playing a crescendo could be considered. The "rule" might be that the performer must gradually increase the dynamics at which they play, but how they do this can be creatively imagined and experimented with. A slightly freer example of this could be improvisation. Rules can be given (for example, a set number of bars that each jazz band member can improvise for); however, the performer can choose what happens in those bars. Almost every aspect of the music experience can involve imagination in various forms. As such, imagination can be evoked through actively musicking in any of the imaginative forms mentioned above.

Imagination literature is important to consider in light of what has been discussed about scarcity mindset as well as Ebersöhn's (2017) conception of resilience. Imagination here is a tool for exploring possibilities and opening up one's perspective for creative solutions to wicked problems within a specific context.

This review of literature has shown the gaps in the research, primarily in terms of our understanding of the lived experience of South African youth who are NEET or unemployed and exposed to multiple social stressors, the enhancement and impact of agency in community music therapy, and how music therapy might afford creative problem-solving opportunities, specifically regarding social issues. These are the gaps that I attempted to speak to in this proposed study.

3. Research Methodology

In this section, I will discuss the paradigm that framed this study, the research methodology I employed, the approach I took, and the rationale behind these decisions. I will also discuss who the participants were and the ethical considerations.

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3.1 Transformative Paradigm

Paradigms are constructed of specific approaches to ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and the participants), and axiology (morality and ethics) (Mertens, 2009). I drew on a transformative paradigm to guide my study. In this paradigm, the researcher acknowledges that interaction occurs between the researcher and the participants (or co-researchers) in a relationship based on trust. Knowledge is firmly situated in a social and historical context, and the power dynamics and privileges that form knowledge are explicitly addressed. The consequence of choosing one reality over another is acknowledged. Mertens (2009) asserts that ethically, the researcher operates from a position of respect for cultural norms and with the "promotion of human rights and social justice" (p. 49) as the goal of the research. Mertens draws a link to the APA's (2002) description of a culturally competent psychologist and asserts how the researcher should become

> an agent of prosocial change, the culturally competent psychologist carries the responsibility of combating the damaging effects of racism, prejudice, bias, and oppression in all their forms, including all of the methods we use to understand the populations we serve (p. 1).

Transformative research should assess individuals' power to adjust unequal power relations imposed upon them, for example, through resistance. Although the transformative paradigm can employ quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods methodology, focusing on a deep contextual understanding of participants' subjective experiences underpinned this study, which led me toward a qualitative methodology. In pure PAR, the methodology would also be decided by participants, however I was limited by the fact that I needed ethical clearance of my proposed dissertation before conducting data collection with the group members.

3.2 Qualitative Methodology

According to Flick (2007), a study falls into the qualitative category if it relies on text (which can refer to any aspect of the world such as spoken word, written text, artworks, and pieces of music, as well as subjective reflection of individuals on any of these things) rather than numbers and other "empirical material" (p. 2). Qualitative researchers are interested in the lived experiences and perspectives of participants. Qualitative studies often deal with social constructs and subjective experiences. In qualitative research, the researcher starts with information and eventually forms conclusions around collected information. This differs from quantitative analysis, where research is deductive rather than inductive.

Additionally, qualitative researchers seek to understand the social world by looking at how it is interpreted by those who live in it (Bryman, 2012). I aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of how

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this specific group used and experienced music therapy to explore how useful it was to their lives, and what future work in these contexts might look like.

3.3 Participatory Action Research

PAR is an approach centring on shared ownership and active participation in the research process. Its outcomes are directed toward solving problems and creating social change (Stige, 2002). PAR embraces mutuality and collaboration, meaning that researchers should be flexible to adapt to the directions and suggestions of those participating. Every aspect of the research process in PAR is inclusive and consultative (Aldridge, 2017).

The benefits of this approach include potentially generating a deeper contextual understanding of the problem. PAR ensures that possible solutions are relevant and realistic (Gardner et al., 2019). PAR has specifically been designed to respect and amplify voices those considered marginalised or "vulnerable" (Aldridge, 2015, p. 7). Having the participants guide the therapeutic process can make it as effective for them as possible.

Hunt (2005) details six fundamental principles that should guide PAR. These occur over the five steps of the research process: defining the problem, finding supporting data, designing a plan, data collection, and analysis. These principles encourage free, democratic communication, where facilitating a space in which participants feel able to share freely is essential in working towards tailored and impactful solutions. The researcher's approach should be holding the intention to learn and generate knowledge ensuring the participants are aware of their ability to change the outcome of the process through their choices. The fourth principle speaks to facilitating processes that enable participants to develop their sense of empowerment. Empowerment is afforded by encouraging participants to take ownership of the process through democratic collaboration and decision-making at every step of the process. Lastly, PAR should function as a liberating form of research, meaning that participants should experience opportunities for a greater sense of freedom through the study. This could occur through challenging unequal power relations or experiencing a greater sense of agency in making decisions and directing the research process.

In PAR, members of the group dictate how the study progresses. Even so, I aimed to facilitate a space for honest discussion of experiences, beliefs, and feelings, as well as the discovery of each participant's perhaps unknown inner potential. The ultimate aim of the study was to understand how if at all, participants used the music therapy space to grow their creative problem-solving skills and gain an understanding of agency within their specific social settings. The participants were offered opportunities to participate in activities such as singing, drumming, playing instruments, song-writing, verbally processing relevant topics, music listening, and drawing or painting. I came to the sessions

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with a basic structure containing suggestions about what we could do, and participants chose which techniques they participated in depending on what they wanted to work on. This collaborative approach to session structure offered opportunities for decision-making, agency, problem-solving, and instigating change.

These techniques are valuable tools that, when developed, have the potential to be beneficial outside of the music therapy space as well. For example, arts-based processes are useful for exploring past, present, and future scenarios and gaining insight into them. Such exploration can be done by role-playing a past relationship through a musical improvisation can offer another dimension of insight into the dynamics of that relationship. Being able to draw (or sculpt, sing, play or dance…) one's feelings about a life event or feelings towards one's situation could offer a depth of understanding that words might not be able to reach. Participants could also expand this idea to explore their relationships with non-human entities. For example, exploring their relationship with unemployment. Arts-based processes are useful when building resilience. An arts-based process can create space for safe risk-taking (and thus growing one's confidence when taking risks), growing assertiveness and confidence (for example, in leading a group improvisation).

Arts-based processing and PAR also go hand-in-hand in several ways. Firstly, artistic activities lend themselves to collaboration. Secondly, arts-based processes are aligned with PAR in being action-oriented (Spaniol, 2005). The decision to hold this process in a group format was also important. This format can create opportunities for developing teamwork skills that can be useful in the workplace. In addition, group members had the potential to experience different perspectives, support from their peers, and experiences of leading, following and collaborating within a group (Hunt, 2005).

3.4 Selection of Participants

The participants in this study were women residing in a women's shelter in Johannesburg. Inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Between 18 and 35 years of age
- Women who are unemployed and living in the shelter
- Women who can understand and communicate in English as the sessions were planned to be conducted primarily in English. It was not necessary to make translators available, as all participants were able to participate in English.

I used a convenience sampling scheme. Convenience sampling refers to the process where the researcher simply invites participants who are available at a particular time and place (Bryman, 2012). I approached the managing staff of the shelter and asked permission to speak to the women, advertising my study and inviting them to join voluntarily. I then created a WhatsApp group for the women interested in joining.

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This shelter had a capacity of 40 women; thus, the number of participants in the study was relatively small. Only some of the women in the shelter attended. Not all women in the shelter were in the 18-35 age group. Patton (2002) states that "information richness" and "observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher" (p. 245) are more important in determining the relevance of a study than the sample size. Thus, a small group of participants can be justified by focusing on acquiring in-depth insight and perspective from my participants. However, rather than just acquiring rich information from group members, I wanted to offer them a space for exploring ideas together on their own terms. A smaller group size also makes it easier to hear individual voices and respect their agency.

Members of the group also changed from session to session. The likelihood of the group structure altering was also increased by the nature of homeless shelters being temporary homes. Women in the group left the shelter at various points during the study.

3.4.1 Ethical considerations

I addressed a letter to the shelter, asking their permission to facilitate this study on their premises once a week over 12 weeks (see appendix A). I am in possession of the signed permission letter, although this is not attached to keep the shelter anonymous.

The nature of PAR dictates that the number and frequency of sessions should be decided by the participants. Thus, 12 sessions was an estimate. In the end, we only had eight sessions together. At the beginning of the first session, I gave each woman an information letter (see appendix B) and a consent form (see appendix C) to fill in. I am in possession of signed copies of these as well. I explained the consent forms to the women and those who wanted to participate signed them. Because the space lacked physical boundaries, it was also necessary to acquire consent from people who were not participating but were shown on the video because they walked into the room during the session. Any woman who joined after the first session had to go through the same process before they could participate in the study. As explained in the information form (appendix B), I reminded the participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without facing any consequences.

Data will be stored securely for 10 years in a password-protected online folder managed by the music therapy unit of the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria. If any other researchers would like to use the anonymised, archived data during this time, they may do so. As I will discuss in section 3.5, the anonymised data consists of thick descriptions of video excerpts and verbatim transcripts of verbal processing. Names (and other identifying information) have been omitted from the thick descriptions and transcripts. I had planned to make a translator available, who would have been required to sign a

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confidentiality agreement (appendix D), however, this was not necessary as we did not require a translator.

At the start of each session, I reminded participants of the confidentiality of the space. I asked them to refrain from sharing anything disclosed by other group members that may be sensitive. This was included in the consent form. After the process, I reflected on how this might have been an imposition on the group members, how I had not considered the possibility that they did not want the space to be confidential, and what the implications would have been if they did not want our process to be confidential. This was not something that was collaboratively discussed, and I perceived how the group members might have found this jarring when they began calling me "the consent form lady".

Whenever any women required additional counselling, I referred them to Lifeline for free counselling. The shelter also had various resources for skills training and education. In this way, where participants were motivated to act in a specific area of their lives, resources were available to guide them. I also prepared a list of referrals in case a group member consulted me regarding an area of their life where they wanted to pursue something but needed guidance.

I had a dual role in this study as a therapist and a researcher. For this reason, I ensured that I received constant supervision in both the clinical and research areas of the study. The well-being of the participants was always of utmost importance and was my priority throughout the process of the study.

3.5 Data Collection, Preparation, and Analysis

I strived to make the data collection process as collaborative and participant-led as possible. However, because women left throughout the study, I also included my perspectives in the analysis and interpretation of the data. I worked to clearly distinguish when a comment was my interpretation and when it was something that a participant contributed. As a participant observer, I became a member of the group. Through this collaboration with the participants, my voice was also present throughout data processing and analysis.

Participant observation refers to the process of a researcher taking part as a member of a particular group of people. It is essential for the researcher to maintain a non-judgmental stance. The researcher either takes mental notes in the moment that will be later converted into written (and theoretically informed) observations (O'Reilley, 2009) or, as was the case in this study, observation can occur through video recording. I video-recorded all the sessions for further analysis after the session. Participant observation is a valuable data collection method as it allows all participants (including the

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researcher) to actively engage in the process (Kawulich, 2005). The main benefit of this data collection method is the potential richness and high quality of the data collected.

We (the participants and I) collected data through video recording and gathering any artefacts that emerged from the sessions (for example, songs written by participants or drawings). Video recording is a valuable means of collecting data as not only verbal communication between participants but also behavioural exchanges can be captured. Video captures non-verbal communication—eye contact or body language—and the use of material objects such as musical instruments. Video recordings can also offer insight into group dynamics and participant interactions (Sparrman, 2005). Practically, transcription is also made easier when the participants can be seen, as opposed to the researcher having to remember the sound of each participant's voice. A potential setback of video recording is the arousal of self-consciousness in the participants. Further, awareness of being video recorded can lead to participants' self-censorship and avoiding disclosure of sensitive or taboo issues. This may be avoided somewhat by ensuring all participants understand and agree to respect the confidential nature of the space (Mitchell & de Lange, 2011). Sparrman also suggests directly addressing the presence of the video camera in the room to demystify its presence and role.

Due to this study involving PAR processes, all aspects of the research — including analysis — need to be owned and guided by the group (Hunt, 2005). Therefore, at the end of each session, I asked participants to give a keyword, phrase, or any other symbol to signify what was most meaningful to them in the session. This marked the beginning of the simultaneous, mutualistic endeavour of processing and analysing the data.

I then extracted excerpts from the video recordings based on the following criteria:

- A participant highlighted the moment as meaningful.
- The excerpt showed the keywords or phrases given by participants at the end of a session as they reflect on the process;
- The excerpt showed the symbol(s) given by participants at the end of a session as they reflect on the process;
- The excerpt showed a participant/the participants employing creative problem-solving (verbally or through an arts-based process);
- The excerpt showed a participant/the participants employing or discovering agency (verbally or through an arts-based process);

I then wrote thick descriptions of each video excerpt. Schwandt (2001) explains the process of writing a thick description as highlighting context and engaging interpretation: "it is this interpretive

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characteristic of description rather than detail per se that makes it thick" (p. 255). A thick description details how action develops within an excerpt, presenting the excerpt as a text that can be interpreted (Ponterotto, 2006).

All the verbal processing from the therapy sessions was transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated into English. Transcription is an important and potentially problematic part of the data collection because it is an interpretive process rather than a simple "clerical task" (Kvale, 2011, p. 2). By transcribing a verbal narrative into a written one, the researcher transforms the text into a set of different hermeneutic and linguistic rules. As the researcher transcribes, they need to present both the words being said and how they are said in terms of the prosodic and paralinguistic nature of the communication. Researchers can use short-hand and symbols to signify these elements of speech, for example, by placing an accent on a letter to show a change in pitch (Kowal & O' Connell, 2013). Kvale states how helpful video recordings can be when transcribing interviews to analyse body language and interpersonal interaction. However, this can make the process of transcription a time-consuming one.

The next step of the process was to present the data in such a way that reflected what the group members identified as meaningful. Therefore, I conducted a process of thematic analysis informed by the content highlighted as meaningful by the participants. Thematic analysis is based on developing themes or patterns in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline the process in six steps. Firstly, one reads and rereads the data to familiarise oneself with it. Here, the researcher can note initial thoughts and observations. Secondly, one generates codes. Codes are words or phrases encapsulating an interesting or important piece of data, idea, or paragraph in the most straightforward manner possible. Thirdly, one looks through the codes for similarities and groups similar codes together. These groups are referred to as themes. Once the codes have been grouped into themes, the next step is to refine these themes and begin making meaning from the data by defining them and giving them a title. Lastly, the researcher writes a report to describe the themes outlined in the analysis. In a recent paper, Braun and Clarke (2020) mentioned how the steps outlined above should not be strictly followed but blended and repeated in a reflexive process.

To adapt the analysis to be as collaborative a process as possible, I used in vivo coding wherever possible and followed the participants' lead in relation to the most relevant and meaningful portions of data. I then took the coded data back to the participants to amend.

Braun and Clarke (2020) mention how a researcher's (theory-informed) subjectivity can be useful during the analysis process. According to them, the researcher should, and can, make use of their subjectivity. I chose this specific method of analysis because it allows for the consolidation of both the

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perspective of the participants (no matter how long they were part of the study) and my perspective as the researcher, thus staying true to both the aims of the study and the nature of PAR.

3.6 Research Quality

PAR studies are directed in such a way as to amplify the voices of those considered marginalised (Aldridge, 2017). The ethical considerations and the moral approach of this design are core ideals continually guiding the process (Angen, 2000). A PAR approach itself, therefore, gives ethical validation to the study. PAR ensures that participants' contributions are valued and respected; it aims to benefit all involved; it accommodates difference and ambiguity; and is ultimately driven by challenging and transforming societal oppression and systemic strongholds.

I aimed to address potential forms of hierarchy in terms of contribution to creating knowledge by viewing the participants as co-researchers rather than subjects being observed. This responsiveness gives my study methodological integrity, as my agenda as a researcher was not more important than the participants' agenda (Bruscia, 1998).

Stige et al., (2009) propose the acronym EPICURE to evaluate research quality and development. The first part of this acronym (engagement period, processing, interpretation, and critique) deals with evaluating the richness and substance of the written accounts. The second half (consequences of research, usefulness, relevance, and ethics) deals with the preconditions and implications of the research. Using this acronym offered by as a guide, the quality of my study can be assessed as follows: This study took place over a relatively long engagement period of approximately 12 weeks. This engagement period was sufficient to get to know the participants to elicit and encourage honest and transparent communication. Not all participants were present for all eight sessions, however, the time allowed me to become sufficiently acquainted with the context of the shelter itself although was not able to be sufficiently acquainted with some of the group members who had attended only a few sessions. I ensured precision in the data processing period by extracting data from video recordings, ensuring that neither verbal nor visual information was missed. The information extracted from the video recordings was based on participants' contributions to what was meaningful for them.

4. Analysis and Findings

In this chapter, I will introduce the participants, discuss the music therapy process (in terms of its development and the content of the sessions), and discuss how the data was created and worked with. Throughout the process, I tried to make the generation and interpretation of data as collaborative as possible, however, I acknowledge that I played a role in making sense of the data, which is influenced

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by my beliefs, experiences, and perspectives. Wherever possible, I have made the various perspectives explicit.

4.1 The Context

Figure 2
The Group Members and Myself Taken at the Last Session

My account of the context of the shelter was coloured by experiences I had and observations I made both within its walls and in the surrounding neighbourhood. The buildings in the surrounding area were dilapidated, the street was littered with bags of refuse that had not been collected in weeks, and the road was pockmarked with potholes. People were often out and about on the street, going about their weekend business. People were washing cars, some doing their hair at the salon, and others standing and smoking in the street as they caught up on the week's news with their acquaintances.

A large wall and gate protected the shelter. To gain entry to the property, I had to pick up a stone and hit it against the gate, shouting for someone to let me in. How I was received once I had entered differed depending on the week. On some of the icier winter mornings, the shelter was quiet and subdued. On other mornings, it was buzzing with people going about their business. A few times, another organisation was there, fighting for a moment of the resident's time. On weekends, the shelter was run by residents who had been there for longer, and now function as part of the management. The wall in the kitchen had an extensive list of duties for who should be doing the cooking and cleaning. These observations all contribute to the community system operating within the shelter and each aspect has a role to play in the lived experience of the group members.

4.2 Group Members

As per the proposed selection criteria for this study, I sought to invite unemployed women between the ages of 18 and 35 to participate. Most of the group members were within the age category. However, a few group members wanted to participate even though they fell outside of this age category and the NEET category (as the shelter sends the residents to workshops during their time there, and one group member was studying at the time). Ethically, it would not have been fair to exclude them. The

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information presented in Table 1 shows how the group members described themselves (including the pseudonyms they chose) as well as how I experienced them and what I observed:

Table 1

Group Member's Details

Pseudonym	Brief Descriptions of Relevant Details
Cecilia	Age: 28 Cecilia is the mother of a one-year-old girl (who attended all groups, even when her mother did not). Cecilia is a self-proclaimed "mother" to other residents of the shelter. She described herself as bubbly and outgoing; she enjoys being indoors and likes football. She was very dedicated to the therapy space, often encouraging the other residents to join, and displaying frequent pro-group behaviour.
Goddess	Goddess is both a resident and part of the shelter's management team. She is interested in fitness and makeup. She loves beautiful things (especially clothing) and dreams of being a make-up artist. She attended most sessions but was in and out due to having to facilitate visitors and deliveries.
Lee	Age: 21 Lee is originally from outside of South Africa. She loves music. Lee was mostly quiet and reserved in the groups, but also had moments where she was outgoing and directive. She attended more sessions during the beginning phase. Her attendance declined as the group came to an end.
Sweet Mamma	Age: 40 Sweet Mamma is the mother of a baby and a teenage girl. She sells biscuits informally to make money for herself. She was often quiet in the groups but contributed to the sessions when prompted. Her attendance was irregular, as she was often sleeping when I was there.
Mimi	Age: 21 Mimi is the mother of a young boy, who often attended the sessions without her. She was quiet in the groups and often only joined towards the end of sessions. She never attended a full session.
Cali	Age: 23 Cali is the mother of a baby girl. She came to almost every session, but her participation was strictly as an observer in the group, except for the fifth session when it was only her and I in the group for large portions of time. Her presence in the groups was quiet and gentle.
Lovely	Age: 30 Lovely arrived at the shelter towards the end of the process. I experienced Lovely both within the group setting and once in an individual setting while we were waiting for other group members to join us. In group settings, she was quite shy and did not say much, but she shared freely and had a lot to say in individual settings. She also participated freely on the various instruments, and creatively suggested many musical ideas.

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Chilli-Bite	Age: 27 Chilli-Bite is loud and outgoing. She has a son who lives in a different province and she struggles with being away from him. She expressed her opinions very strongly, and often dominated the sessions she attended. She also thought she may have Bipolar Mood Disorder and reported feeling very down in a few of the sessions.
Rose	Age: 22 Rose is studying film, and requested to still be a participant in the group even though she was studying. She is an aspiring actress and entrepreneur. She likes blueberries, and palm trees. In her description of herself she explained that her favourite colour is blue, and her favourite food is pizza and lasagne. She was quiet, thoughtful, and insightful in the groups.
AM	AM is the mother of a baby girl. She was quiet and mostly preoccupied with her child during the one session she attended. She reflected on how her child's engagement with the session was of importance to her.
LT	Age: 22 LT was a well-educated and vocal group member. In describing herself, she highlighted that she likes animation and dislikes some people. Her favourite colour is black, and her favourite food is pizza. She only attended the second-last session. She used to work as an assistant to an advocate. She was friendly, and enthusiastic in her participation during the group.
Slam	Age: 33 Slam is also part of the shelter management. She is well-educated and was very vocal in her participation in the group. She often dominated the conversation and spoke eloquently.
Tamia	Age: 22 Tamia is the mother of a baby boy. She likes taking photographs, and dislikes spiders. She loves the colour purple, and her favourite food is "mac 'n cheese". She only attended the second-last session. She was quiet and reserved in the group. When prompted her participation was relevant and insightful.
Nadia	Age: 37 Nadia is the mother of a 7-year-old boy who lives in another province. She is trying to find work teaching English online to people in East Asia. She likes travelling and hates cooking. Her favourite colour is pink, and her favourite food is fried chicken. She was quiet in the group, but thoughtful and insightful in her participation when prompted. She only attended the second-last session.
Y	Y only attended the first session and shared a song that she had written about being away from her family during a family death during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3 The Process

I approached the first sessions with an open intention regarding the structure of the process. I offered the group various musical experiences and introduced them to what was possible in our time together.

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Once I had done this, I invited them to articulate goals for our process that would inform our journey going forward.

The music therapy process consisted of seven Saturday morning sessions, each approximately an hour and a half long. The group decided which day of the week we would have sessions, what time these would be held, and the frequency of the sessions. The group membership varied weekly (changing from a group size of ten to only two on one day). In addition, residents moved in and out of the room throughout the session, so their attendance, as mentioned in the tables below, may only apply for part of the session.

At the end of the process, we had one final reflection session where we discussed the topics that had emerged from the sessions and reviewed the process. Before describing the research process, it is necessary to clarify my use of pronouns. As I reflected on my role within the group, I realised that as much as I wanted to become more of a participant than a facilitator in the group (in an attempt to dismantle the power dynamic between us), my role and participation in the group were distinct from theirs. When I use "I" and "they/them" pronouns, I am referring to processes where the roles of group facilitator and group members were distinct. Here, either I had a clear role as the facilitator and was more directive, or it was a moment where the group members and I could not experience something as mutual. For example, in moments when they spoke about the difficulty of their shared context that I was clearly not part of. When I use the pronoun "we", I am referring to a process where we functioned more as a unified whole, and perhaps more in line with how the relationship should look between researcher and group in a PAR study (in essence, as co-researchers).

4.3.1 The Beginning Phase

Although I have structured my discussion around the process in three phases (beginning, middle, and end), the characteristics of each phase are somewhat difficult to distinguish due to this being an open group. The changes in membership meant that although I was trying to track trends over time, the development of thematic material was mostly non-linear, and I was aware of the need to co-create space for both newer and more regular group members to participate equally.

The beginning phase was marked by musical experiences specifically centred around getting to know each other as well as exploring the various modalities and possibilities that they could experience as a group through a music therapy process. What follows are thick descriptions of video-recorded excerpts that I have taken from the data created in this phase, in line with the data selection criteria. These excerpts were extracted from video recordings of each session. The first three criteria centre the

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experiences of group members while the last two gently hold the broad research intentions that I had for the study:

- A participant highlighted a meaningful moment;
- The excerpt showed the keywords or phrases given by participants at the end of a session as they reflected on the process;
- The excerpt showed the symbol(s) given by participants at the end of a session as they reflect on the process;
- The excerpt showed a participant/the participants employing creative problem-solving (verbally or through an arts-based process);
- The excerpt showed a participant/the participants employing or discovering agency (verbally or through an arts-based process).

Session One

This was an impromptu session immediately after the initial contracting and explanation of the study. I invited the group members who agreed to join the study to participate in the session.

Table 2

Session 1 Data Excerpts

Session 1 (29/4)	**Attendees**	**Session Structure**
	Lee, Cali, Cecilia, Goddess, Y	Recruitment (speaking to the residents and inviting them to participate) Contracting (signing consent forms) Spontaneous and unstructured drumming Singing *When Jesus Say Yes* as suggested by the group Discussing the option of song writing for future sessions Y shared a song that she had written
Excerpt 1	Reason for selection: <u>Group member showed agency in creativity during a musical improvisation</u> Description: Right at the beginning of the session, I initiated an impromptu djembe drumming circle by asking the group for a beat. Without saying anything, Lee began playing a somewhat complex dotted rhythm on her drum. The group members immediately join in, playing the same beat. This developed into a lengthy improvisation.	
Excerpt 2	Reason for selection: <u>Group member showed agency by articulating their needs</u> Description: I expanded on the possibilities of our drumming circle by introducing the group to the concept of improvisation and then I asked for a simple beat from the group. The group was silent. I suggested a beat and the group members attempted it. Cecilia said that she was struggling with the beat and asked for something simpler. I simplified the beat, and we tried it again. This time, everyone was able to play the beat together, and with ease.	

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Excerpt 3	Reason for selection: Group member showed agency by playing without invitation and ending a group improvisation Description: We ended the first drumming improvisation. The group seemed enthused (through their cheerful facial expressions and sighs of enjoyment after we had finished playing), but also wary of the new territory of improvisation (through the slow and cautious emergence of their improvised playing that did not stray too far from the basic beat that formed the foundation of our improvisation). I showed the group several different ways of ending a drumming improvisation (such as a rumble and counting down to the ending). Goddess spontaneously began playing as I finished speaking, smiling to herself as she did this. The group eventually joined her, playing together with her energetic beat. After playing for a while, Goddess looked at me with an expression that signified she was getting tired of drumming. I nodded to her, indicating that she could end the music if she wanted to. She began playing a loud rumble on the djembe to indicate the ending. She finished it off with one loud beat, and the rest of the group played this together with her. She smiled and chuckled gleefully, saying that she was glad we were able to end together.
Excerpt 4	Reason for selection: Group member showed creative problem-solving in a musical improvisation I had asked the group for a suggestion of a song we could sing together. They negotiated between themselves before suggesting *When Jesus Say Yes.* As we were singing together, some group members suggested we play along on the drums. Y told Cecilia to suggest a beat. She began playing a rapid beat that did not quite fit with the phrasing of the song. We carried on playing. She stopped for a moment and then adjusted her beat to suit the phrasing of the song better.

As we continued with the session, other shelter residents came in and watched us making music together, some even taking videos of us. One by one, children from the shelter started coming into the room and watching us quietly as we made music together. The session ended with us drumming together for a large audience of children and other residents. (I reflect on the ethics of this in the following chapter.)

Session Two

When I arrived at the shelter for the second session, I was met with a minibus full of women from a church who were coming to donate to the shelter and speak to the residents. They asked if they could join the group for a moment. I asked the group members, and they agreed that the church members could join the session. I got the impression that the group said yes out of obligation rather than wanting the women from the church to join us. I also felt uncomfortable saying no, as one of the women was already in the room when they asked to join us.

Table 3

Session 2 Data Excerpts

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Session 2 (6/5)	**Attendees**	**Session Structure**
	Chilli-Bite, Goddess, Lee, Cali, Cecilia, Rose	Greeting song Singing *Avulekile Amasango* together (as suggested by Goddess) Introducing ourselves and sharing a part of our story Singing *Ajekho Ofana* together (as Cecilia had asked for a gospel song) Singing and prayer from the visiting church members Working with clay and listening to music (as requested by the group) Group discussion of the experience Discussing the coping strategies they use when they are struggling Drumming and singing *Shosholoza* to close
Excerpt 5	Reason for extraction: Group member showed agency by directing the session and leading the group Discussion: After the greeting song, I handed out percussion instruments to everyone in the group, including the fifteen women from the church. I asked for a suggestion of a song that was easy enough for everyone to sing, even if we didn't know it. Goddess suggested *Avulekile Amasango*, and asked if everyone knew it. Everyone in the room did know it, so she led us in singing it. Her voice was strong and powerful. The group followed along easily in the refrain part of the song. She ended it quite abruptly, but I encouraged her to keep going. She started the song again by singing just the refrain part twice. After this she began singing the solo lead part again. We ended the song more gradually the second time, by singing the refrain with just our voices, and then only the percussion instruments (without singing), eventually ending with a rumble on the various percussion instruments.	
Excerpt 6	Reason for extraction: Group member showed agency by articulating a need Discussion: The women from the church then prayed for the group and left. After they had left, I facilitated a brief check-in with the group to see how they were feeling after the busy start of the session. They engaged seemingly superficially with the question, mostly responding by saying they were good. I asked Chilli-Bite if she was still feeling down (as she had checked in earlier by commenting that she was feeling very down), and she said yes. She explained that she was staying because she did not want to be alone. I then offered the group a relaxing experience or an energetic experience. Rose spoke up and said that she felt that she needed something calming. I suggested listening to music and working with clay. The group agreed to this.	

After the music listening, the group members reflected on the various conflicting emotions they experienced in general when visitors came. A lot of them expressed a somewhat low mood. I asked them if it was normal to have large groups of visitors coming into their space and having to entertain them. They stated that it happened regularly. While the presence of such visitors could feel supportive, Cecilia stated how sometimes it made her feel like there was something wrong with her and provoked questions in her about why she was there and what her next step should be. Goddess agreed with this.

In an attempt to understand how they normally respond to difficult feelings, I initiated a discussion on coping skills. The group members shared helpful coping strategies they already have in place. Goddess

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mentioned how she goes to the gym and how that helps her feel much better. Cecilia explained that she likes to watch YouTube videos on her phone as well as football. Rose uses incense to calm herself when she is feeling down. Lee mentioned that she listens to music when feeling down and that that is the only thing that helps her. Once the group seemed calmer and more supported, we drummed again briefly to end the session.

Session Three

This was the first session where I saw some of the group members experience difficulty accessing their creativity. During a free-writing exercise, I put on a piece of music and asked the group to write or draw whatever came to mind when they listened to the music. Sweet Mamma sat staring at the blank paper in front of her. She commented that she had no idea what to write. I told her to write whatever came into her head and not to censor herself. She stared at her paper for a moment longer before picking up the pen and beginning to write. At the end of the piece, she turned to Slam and said that she just wrote down a whole lot of nonsense. I acknowledged and affirmed that this was okay, and there was no need to "produce" something. Lee also reflected that she could not think of any words, so she just drew a picture of a bow. After this, we discussed taking what they had written in their poems and using the ideas to write a song together, but the group decided against this. They articulated feeling as though they did not have enough content or skill to write a song. They maintained their decision despite assuring them that I could assist them with this. The excerpt in Table 4 details what the group members found meaningful in the session.

Table 4

Session 3 Data Excerpts

Session 3 (20/5)	**Attendees**	**Session Structure**
	Lee, Rose, Chilli-Bite, Slam, Cali, Sweet Mamma	Greeting song One-word check-in Drumming together (ending with drumming to prerecorded music) Dancing to music suggested by group Free-writing process (with the intention of creating lyrics to write a song) Discussing song-writing One-word check-out (identifying meaningful themes)
Excerpt 7	Reason for extraction: <u>Group members identified a meaningful moment</u> Description: At the end of the session, I asked each group member to reflect on what they had found meaningful about the session. Lee reflected on how she felt exhausted at the session's beginning and did	

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	not want to attend. She had felt like everybody in the shelter wanted something from her, but she decided to come to the group anyway and felt energised by some of the experiences – particularly the dancing. Chilli-Bite said that she thought the session would be boring and did not want to attend, but she ended up having a lot of fun. Rose said that she did not want to come because she usually likes to isolate herself, but she came and found value in being around others. She reflected on how she felt within the group by using the word "harmony". Sweet Mamma reflected that she was angry at the first check-in because of something that happened before the session, but she calmed down as the group progressed. Slam said that she enjoyed seeing her fellow group members access their creativity and create something without needing it to be perfect.

Cali attended the sessions from the start of the process but seldom participated actively, mostly acting as an observer. During the reflection in this session, she said that nothing was meaningful to her. I affirmed that this was a perfectly valid response and appreciated her honesty. I asked her if there was anything I could do to make the process more meaningful for her, but she could not think of any ideas. I also asked the group members to reflect on what they would like to get out of the process. Lee and Cali replied that they did not know. Sweet Mamma responded that she wanted to feel like herself again (particularly regarding calming her feelings of anger). Chilli-Bite, Rose, and Slam said that what they would like to get out of the process was the opportunity to do something together as a group. Rose replied that she would like the opportunity to be creative in a variety of ways. I then used this feedback from the group to inform my approach to sessions in the next phase of the process. I offered processes that catered specifically to emotion regulation, interpersonal experiences, and creative expression.

4.3.2 The Middle Phase

This phase was marked by the refined focus mentioned above. In addition, this was also a phase of notable scheduling conflicts and disruptions to the continuity of our process because of these conflicts.

Session Four

The fourth session with the group seemed rich and content-heavy. I was more intentional about introducing discussions and experiences that were more directly related to the research questions. This intention might seem contrary to the philosophy of PAR (especially seeing as I did not form my research questions collaboratively with the group members – this will be discussed in the limitations section of the last chapter). However, I believe that my role here was to be what Anne Toomey (2011) calls a catalyst. She describes this as an approach to community development where the purpose of the catalyst is to spark new action in a particular direction. She describes this person as someone who simply "gets

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the ball rolling" (p. 189). Given my research into context-appropriate literature beforehand, and my knowledge of the context, I believed this was an appropriate decision. In addition, I was sensitive to the needs articulated by the group, and constantly informed my approach with these needs in the foreground of my mind. I intentionally avoided overtly psychotherapeutic intentions because I was aware that I was only there for twelve weeks and did not want to start a process that could not be safely concluded.

During this session, I initiated a discussion around the meaning of creativity and creative problem-solving. Here, the group defined creativity as "making something new out of something else". There was some hesitation when defining creative problem-solving. However, we eventually collaboratively defined it as "creating new solutions to old problems" as well as "thinking about solutions to problems in new ways".

During this session, the group members used craft materials to visually represent what they wanted the music therapy space to be like (in terms of physical, social, and emotional affordances). Here, they outlined their need for a space that could be warm, filled with love, healing with music, relaxing, a place they could come to when feeling down and where all their physical needs are met, where we can connect with nature, and just be creative. The most important need identified by the group was love. In addition to this, I reflected on how the spaces they created all had closed doors. The group suggested that this might mean that they desired a space that was safe and comfortable. The excerpts taken from the data based on the extraction criteria are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Session 4 Data Excerpts

Session 4 (24/6)	**Attendees**	**Session Structure**
	Cecilia, Chilli-Bite, Sweet Mamma, Lee, Goddess	Drumming with greeting song Brief verbal check-in Singing *Something Inside So Strong* Discussing creativity and creative problem-solving Crafting the space (what they want the music therapy space to look like) Discussing the crafted space Singing *Something Inside So Strong* again
Excerpt 8	Reason for extraction: <u>Group member showed agency by changing the lyrics of the song</u> Description: I began singing the greeting song (*Somebody is calling my name*) and playing the drum, inviting the group to join. The group members joined in on the drums but sang along very quietly. The energy of the drumming grew. When prompted to sing her name during the greeting song, Chilli-Bite said, "I don't want to be called by somebody" and began singing "Yeshua is calling Chilli".	

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Excerpt 9	Reason for extraction: Group member showed agency by directing the ending of an improvisation Description: The drumming continued after we finished singing the greeting song, and once again quickly developed a strong sense of groove. There was a moment where it seemed like the drumming was going to end, but Lee played a confrontational beat which sparked more confrontational beats from the rest of the group, and the drumming picked up in energy again. It carried on for a brief moment, and then she initiated a rumble to indicate that she wanted the drumming to come to an end. The group members cheered, and Cecilia waved her hands in the air.

The following paragraph is in italics to indicate that what is said is my purely subjective reflection on the content:

Despite the rich content that emerged from this session, I also began to feel a strong sense of what I interpreted as apathy from the group members at this point in the process. I had waited for almost an hour for the group members to join the group on this day. (It was a cold winter's morning). The management staff has called them multiple times, but they did not come down for a long time afterward. (I originally wrote this sentence in the passive voice: They had been called several times by the management staff. I reflected on why that might have been. Although I cannot be sure, I do believe it reflected some of the passivity I felt at that moment, waiting for an extended period of time for the group members to join me).

I had also forgotten to take a picture of the poster they had created at the end of this session. I asked multiple times for someone to send a photo of it on our WhatsApp group, but nobody did. In general, their replies to my messages were exceptionally infrequent. I experienced this as apathy and as them not being overly invested in the process (perhaps feeling as though they might have had more important things to do). However, it could have been due to general business of preoccupation with other things.

Session Five

Session	**Attendees**	**Session Structure**
5 (1/7)	Cecilia, Cali	Drumming with the greeting song (this was very disruptive because Cecilia kept having to leave the room throughout the session) Brief verbal check-in Singing *The Climb* Discussing the lyrics Playing drums along to an amapiano song (myself and Cali alone)

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		Discussing the lack of attendance and how to make attendance easier Playing instruments along to *Something Inside So Strong* (as requested by Cecilia) Verbal check out (identifying meaningful themes)

Table 6

Session 5 Structure

This was the most disjointed and difficult session of the whole process for me. It began with only two group members, as everyone else was either busy or ill. Cecilia was continually called out of the room, and so it was only myself and Cali for most of the session. I mentioned earlier that this was the only session Cali participated in, and that was because there was nobody else in the room. For this reason, I have not included a table of excerpts here. Instead, I briefly discuss the session as a whole below.

I struggled with feeling that she might have felt obliged to stay, but I did reassure her that she was free to leave if she chose to. In conversation with her, she shared that she was doing a make-up course. I asked her if she wanted to be a make-up artist. She replied that she did not enjoy wearing or applying makeup and communicated that she was only doing it for the possibility of getting a job.
After this discussion, Slam entered the room and asked me why Cali was the only group member present. I stated that it seemed like everyone was busy with chores or otherwise unavailable. Slam replied that she believed the residents "lacked volition" and "needed to be pushed" to attend things. I asked her if she thought the group members could be excused from their chore duties until the data collection was finished, but she did not believe this would be possible. When Cecilia re-entered the room, she said that it was just a busy Saturday, and she was certain next week would be better.

In the moments when both group members were in the room, I invited them to do a lyric analysis of the song – *The Climb*. Cecilia was shocked that there was a song that spoke directly to her circumstances, saying: "I loved the song; I didn't know there was a song that was like exactly what I am facing. Now I know that if I face a struggle, I must be strong and I have to find a solution". She identified that it was meaningful to her to have access to songs that speak directly to her situation.

4.3.3 Ending Phase

The ending phase of the process was marked by meaningful and rich processes exploring ideas around the discovery and development of agency through musical and arts-based processes. Sessions during this phase of the process were laden with rich content that dealt with topics of concern in detail.

Session Six

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Table 7

Session 6 Structure

Session	**Attendees**	**Session Structure**
6 (8/7)	Lee, Lovely, Cecilia, Goddess, Chilli-Bite, Mimi, Cali, Rose	Welcome and check in Discussing how music helps (with Lee and Lovely) Listening to *Ba Straata* (suggested by Lee) and drumming along. Drumming call and response (with Lovely only – Lee had left the room) Brainstorming an end product for our process Discussing agency Suggesting and listening to the songs that make us feel powerful Verbal check out (identifying meaningful themes)

This session focused on how music can help participants in their daily lives, more specifically, how music can help them to be active agents in their daily life. I felt that this session would be better outlined with a broad description, combined with the images from the processes rather than with a selection of excerpts. This is because the session was focused on agency as an explicit intention. Therefore, most of the session would have been extracted as it relates to agency.

Figure 3 shows the brainstorming process related to how music helps in general areas of their day-to-day life. Figure 4 illustrates how music helps in relation to their agency (here defined as the power to act). The brainstorming was done almost exclusively by the group members. My only contribution was asking open and prompting questions such as “Can you tell me more about that?” or “Is there anything else that can be added here?” Together they came up with comprehensive lists of how music (mostly in the form of music listening) can be useful in their particular situations and in the tasks they have to complete in their daily lives. This included using music while doing chores, studying, and waking up early. In addition to this, they discussed how music can change one’s perspective and mood, calm us, and activate one’s spirits (such as in moments of prayer and meditation).

After this exercise, I suggested coming up with an end goal or product to work towards since the study was coming to an end. They seemed reluctant to suggest ideas for an end product and struggled to decide on one idea after suggestions were made. After some discussion, Lovely suggested that we make playlists they could all access based on different moods. I thought that this was a great idea, but there was little investment from other group members. Seeing as we had been discussing agency, and power to act, I suggested making a “power playlist” with a suggestion from each group member of a song that helps them feel powerful and motivated. They were content with this suggestion and seemed excited to

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share their song choices with the group. After the session, I took the songs and made a playlist with them. I shared this with the group members in our final session. Table 6 shows the songs selected for

Name	Song	Reason
Lovely	*Congratulations* Ada Ehi	"It makes you feel like anything is possible."
Rose	*Ocean Drive* Duke Dumont	"It has a strong beat, I like the vibe, it makes me feel alive."
Cecilia	*Stronger* Kelly Clarkson	"The story behind it is similar to mine, struggle and people not believing in you."
Chilli-Bite	*I Drink Wine* Adele	"Loking after yourself, self-love, respecting people's boundaries and not forcing them to listen to you or be a part of your life."
Goddess	*Sun Comes Out*	"Strength, I can still make it, the sun will come out."
Mimi	*Young & Wild & Free* Wiz Khalifa, Snoop Dogg	"I want to live my life freely and to be able to do what I want without other people judging me."

the playlist as well as why they were selected. In the spirit of incorporating the voices of the group members as much as possible, I have directly quoted them in the following section.

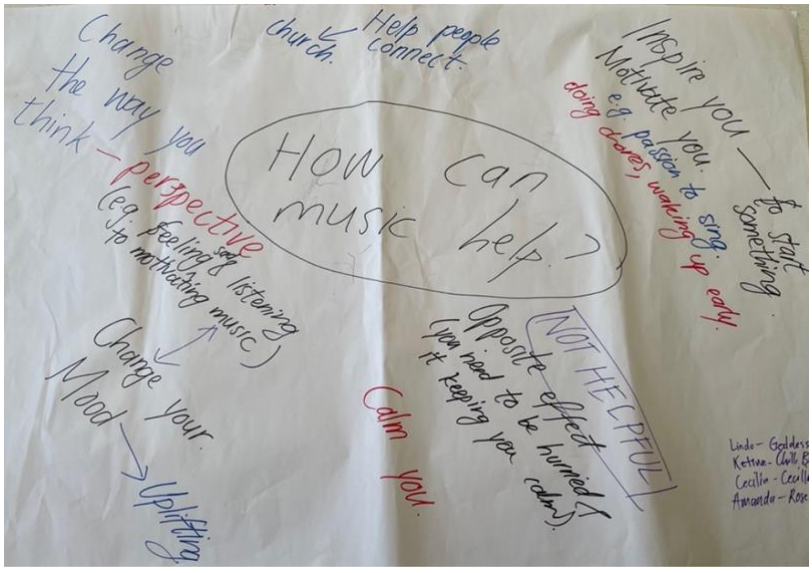

Figure 3
"How Music Helps" Brainstorm

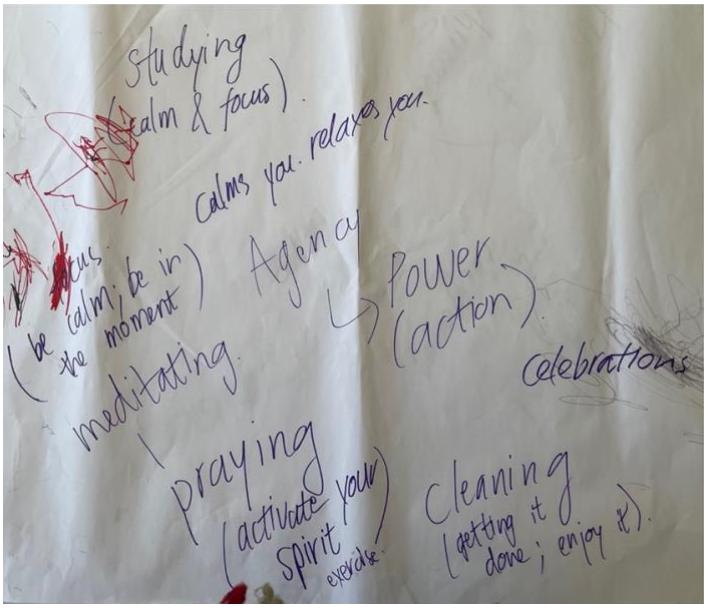

Figure 4
"How Music Can Help Our Sense of Agency" Brainstorm

Table 8

The Power Playlist

Themes that the group members identified as meaningful in this session were as follows:

- Mimi articulated how she had not expected to enjoy another person's song suggestion and realised that she did actually enjoy it.

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- Goddess explained how the music released her negative energy, made her free to say what she felt, made her feel strong, and motivated her by lifting her energy level. She also valued being able to have input into how the session went.
- Rose reflected on the experience as being interesting and relaxing.
- Cecilia highlighted learning something from the songs.
- Chilli-Bite mentioned the importance of "just looking within oneself".
- Lovely described the experience as fulfilling.

During the reflection time at the end of this session, Cecilia also mentioned how the music from the previous session had helped her, saying that "there is another side of music, the way you are teaching us, there is another side of music that we didn't know it was a therapy, we were not even aware that it is a therapy". It is worthwhile reflecting on the use of the word "teaching". As much as I tried to deconstruct the power dynamics between myself and the group members, this language potentially suggests the perception of a teacher-student power dynamic. (The framework of a teacher-student relationship may have been firmly entrenched in their minds due to previous life experiences and so they merely imposed this habitually onto the music therapy relationship, despite my attempts to explain it differently). I reflected more on this in my reflexivity journal (see Appendix E). I speculate that it may have something to do with my position as a white, educated professional in a shelter where the residents are constantly being exposed to opportunities for self-improvement (such as classes and workshops).

A few of the group members expressed their gratitude to me after this session. Three other members also spoke to me for half an hour after the session about self-care. During this discussion, they expressed their struggles with mental health and how they sometimes have difficulty coping. I referred them to a crisis line that is free of charge due to public service providers being over-burdened and having extremely long waiting lists. The group members do not have the financial resources to see a private counsellor. I also informed them that there is a counsellor who comes to the shelter weekly, as they were not aware of this. I told them to contact me for further referral options if neither of those possibilities worked out for them.

Session Seven

Table 9

Session 7 Structure

Session	Attendees	Session Structure

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7 (22/7)	Lovely, Lee, Rose, AM, LT, Tamia, Slam, Nadia	Drumming with greeting ritual (sharing likes and dislikes) Drumming improvisation Dancing to music selected by LT Singing *Roar* together (suggested by Rose) Ecological circles exercise Discussion of exercise Check out (identifying meaningful themes) Singing *Roar* again (with drums as requested by Nadia)

Our final session was a rich conclusion to our process, both in terms of verbal and musical experiences. Once again, no excerpts were selected here, because of the explicit intention to focus on agency for the whole session. The bulk of the session consisted of discussing how group members perceive their agency within the various levels of their respective systems (see Figure 4). This led to a robust exploration of the importance of voting, dreams for the future, difficulties with interpersonal connecting, and burnout and exhaustion related to constantly working towards a better life. This discussion concluded with group members highlighting the following themes:

- Needing to stand up so there will be a change.
- "The importance of voice" (Slam stated this in reference to the group space being a place for self-expression)
- Needing to "wake up and do it for yourself".
- Realising that "change starts with you".
- Being able to lean on the right people for help.

Figure 4

Ecological Circles with Symbols for how Group members Perceive Agency at Each Level

4.4 Collaboratively Generated Themes

After the second last session, I read through the thick descriptions, transcripts, and session notes and began sorting the data into topics. I then took these topics back to the group to alter and add to. I laid four large pages on the table, and wrote the words agency, creativity, and music as therapy on the first three. I left the last page blank. I derived these three phrases from the content in the selected excerpts, as well as in broad association with my research questions. On the three pages I had already written on, I added the words and statements from their previous reflections that they had identified as meaningful

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throughout the process. I then invited them to vote for the ideas they felt were true to their experience as well as adding or removing ideas as they saw fit (see Table 7). I removed the words and statements that nobody voted for.

I then asked each group member to identify a symbol from nature to describe their experience of the process, and to place it on the fourth page. Some group members wrote why they chose their particular symbol as well. I had planned to then have a lengthy discussion about each person's symbols, but unfortunately, this session was shorter than expected and their engagement with the reflection was somewhat limited due to having to rush through the reflection process. This was due to a group of visitors arriving in the morning that I had not been made aware of. The group members had to participate in their talk before coming to the last session. Most group members were only able to share one word or sentence about their experience, in addition to the voting process and sharing their symbols. Table 10 shows the keywords they selected and voted for. Figure 5 is an image of the symbols they chose to represent their experience:

Table 10

Words Selected as Meaningful from Session 8

Broader idea	**Agency**		**Creativity**		**Music As Therapy**	
	Word	**Votes**	**Word**	**Votes**	**Word**	**Votes**
	Motivated	5	New ideas	5	Healing	5
	Powerful	5	Alive	3	Calming	3
	Energised	5	Making things		Peaceful	2
	Using music to help with tasks	5	*Stronger	9	*Music to describe and process feelings	1
	Confident	2	*Patient	6	*Motivating	4
	*The importance of voice	1	*Gratitude	5	*Mood-changing	1
			*Free	3	*Free	1
			*Openness to new things	1	*Seen and heard	1

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*Words marked with an asterisk were added by group members. Unmarked words were taken from their contributions in previous sessions.

Figure 5
Group Selected Symbols to Describe the Process

Once I had the member's final reflections, I looked through the material from the process again (transcripts, thick descriptions, session notes, and brainstorm diagrams) with their reflections in mind and grouped the data into categories based on trends in their reflections. I grouped common ideas, specifically looking for excerpts from the data that supported the phrases they outlined as being meaningful, and developed the following categories: agency, apathy, creativity, difficulties in the system, isolation versus togetherness, music as therapy, and resources. I then further explored and organised the data within each category into groups of similar ideas. I have called these subcategories "facets". Appendix D shows the table of categories and facets (this is summarised below). Although the grouping of the data involves my interpretation, the supporting information under each facet is taken directly from the participants' experience with little interpretation by me. My only contribution to the selection of the data was in line with the extraction criteria.

Table 11

Summaries table of categories and facets

Category	**Agency**	**Apathy**	**Creativity**	**Difficulties in the system**	**Isolation versus togetherness**	**Music as therapy**	**Resources**
Facets	Big agency	Remaining quiet	Struggling to think of ideas	Disturbances	We drift towards isolation but benefit from togetherness	Mood modulation	What is already here
	Little agency	Finding nothing meaningful	Valuing being able to create without perfection or goals here	Overwhelm is oppositional to agency	Music helps us connect in positive ways	This was a therapeutic experience	Spirituality is an empowerer

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	I need to be self-sufficient	Not feeling up to it	We dream about our futures	We do not have a boundaried space that is just for us		Music is a building block of subjectivity	
	I need energy, strength, and motivation to act. Music helps me do this	Avoiding action	Gaining new perspectives			Musical experience are meaningful	
	Suggesting musical material when invited	Self-doubt feeds apathy	Exploring and expressing through symbols and metaphors			We articulated our needs from a therapy space	
	Spontaneously playing without invitation	Refusing to initiate musical experiences	Musical problem-solving (something is not, so we need a solution)				
	Adapting known songs						
	Choosing the session direction						
	Ending improvisations						

4.5 Reflecting on the Themes

This section details the part of the data processing that is mostly my reflection on the data after the process with the participants had ended. This was the least collaborative part of the process. Here, I reflected on the process and my perception of the salient themes. This was not ideal but was necessary because of the little time in our last session to discuss the categories, as well as the time constraints for the submission of this dissertation (which limited more ongoing collaborative reflection with the

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participants). Whilst I played a more active role in the interpretation of data at this point, I attempted to remain grounded in the contributions of the group members.

I printed out the facets from Appendix E and began creatively working with the pieces of data, seeing how they related to and communicated with each other. From here, I noticed how, throughout the sessions, emphasis had been placed (both implicitly and explicitly) on energy. Examples included waiting for extended periods of time for the group members to get out of bed in the mornings, my personal reflection on the low energy in sessions, Cali saying she was "tired and trying" in the fifth session, LT describing herself as an "exhaustosaurous" in session 7, as well as constant feedback around the musical experiences as being energising. There was a clear focus on the importance of how the group members use and create energy.

I thought deeply about the events in the process that seemed to lift energy, drain energy, and how much energy was created or used in each instance. I considered the system, and how energy (particularly energy to act) moved throughout the system. I reflected on an analogy of a pot boiling on fire as a way to make sense of this energy system. Throughout this process, I was constantly referring to the data and reflections from the other group members to ensure my interpretations could be supported by what they had said.

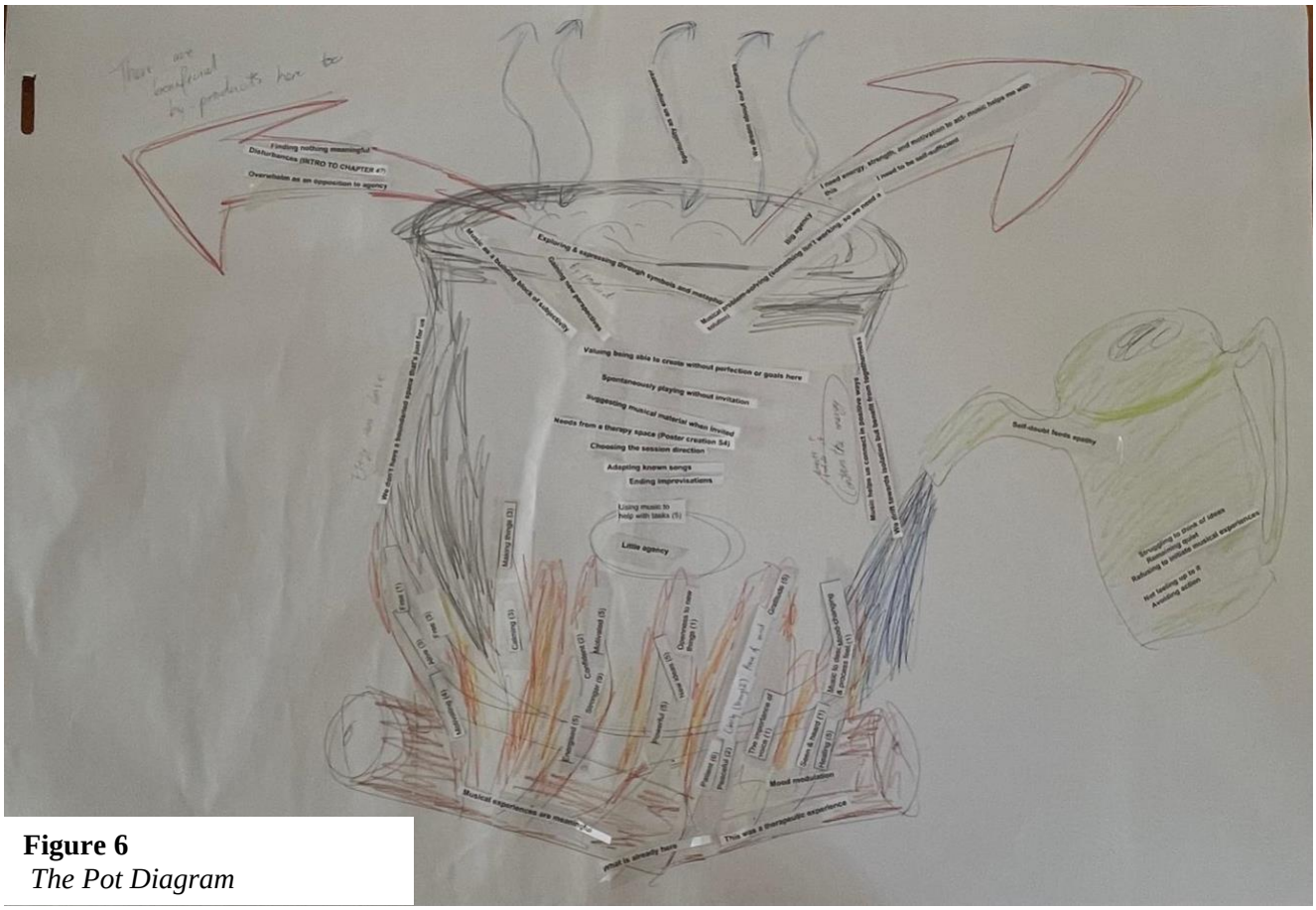

Figure 6
The Pot Diagram

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In this analogy, the logs symbolised a music therapy process that explicitly focused on nurturing existing resources – this seemed like the fuel to the fire of energy and action. The group was already familiar with using music in many social areas of their lives, but a process that specifically focussed on the intentional use of music for therapeutic benefit was somewhat foreign to them. Working through a music therapy process seemed to enhance an existing awareness of the benefits of music and the ability to appropriate the benefits of music. My first main finding, therefore, was that understanding the affordances of music in this context helps group members to be more effective appropriators of these affordances.

I understood the flames as the immediate byproducts of this process (including motivation, feeling free, new ideas, confidence, and increased energy). I then saw these byproducts begin to bubble the contents of the energy pot that could eventually boil into agentive actions. The immediate reflections of group members on how they felt after sessions (for example, energised and powerful) also led to their reflections on how they felt motivated to act in the moment, and being motivated to use music to assist with these actions (for example, Chilli-Bite saying she was going to use music to finish an assignment after session 6). Thus, my second finding was that the beneficial byproducts of a music therapy process can create intention for agentive behaviour and creative action.

For me, the pot represented communities that contain energy and direct it in constructive ways. In the final session, the group reflected on how many of them felt disconnected from their community, including their friends, family, and neighbourhood when they discussed the various levels of their individual ecologies. They reflected on the importance of having people in their community that they can "lean on" and share resources with. In addition to this, throughout the process, they highlighted the benefit of being together and constantly articulated togetherness as a goal and a need. In addition to this, I reflected on how the residents did not have another boundaried space outside of the music therapy space where they could share with each other in confidence, make music together, and speak freely with each other. This led me to realise that the music therapy space created a containing community that offered opportunities for the group members to lean on each other, draw on each other's resources, and share what they were experiencing. I articulated this as the third theme: there is a benefit to being connected to a community.

The watering can in Figure 6 reminded me of how apathy puts out the fire, by stopping the catalytic benefits of the group's engagement in the music and stopping action. I then thought about the things that remove energy from the pot. This includes the systemic factors that might restrict or obstruct agency. Lastly, I reflected on how the steam could represent the less tangible role players in the analogy, namely the use of spirituality as an empowerer and the dreams they have for their futures. Observing

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the movement of energy both into and out of the group system led me to understand how dynamic the process is and how parts of the system influence each other. I have articulated this in the next finding, which is that the experience of agency within this system is dynamic with many influencing factors.

This finding can further be elaborated on when looking deeper into the dynamics of the system (particularly in reference to session seven's ecological process where the group practically considered agency on various levels of their system). The group made sense of their capacity to interact with the various levels of their respective systems. I have articulated this as follows: Awareness of this system, and how it interacts with group members, is crucial to understand their power to act.

My broad research questions entailed exploring how the participants used this process for creative problem-solving and to experience agency. Throughout the process, creative problem-solving seemed like a more difficult topic for the group members to access, particularly because of the group's difficulty accessing creativity during certain sessions. I also used my discretion with this, as the exploration of agency seemed to be of higher importance to them (this was confirmed by how they interacted with and reflected on the topic of agency as compared to the topic of creative problem-solving). That is not to say that creative problem-solving did not show up at all, but rather that it showed up in ways that were less explicit and was not processed or verbalised by the group.
For this reason, the discussion chapter will focus primarily on discussions around agency and my speculations of their experiences of creative problem-solving.

5. Discussion

Through this study, I set out to find (1) how young women who are unemployed used music therapy for the creative problem-solving of issues relevant to them, and (2) what their experience of agency was throughout the process. The participants steered the process to focus predominantly on agency. Although I introduced the topic of creative problem-solving several times to the group, their investment in exploring it was often minimal, which I respected. I speculate that the topic might have felt somewhat inaccessible and abstract for some group members. It should be noted that although creative problem-solving was, therefore, not a central theme in the process, ideas around creativity and accessing creativity were prominent in many sessions. It may have been important for group members to have a space to access their creativity before thinking about creative problem-solving.

, Understanding how music helps in this context supported group members in more effectively appropriating its affordances; the beneficial byproducts of a music therapy process can create intention for agentive behaviour and creative action; there is a benefit to connection to community; awareness of

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community systems, and their interconnectedness with members' lived experiences is crucial to understand their power to act; and the experience of agency within this system is a dynamic one with many influencing factors. I will discuss these in detail below.

5.1 Understanding how music helps in this context supported group members in more effectively appropriating its affordances

As a music therapy postgraduate student, I am in training to know how music can help in various circumstances. The group members are experts in their context and their individual lived experiences. Their expertise was necessary for the formation of a framework for how music can help within this specific context. Together, we could conceptualise effective ways of appropriating the affordances of music in their context. DeNora (2003) describes this as an interactive process where the affordances of music depend on how it is appropriated. In other words, the benefits of music cannot be prescribed or predetermined until one understands how the music user will act and interact with the music. This articulation of the concepts of appropriation and affordance is interesting in light of how group members often described the music as "making" them feel something. DeNora argues that the music itself cannot make a person feel its affordances unless that person uses it with intention. This shifts music users from being passive receivers to active constructors of the benefits music affords.

McFerran and Saarikallio (2014) also note how powerful the affordances of music are and how there can be a risk of harm if music users do not employ it with intentionality. While they write about a mental health context with adolescents, the same applies here. Group members agreed about the potentially unhelpful effects of music listening. For example, in session 6, Lovely mentioned how listening to calm and slow music when one is in a hurry could slow you down even further and that would be unhelpful. This idea of music potentially being unhelpful reinforces DeNora's (2003) belief that music should be used with intention.

It was clear to me that music was already present in the space before I arrived, but the group members were not yet consciously familiar with how to fully use it to meet their needs. Music was already used at social gatherings and when cooking in the kitchen. The group seemed mostly unaware of its intentional use for therapeutic goals, however. Cecilia mentioned in the sixth session that she "didn't know music could be therapy". Figuring out how music could help within this specific context together meant that group members could have access to the helping factors available to them through music experiences when they needed them. What follows are several areas where group members found music most helpful.

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5.1.1 Mood modulation

Music's role as a mediator and adjuster of emotional and affective states is thoroughly covered in the available literature. People all over the world use music both consciously and unconsciously to alter their moods (Ahmad, 2015; Garrido, 2016; Gebhardt et al., 2014; Gültepe, 2016). The idea of becoming more conscious appropriators of music was evident in how the group spoke about mood modulation at the beginning of the process versus how they spoke about it at the end. In the initial stages, group members experienced a change in their mood when comparing how they entered and how they left the session, and took note of this as a response to the music (for example, Sweet Mamma entered the session saying she felt angry and left the session saying that the music helped her feel calm). At the end of the process group members highlighted how music was a tool that they could use themselves for their own mood modulation. It was clear that the group members had an awareness of the regulatory abilities of music within the sessions and were able to give many practical examples of how they could use music to help themselves in their personal lives when it came to regulating their moods. Group members shifted from experiencing mood modulation as something that happened to them through music to something that they could use as a tool for their own purposes.

Identity-formation

There were two notable moments where group members expressed that music resonated with their inner world. The first was when Cecilia said that the lyrics of *The Climb* spoke exactly to her situation, and she had not known a song that could do that before. Earlier on in the process, Chilli-Bite had spoken about the music resonating with her low mood. In both instances, music contributed to establishing the "technology of self" (p. 46) by creating moments where group members could more fully understand exactly how they were feeling (DeNora, 2000). DeNora expresses how music that resonates with one's internal world is more meaningful than just a mode of self-expression but is also a means for working out how one feels. She describes how one might identify a piece of music as reflecting one's internal feeling state, and then use that music to flesh out the actual feeling. For instance, where Chilli-Bite had said that the slow, minor music resonated with her internal feeling state, she could articulate that she was feeling low. I suspect that if we had discussed exactly how the music resonated with her feeling state, she might have gained more insight into the quality of the low mood. In Cecilia's case, the particular lyrics of the song she highlighted were perhaps a more concrete example of how music helped her flesh out how she felt about her struggles. She specifically mentioned how the lyric "the voice inside" reflected her internal voice of doubt and worry about having failed her studies in the previous year and whether or not she will ever be able to get the qualifications she hopes for.

Group members also noted additional therapeutic benefits of the process that they may or may not access in the future but were beneficial nonetheless. In the final reflection session, Tamia noted how the music group showed her that she was enough even though she doubted herself. Other group

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members also described the experience as therapeutic without giving specific examples of how or why it was therapeutic.

In other instances, group members expressed how they found the act of just having a musical experience meaningful, without noting any extra-musical benefits. The music itself became something meaningful for group members. For example, Lovely expressed being able to "let go of everything" while engaged in active music-making. AM shared that watching her children experience the music with the adults was meaningful for her.

5.2 The beneficial byproducts of a music therapy process can create intention for agentive behaviour and creative action

Newton's first law of motion states that every object will remain at rest or in uniform motion in a straight line unless compelled to change its state by the action of an external force. I considered this image by comparing one's will to act to a static object and a motivational factor such as energising music to the external force. As articulated in Chapter 4, I saw the beneficial byproducts of a music therapy process as the first step in a chain of events that could eventually lead to an agentive or creative action.

The beneficial byproducts of the music therapy process were taken from group feedback during the reflection parts of the session. These included feeling motivated, powerful, energised, confident, alive, stronger, patient, grateful, free, calm, and peaceful. Group members also articulated a need for energy, strength, and motivation to act, and said that some musical experiences helped with this. Other reflections from group members included feeling exhausted at the beginning of a session, energised when leaving, and feeling alive.

Ansdell's (1995) use of the term "quickening" (p. 81) seems relevant here. He speaks about music as something that can arouse by lending human bodies and spirits its lively and motivated qualities. In sessions, I observed this as manifesting in group members' participation before musical experiences as compared to after musical experiences. I noticed that group members spoke more, engaged more fully with creative experiences, and interacted more enthusiastically with other group members after or during musical experiences. Further, I observed the group members as being most spontaneous and assertive during active music-making. For example, in session 1, Lee (who was otherwise very quiet) played a confrontational beat on the djembe drum at the end of an improvisation, indicating that she wanted to keep going. Another example is from session 7, where LT chose to play music for us to dance

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to. Originally, I had suggested only dancing to one song, but during the first song, she asked if she could queue more songs. We ended up dancing to three other songs that she selected.

I also mentioned that the beneficial byproducts of music can create intention for creative action. The group defined creativity as "creating and learning something new". In line with this definition, their reflections on experiences also showed how music experiences offered opportunities for creative action by gaining new perspectives. In the reflection during session seven, LT observed how the group members thought very differently about the same issues. To her, understanding different perspectives, and witnessing creative expression were meaningful. In session six, Lovely also highlighted how music can change your perspective by "changing the way you think or feel about a situation". This was in response to the question "How can music help?".

I also observed one instance of what I would call creative problem-solving in the music during session one. Cecilia was singing the song *When Jesus Say Yes* with the rest of the group while playing the djembe drum. She realised that her drumming pattern did not fit the song's phrasing, so she stopped and adjusted what she was playing to fit the song better. Pavlicevic (2004b) writes about a marimba ensemble of ten-year-olds she observes rehearsing together. She notes how they adjust their playing of *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* to fit in with their fellow group members' music, playing in a way that is cohesive. She speaks about this moment as a social experience where the players change their own music to be cooperative members of the music society to which they belong. She highlights how it is unlikely that this process is at a cognitive level, although in the example of Cecilia's playing, her cognition around the adjustments she made did seem more explicit. If I had noticed her change in the moment and said something about it, it is possible that it might have initiated a more accessible discussion around creative problem-solving as well as social cohesion.

5.3 The experience of agency within this system is a dynamic one with many influencing factors

In the analogy of the boiling pot (Figure 6 in the previous chapter), the various objects in the image speak to all the dynamic parts of the context that influence each other, and the group members' sense of agency. The aspects that remove energy from the pot include the systemic factors that might hinder action. This will be addressed more in-depth in the next theme. Another factor that appears to hinder the development of agency is apathy. Apathy seems to act as a suppressant extinguishing the possibility of proactive engagement with one's environment and preventing experiences of the advantages of agentive action.

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5.3.1 Apathy

When asked to define apathy, the group simply articulated it as "not feeling like it". Here I frame apathy as a barrier to agency because of the lack of enthusiasm to act. In the analogy, I articulated apathy as the water that extinguishes the fire. Before anything helpful can happen, apathy stops action before it can even start.

There were many instances during the study where I felt the presence of apathy very strongly, both within myself and within the group. Apart from the instances where I explicitly state that the group members reflected on their own apathy, it is my interpretation of a response as apathetic. There are other factors at play here that barred group members from taking action, and where appropriate, I will discuss those.

Group members often expressed not wanting to come to sessions for various reasons. For example, in session 3, Chill-Bite expressed not wanting to come because she thought it would be boring but then remembered the benefits she received from attending the previous session. I asked the group members if anyone felt the same, and many of them agreed, citing tiredness as another reason for not wanting to come. When I asked the group members how they thought they could motivate themselves now that they knew how the sessions could be beneficial to them, Chilli-Bite said that they simply needed to find the motivation within themselves. I found it interesting that she immediately put pressure on herself to motivate herself. I will discuss this in more detail in the following theme. I suggested to the group that we could use an external motivator to help us fight feelings of apathy (I use the word "us" here because I was also feeling unmotivated at this point). We discussed the idea of writing a song to have as a product at the end of the process, but nothing ever came of this. The group struggled with feelings of self-doubt besides my reassurance that I would help them write it.

Self-doubt showed up in other spaces as well. Group members often stated that they did not feel that they were good enough to suggest a beat for the drums or that they were not good enough singers to sing along, so they would abstain from participating. In non-musical experiences, two group members also described themselves as often feeling "not strong enough", and how this was something that stopped them from acting. Here I view self-doubt as something that hinders action and feeds apathy because it robs us of the motivation and enthusiasm that might have otherwise been associated with a task. Bjornsen et al. (2007) also draw a link between self-doubt and apathy in college students. They conclude that interventions aimed at self-worth and connectedness to community were important when targeting apathy.

Another way that self-doubt manifested was through group members devaluing the impact of their actions. Discussions around agency inevitably concerned big choices and life decisions (for example,

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voting in the national elections). When I discussed seemingly less significant choices such as getting out of bed, studying for tests, and taking your child to the clinic when they are sick, group members hesitated to view these actions as important or powerful in terms of their day-to-day lives. I considered the idea of "big agency" versus "little agency" and how the significance of some agentive actions might be devalued in contexts where wicked problems are being faced. This is something that I would have liked to explore more with the group.

The reader might wonder if it was the group members' apathy that I was experiencing or if they actually did not enjoy the group or the musical experiences. However, I observed them as being the same in many other spaces within the shelter. I noticed a general lack of enthusiasm (here labelled as apathy) when residents were required to entertain visitors and donors, as well as when they had chores to do. In addition to this, many group members also stated how they had felt apathetic at the beginning of the group but felt grateful that they attended by the end of the session. My reflexive engagement with the topic of apathy is necessary here to avoid harsh critiques of group members that might be interpreted by the reader as me labelling the group members as lazy or unmotivated. This is not the case. Discussing the group members' experience of apathy, as well as my own, is a necessary part of the discussion because of its consequences. In many of the instances mentioned, the experience of apathy led to group members avoiding action, whether that action was engaging creatively in an aspect of the session, attending workshops or discussions hosted by the shelter, or completing their chores.

Another possible explanation for actions that I interpreted as apathetic could be the result of a scarcity mindset. In their writings on the scarcity mindset, Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) discuss how part of the reason that people in situations of poverty make what some might interpret as poor decisions, is because of a reduced cognitive capacity for thinking through issues that are not necessarily the most urgent in one's life. The mental load of the individual is consumed with thinking about problems that require immediate solutions, and other problems (that may or may not be as important) do not get as much attention. An example of this is when Cali spoke to me about doing a make-up course despite having little interest in make-up. She was faced with the urgent problem of needing money to provide for herself and the opportunity to train as a make-up artist through the shelter. At that point in time, her future job satisfaction was not an urgent consideration despite its potentially important implications for her mental health (Allan et al., 2016) and labour mobility (Green, 2010; Kristensen & Westergård-Nielsen, 2004).

Lastly, it is important to take note of apathy as it shows up in various mental health issues and as a response to being exposed to traumatic incidents. For example, the DSM-V lists loss of interest or pleasure as a diagnostic criterion for a major depressive episode, as well as in the negative alterations in cognitions and moods cluster of post-traumatic stress disorder (American Psychiatric Association,

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2013). Macy (2003) also discusses feeling as if one's future will be cut short after experiencing a traumatic threat and how this may lead to further decreased interest and pleasure.

5.3.2 Spirituality as an empowerer and dreams for the future

Spirituality and dreams for the future came up frequently in group discussions around agency. I came to consider these two factors as elusive and somewhat elusive role players in the group members' systems. Although these concepts are difficult to measure or quantify in any way, group members often made reference to them as things that motivate them to take action.

Spirituality was a frequent theme during sessions. When group members suggested songs, they were often songs with a spiritual focus (*When Jesus Say Yes, Avulekile Amasango, Congratulations*). Chilli-Bite mentioned feeling strengthened and encouraged by her faith in God in almost every session. Goddess discussed how music helped her to "activate her spirit" in moments of prayer and meditation. In the second session, the women from the church who joined our session prayed for the women in the group. Although many of the above examples are clearly associated with the Christian faith, a few group members did not explicitly associate themselves with the Christian faith. For example, Rose mentioned a type of non-denominational spirituality that allows her to meditate and regulate her emotions when she is feeling overwhelmed. The shelter did have a Christian ethos, however, and most group members ascribed to Christian beliefs in their lives.

Various researchers highlight how spirituality can be a protective factor, a coping mechanism, and an empowerer (Benavides, 2012; Elkonin et al., 2014; Peltzer, 2011; Salgado, 2014; Tolentino et al., 2022), and it is clear that this was true for the experience of the group members as well. Park (2012) outlines how spirituality can promote physical and mental health by increasing one's sense of direction and positive emotions as well as promoting resilience by moderating experiences of stress in difficult situations.

In the seventh session, Slam stated that "everybody's got a dream, and whether they've spoken about it or not, it is still there". During this session, individual group members shared their dreams to start a foundation, become an entrepreneur who inspires others with their story, become an actress, and be a good mother to their children. These dreams gave them something to aspire to and a sense of direction that guided where and how they used their energy.

Spirituality and dreams for the future are thus useful to consider for resource-oriented practitioners working in contexts with limited physical resources. I have intentionally used the word spirituality here to not impose any particular beliefs or religious orientations on the group members.

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5.4 Awareness of community systems, and their interconnectedness with group members' lived experiences, is crucial to understanding their power to act.

I was reminded of Narayan and Petesch's (2007) framework during the discussion in the second last session where group members reported feeling empowered by the realisation that they have power to act on the different levels of their ecologies (with one group member even saying "You don't need to wait for the government, you need to wake up and do it for yourself"). Although this is a helpful realisation, Narayan and Petesch's framework also demonstrates that factors such as the accountability of dominant institutions and their local organisation capacity influence developmental outcomes. The mobility of individuals will always be somewhat limited if the necessary contextual factors do not change. LT noted this in the same discussion, highlighting her right to vote as a means of playing her part in holding the government accountable for its actions.

This also brought Scrine's (2021) discussion on the limits of resilience to mind. She critiques individualistic cultures of therapy that focus exclusively on the resilience of the individual. She highlights the importance of understanding systemic structures that cause harm and moving away from individual responsibility towards social responsibility. As discussed in the literature review, there are many systemic and institutional factors that complicate the context and hinder the group members from moving out of poverty. These factors include (but are not limited to) difficulties in the education system, gender-based violence, and mismanaged social support structures. The accountability of these structures is essential to ensure positive developmental outcomes for those in poverty.

Another large role player in this system is the shelter itself. I realised how large the shelter's role is within the lives of group members from my own observations as well as how the group members spoke about their relationship with the shelter. The comments and observations I will make here are not to critique the shelter, but rather to provide a fuller picture of the role they play in the group member's experience of agency and power in the context. The picture would be incomplete without this discussion.

My observations and impressions of the shelter were as follows: The facility itself was safe and well-run. The members of the management team were professional and helpful at most times. I quickly perceived a strong sense of hierarchy in the shelter, and residents who were new to the shelter had little say in the day-to-day running of the shelter. From a practical standpoint, it makes sense that the residents who had been there the longest had the most responsibility though. During the sessions, I was often overwhelmed by the frequency of interruptions and disturbances both in the form of people being called

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out of sessions to do something or the frequent schedule clashes that often meant the group members were double-booked on Saturday mornings. In addition to this, I quickly became aware of how group members did not have a boundaried space that belonged to them only. Even during sessions, people would enter the room without knocking, and there were always children in the room as well.

I deeply considered the ethics of facilitating a therapy group with so-called vulnerable group members in a space that was not boundaried as a traditional therapy space usually is. The blurring of lines between public and private has been widely discussed in CoMT literature (Ansdell, 2010; Procter, 2004). Ansdell mentions how the social and cultural dimensions of music can be helpful in the therapy space and should not be excluded solely out of a self-protective professional obligation to rule ethics that govern traditional therapeutic spaces. There was no explicit psychotherapeutic intention in terms of trauma or working through sensitive issues. The group members knew that the focus of the study was on agency and creative problem-solving from the outset. This does not mean that I ignored sensitive issues when they arose.

In the context of care ethics, Clifford Simplican (2018) outlines the idea of creative care as a type of care that requires "taking risks to create new relationships and new spaces that foster these relationships" (p. 305). This is relevant in relation to the new relationships that group members experienced with their children. In multiple sessions, group members highlighted how watching their child engage with the music was meaningful to them. The group members who were mothers developed a new dynamic in their relationship with their children through musical interaction that was important for them.

The consequences of not maintaining traditional therapy boundaries were not all positive, however, as group members did express their difficult feelings after the second session when women from the church had joined our session. They expressed how they often felt overwhelmed when they were expected to entertain visitors and that they felt like they had little control. They also expressed feeling pressured to be further along in their journey than they were. After this, I was stronger in how I maintained the boundaries in relation to visitors from outside the shelter. I contacted the shelter manager and asked her not to schedule any other visitors on Saturday mornings to avoid further issues. This was managed well until the last session when there was a scheduling conflict once again.

In the fifth session, group members also reflected on how busy they were with chores, workshops, and classes that the shelter management required them to attend, but it was clear from Slam's comment in this session (about the residents "lacking volition") that the residents and management staff had conflicting views. I thought deeply about the power I held here, and my responsibility to advocate for the wishes of the group members throughout the process. In the session, I asked for the group members

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to be excused from chores when they were coming to the music group, but Slam said that this would not be possible. In the seventh session, I also felt an obligation to advocate for the group members when LT informed me that the residents used to have a speaker they could use to play their own music, but this got taken away (because of them playing music loudly late at night). I asked Slam if it was possible to have the speaker returned to the residents if they agreed to be more respectful of the neighbourhood, but she just laughed and said she did not think it would happen.

In these moments, I saw the shelter's actions as a barrier to the group member's agency, and it was clear to me that the group experienced this too. It was difficult for me to decide whether or not to act, or push back more because of my presence as a foreigner in the space and because of my awareness that my actions could take power away from group members to act for themselves.

In both instances, I encouraged the group members to think creatively about other avenues they could pursue. Rose mentioned that they could listen to music and the TV or on their phones if they were not allowed a speaker. This is another example of creative problem-solving that emerged in an organic and practical manner.

5.5 Community connection can be beneficial

During the process, there was a clear sense of tension between group members drifting towards isolation, but being aware of the benefit of being in a community. This presented in many ways. Some group members explicitly stated preferring to be alone and some expressed a strong urge to be self-sufficient. A more covert example of this was in the third session when I invited the group members to design the ideal music therapy space with craft supplies on a large sheet of paper. We all sat around the same large piece of paper, at the same table, but each group member designed their own individual space instead of one group space. Perhaps this was an expression of a need for autonomy and personal space. The group members were constantly surrounded by others in the shelter as well as being under the authority of the shelter managers (receiving strong direction and instruction from the management team regarding how they lived and spent their time within the shelter). Likely, their indications of a need to be alone and independent were also an assertion of their autonomy and agency. I would have liked to explore this more with the group.

When we discussed the idea of being isolated, LT mentioned her lack of trust in others as the reason she isolates herself. Mimi and Chilli-Bite cited interpersonal conflict as the main contributing factor. Many of the group members had been in highly conflictual interpersonal relationships and were exposed to intimate partner violence, which informed their difficulties in trusting others. I also reflected on the fact that the shelter is a transient home with a constant turnover of residents, and how this might have

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been a factor that limited the building of relationships between residents. This was not something stated by group members, however. This longing for isolation was not true for everyone though. Both Cecilia and Chilli-Bite identified struggling to be alone when they were having difficulty coping emotionally.

As the process unfolded, group members highlighted the importance of being together and expressed their enjoyment of the small music community we had created. Rose described the experience with her fellow group members as "harmony" and was surprised at this because she preferred being alone. In the second last session, she also expressed how she realised that "we are not meant to be islands during difficult times". In the third session, group members also articulated "just being able to do something together as a group" as a goal for the process.

In addition, the group members also realised the importance of their community as a mediator between self and society. Ansdell (2014) talks about the community as the "meso-level" of influence where individuals can interact with society and society can interact with individuals. The group members realised that they need people who support them to be able to build a life for themselves despite struggling to trust others. We discussed practical ways in which community can help in spite of how it might have caused harm in the past. This brought me back to Ebersöhn's (2017) definition of resilience, where resources are held within the connections made with trusted members of our respective communities. She calls this resilient act of joining to community, flocking.

Through various musical experiences, the group members also expressed that music is something that helps positive connection. Goddess expressed this by highlighting connection, healing, hope, and peace as things that music gives us when we are together. Cecilia shared how gatherings such as church and wedding celebrations would be very strange without music. LT shared about moments in the shelter where the residents would listen to music in the kitchen, and dance together. She described these moments as making the environment "lighter and everyone was joyful and happy". In all of these instances, the music is the active factor that aids connection.

Procter (2004) outlines musical experiences that encourage connection to others as builders of social capital, highlighting the important social objectives of music-making. He highlights how connection through music can build connections in non-musical spaces. I observed this in the group as well. Group members who had articulated that they were not close with anyone in the shelter began to connect in the space. As the process developed, I observed them connecting outside of the space as well. I cannot draw any conclusions about the music space as being the primary cause of this connection, however, it was clear that within the group spaces, the residents were more connected to each other through their interaction, sharing, and encouragement of one another. For this to happen, the facilitation of techniques had to be focused on creating connection within the group space. Musical experiences such as group

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singing and djembe drumming, listening to and commenting on each other's song choices, and the creation of spaces for open sharing with the group all aided in enhancing the potential for social connection within the space.

Procter aptly articulates this movement between individualism and connection, and how music functions in both spaces as well as the spaces between them:

> [musical capital is] inherently social in that it is of and between people and increases the chances of positive change within society, but also inherently musical in that it carries opportunities for aesthetic self-realisation and self-experience. It can be both public and private, communal and personal. It is about self-identity but also about being heard by others. It is above all about living performance, about grasping opportunities that promote well-being, as an individual but also as a member of communities. The role of the music therapist, then, must include offering people opportunities to steer a healthy musical course, to renew and develop their health-promoting relationship with music within communities. (p. 228)

Through the group members' participation and direction of this process, I have gained in-depth information into their lived experiences, and what they find valuable in their respective situations. I have also gained insight into their systems, and how they function within their systems. I also hope that through their engagement with these topics, they have developed their own understanding of their circumstances and their power to act within them.

5.6 Considerations for music therapists working in similar contexts

The findings regarding agency and the different ways in which it could show up or be explored in practice are relevant for music therapists working in any setting. An ethical approach to practice values the agency of the service user regardless of the setting. In addition, a focus on creative problem-solving is also one that highlights the agency of the service user by working towards equipping people to be solvers of their own problems. This makes it almost impossible for practitioners to walk into a setting with a preconceived solution to the problem at hand. Creative problem-solving posits the client and therapist as two entities working together to solve a problem.

I would invite music therapists working in similar contexts to adopt a participatory and consultative approach to work, by ensuring that clients or groups believe that they have the freedom to speak out regarding things that they would like changed about the therapeutic process, as well as to articulate their needs.

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The findings surrounding the context are also relevant. Music therapists should take the context seriously into account and gain insight from the clients or group members where their knowledge of the context is limited. Music therapists should also take a liberation approach that deliberately seeks to dismantle power dynamics and barriers of societal oppression in such contexts where societal issues are multiple and complex. Music therapists should work from both resource-oriented and strength-based positions where clients do not feel like they are a problem you are trying to fix, but rather that you are a supporter of them, simply lending a hand to assist with what they believe they need.

5.7 Considerations for non-profit and public benefit organisations

As stated by the group members in the second session, visits from donors and organisations can be overwhelming and stressful for residents of shelters. They mentioned often feeling pressure to move out of the shelter quickly and improve their socio-economic status. For this reason, I often observed the residents avoiding the well-intentioned visitors who came to spend time with them and deliver donations.

For altruists, hoping to make a difference in the lives of women in these contexts, this information is important. What may be deemed helpful by non-profit organisations, and even shelter management could have a counterintuitive response.

Donors might consider ways to donate that could be less stressful and overwhelming for residents of shelters. These might include donating without interacting with residents or visiting the shelter, visiting the shelter in smaller groups (of perhaps one to three people), and most importantly, asking the residents what they need from you once you are there.

6. Conclusion

Through this PAR study, I gained some additional insights into the context and lived experiences of unemployed woman in South Africa through being a witness to these group members' stories. Together we identified how to use music to best meet their needs, how a music therapy process can motivate them to act, and how being in a community can be helpful. They also articulated how their power to act is mediated by their context.

The aims of this process were to explore how young women who are unemployed use a music therapy process for creative problem-solving regarding relevant social issues and their experiences of agency

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throughout the process. Although the issue of creative problem-solving did not come up as explicitly as the issue of agency, this study has added to the literature on how one might understand the various subjective positions that the group members were in and the unique and complex challenges they faced (and still face). The techniques that seemed to be most helpful for them were the ones where we created something together and explored concepts as a group (such as the ecological circles experiences and the poster creation). In addition, moments of sharing and discussing existing songs that related to their lived experience seemed most helpful.

I sought to explore the experience of being unemployed from the perspective of young women, hoping to amplify their voices in the literature, by centring this dissertation around their subjective experiences and honouring their contributions as much as possible.

6.1. Limitations

True PAR design necessitates that the participants are co-researchers rather than subjects. Because of this, the researcher and co-researchers have equal control and responsibility for the structure of the study and the process. To construct a process that is as relevant as possible to the co-researchers, all aspects of the study should be collaboratively formed, including the research questions and the methodology (Aldridge, 2015). The research questions that defined the focus of this study were not collaboratively generated, and thus the group members of this study are referred to as participants rather than co-researchers, as they were not fully co-researchers. This could have potentially impacted how relevant the process was for the participants and could have also impacted their sense of agency throughout the process because of how the initial research focus was suggested to them instead of instigated by them.

I was also limited by time. Although the engagement period was relatively lengthy, not enough of the data analysis took place with collaboration from the participants. This was due to the time constraints for my dissertation submission and the many scheduling conflicts resulting in cancelled sessions. Ideally, I would have taken the pot analogy back to the group members and discussed it with them, inviting them to comment and make changes as they saw fit. As a result, I had to make more personal interpretations during the data analysis phase than I would have liked to. I tried as much as possible to ensure that my interpretations were all in line with what the group members had already said or experienced.

These limitations have been considered within the frame of PAR, and thus what may be a limitation in a different study (such as small sample size, the inconsistent attendance of group members, and the inconsistency of the session structure in terms of plan and approach). These are rather features of a PAR

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study that represent the messiness of PAR, and how inviting collaboration from your co-researchers makes the process significantly more dynamic and adaptive, instead of fixed and structured.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

Because creative problem-solving was not dealt with as explicitly as the topic of agency, I recommend future research into how this population might use music to experience creativity and creative problem-solving. A study exclusively focused on creativity could be a useful precursor to research into creative problem-solving, due to group members' perception of themselves as not being creative. I also believe further research is needed in the music education literature exploring creative problem-solving outside, where educators could examine using music to help learners solve problems of daily life. Lastly, a similar study with a longer engagement period could be useful for understanding how/if members' insights from the group space were applied to their personal lives.

6.3 Concluding thoughts

Through the group members' exploration of their agency and creativity, I witnessed them articulating insights gained about themselves, their peers, and their communities. They expressed themselves and discovered new (and forgotten) parts of themselves while dreaming and imagining what their futures could look like. I gained insights about work in such a context, while attempting to deconstruct my preconceived notions of what should happen in spaces like these, and realised how important it is to listen deeply to the group members and to be insistent on co-creating knowledge. I hope that participants felt valued and heard through the process.

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Appendix A: Letter requesting permission from the organisation

Dear ma'am,

My name is Stephanie Sparks. I am a student at the University of Pretoria and am currently enrolled for a Master's degree in music therapy. I was hoping to request permission to host a study on your premises that holds the potential to benefit the women in the shelter.

Research topic: Agency and creative problem-solving in music therapy with unemployed women.

Rationale/Aims of the study: The study aims to understand how young, unemployed women may use music therapy as a tool for creative problem-solving of issues in their own lives (specifically pertaining to social issues experienced on a broader level). Music therapy is a process where a therapist helps clients optimise their wellbeing using multiple aspects of music and the relationship formed through musical experiences. This study also aims to understand how agency (the capacity to act independently and make free choices) may be impacted throughout the process. It is important to note that my study does not guarantee participants a job at the end of the process.

What is requested of the shelter?

I would like to ask for the opportunity to hang up posters advertising my study on your premises. I will attach tear-off slips with my contact details to the posters. I would also ask permission to come to your premises to address the women in person to explain my study and answer any questions they might have.

For the study to be conducted, I would need the use of a private room big enough to host the group. The study will consist of approximately 12 music therapy sessions between 60 and 90 minutes. The types of activities we will be doing may include singing, drumming, discussing specific topics, listening to music, and drawing or painting. The focus of the study is to create a space where the participants will be able to explore their creative problem-solving potential, discover more about their agency and feel empowered through their participation. The above arts-based activities are useful for exploring scenarios and relationships and gaining insight into them (e.g., role-playing a past relationship through a musical improvisation), exploring their relationships with non-human entities (e.g., their relationship with unemployment), building resilience through safe risk-taking (and thus growing one's confidence when taking risks), and growing assertiveness and confidence (for example, in leading a group improvisation).

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I request permission from the shelter to video-record the sessions for the purpose of data analysis. Participants will also need to consent to this. Due to the nature of this study, the participants will be deciding what the end goal of the study should be. At the beginning of each session, the women who choose to participate will be reminded that they are free to withdraw from the process at any time and that they will not be asked to do anything that makes them uncomfortable at any point in the process.

Participants will be required to adhere to Covid-19 safety protocols. This will include wearing a mask, sanitising hands upon entry and social distancing.

Approval: The study will only begin after ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria, has been obtained.

Who will have access to the results of the study? The research will be conducted by myself as principal researcher and my supervisor. It will be used for academic purposes only. The anonymised data will be securely stored at the University of Pretoria's School of the Arts for 10 years. The stored data will not include any participant's name or any other identifying information. If any other researchers would like to use the anonymised, archived data during this time, they may do so.

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor if you require more information about the study.

Kinds regards,

Student:
Stephanie Sparks
Email: stephmarisparks@gmail.com
Tel.: 074 616 0707

Supervisor:
Andeline dos Santos
email: andeline.dossantos@up.ac.za

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Appendix B: Letter of information – Participant

Good day,

My name is Stephanie Sparks. I am a student at the University of Pretoria and am currently enrolled in a Master's degree.

Research topic: Agency and creative problem-solving in music therapy with unemployed women.

Rationale/Aims of the study: The study aims to understand how young, unemployed women may use music therapy as a tool for creative problem-solving of issues in their own lives (specifically pertaining to social issues experienced on a broader level). Music therapy is a process where a therapist helps clients optimise their health using multiple aspects of music and the relationship formed through musical experiences. This study also aims to understand how agency (your capacity to act independently and make your own free choices) may be impacted throughout the process. By participating in this study, you are not guaranteed a job at the end of the process.

What will be expected of you? You will be invited to participate in 12 group music therapy sessions (between 60 and 90 minutes in length). Both the music therapy session and the discussion will be video recorded. This information will be treated with confidentiality. You will also be expected to keep any personal information shared by group members confidential.

In the sessions, you might be invited to play an instrument (such as a drum or tambourine), draw, paint, sing, dance or move or talk about yourself and your experience. You will not be made to do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

You will be required to sanitise your hands when entering and exiting the space. You will also be required to practice social distancing and to wear a mask throughout the sessions.

Approval: The study will only begin after ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria, has been obtained.

Risks and benefits: Participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. There are few risks or direct benefits of participating in this project, however, it is my hope that you will benefit throughout the process. It is also possible that sensitive material may emerge in the therapy process. This is a risk that you are undertaking by taking part in the process. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no negative consequences to you, nor will you need to explain your reason. You are encouraged to ask any questions you might have about the study. You will not be paid to participate in this study.

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Who will have access to the results of the study? The research will be conducted by myself as principal researcher and my supervisor. It will be used for academic purposes only. The data will be securely stored at the University of Pretoria's School of the Arts for 10 years. The stored data will not include any participant's name or any other identifying information. If any other researchers would like to use the anonymised, archived data during this time, they may do so.

Please feel free to contact me if you require more information about the study.

Kinds regards,

_____

Student: Stephanie Sparks Date

Email: stephmarisparks@gmail.com

Cell phone number: 074 616 0707

_____ _____

Supervisor: Andeline dos Santos Date

Email: andeline.dossantos@up.ac.za

Appendix C: Letter of Informed Consent – Reply Slip

Name of student researcher: Stephanie Sparks

Title of study: Agency and creative problem-solving in music therapy with unemployed women

This study has been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that I understand what is required of me in the research project.

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I hereby consent to participate in the research project and acknowledge that the data may be used in current and future research. I agree to the sessions being video-recorded.

I am aware that I may withdraw from the study at any time, should I wish to do so. I agree to keep any personal information shared by group members confidential.

Full name: _____

_____ _____

Sign Date

_____ _____

Stephanie Sparks Date

_____ _____

Andeline dos Santos Date

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Appendix D: Data Facets and Categories Table

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Topic	AGENCY		APATHY	
Group definition	Making a change		Not feeling like it	
Facets	**Big agency**		**Remaining quiet**	
	Holding the government accountable by voting	LT S7	Staying silent when questions are asked in sessions	
	Internal motivation (feeling able and powerful "I can do this")		Not responding to messages on the WhatsApp Group	
	Little agency		Not responding to me when I'm waiting at the gate	
	Cecilia calling other group members to join the session (external motivator)	Multiple sessions	**Finding nothing meaningful**	
	Initiating musical experiences	See below	Responding with "I don't know" when asked questions	Cali
	Using music for day-to-day tasks	Finishing assignments, exercising, helping others out	"Nothing was meaningful"	Session check-outs
		Passion to sing, do chores, wake up early, help you focus while you study S6	Joining the group every week exclusively as an observer, never participating	
	I need to be self-sufficient		**Not feeling up to it**	
	"**one has to stand up so that there will be change**, even in other people's lives so you can inspire them in any way just so that you're the one who decides to stand up"	Lee S7	Group members have reflected multiple times on how they didn't feel like attending the sessions, but came anyway and enjoyed themselves	
	"you don't need to wait for the government, **you need to wake up and do it for yourself**"	Nadia S7	"The ladies need a lot of pushing and motivation. They lack volition"	Slam S5
	if you want change at all, **it just starts with you**	Tamia S7	**Avoiding action**	
	Feeling pressured into a career to make a living	Cali S5 (pursuing career as a make-up artist even though she has no desire to be a make-up artist)	In response to above, we began a discussion about how we can motivate ourselves to attend, Chilli-Bite said we just need to find the motivation within ourselves	
	Being consulted in decision making	Goddess reflecting on how nice it is to have a choice S6	After I advise using an end product to motivate us to come, the group members find it difficult to agree on a good end product (S 3&6)	
	Articulating your needs: "I need to feel like myself again"	Sweet Mamma S3 designing how we want the space to look & Cecilia S1 asking for a simpler beat	**Self-doubt feeds apathy**	
	I need energy, strength, and motivation to act- music helps me with this		"I can't sing" "I haven't played drums since primary school"	Cecilia S1
	was feeling exhausted at the beginning of the session … came to the group and **actually felt energised**	Lee after dancing S3	Not strong enough	Cali & Tamia in reflection session
	Rose "it makes me feel alive"	S6 group were drumming along to other's song choices		
	Lovely "it makes you feel like anything is possible"			
	Goddess "it makes you feel strong and have energy"		**Refusing to initiate musical experiences**	
	MUSICAL FACETS			
	Suggesting musical material when invited			
	Playing dotted rhythm on the djembe drum	Lee S1		
	Asking to play music from her playlist for use to dance to	LT S7		
	Spontaneously suggesting various drum beats	Lovely S6&7		
	Suggesting Avulekile Amasango and leading the whole group in the song	Goddess S2		
		Sweet Mamma S3		
	Spontaneously playing without invitation			
	Playing the drum when I was speaking to other group members	Goddess S1		
	Adapting known songs			
	Changing the words of "Somebody is calling my name" to "Yeshua is calling Chilli"	Chilli-Bite S3		
	Choosing the session direction			
		Rose S7		
		Nadia S7		
	Ending improvisations			
		Lee S1		
	Resisting endings by playing a confrontational beat to continue playing	Lee S4		

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CREATIVITY		DIFFICULTIES IN THE SYSTEM	
Creating & learning something new			
Struggling to think of ideas		**Disturbances (INTRO TO CHAPTER 4?)**	
Can't think of a beat suggestion	Cecilia S1	Babies crying in every session	
Avoiding song-writing (don't know what to write about)	Whole group S3	People being called out of sessions to do chores	S5 most prominent example
"I don't know what to write" followed by "I'm just writing a whole lot of nonsense"	Sweet Mamma S3 during a free-writing experience	Schedule clashing with other visitors being there at the same time	S2; S4; reflection session
Drawing a bow because she had no idea what to write	Lee S3 during a free-writing experience	**Overwhelm as an opposition to agency**	
Responded that she was feeling stuck after drumming improvisation	Lovely S6	Feelings of having no choice, no control and feeling overwhelmed with thoughts about the future and where we feel we "should be"	Cecilia & Goddess S2 discussing their feelings around constantly entertaining visitors & donors
Valuing being able to create without perfection or goals here		Pressure to make pans for your life, feeling like you have to be back on your feet as soon as possible	Goddess S2
It was meaningful "accessing our creativity without a need for it to be perfect"	Slam S3 reflection	Shelter keeping the ladies so busy with chores that they can't attend the session	S5
"I don't know what I'm making, I'm just making"	Lee S4	**We don't have a boundaried space that's just for us**	
We dream about our futures		People come into the space without knocking on the door, children enter the room and watch the group.	
Stating how she has goals to be a good mother and give her daughter a better life in future	Cecilia S5		
everybody's got a dream, and whether they've spoken about it or not, it is still there, I mean I've heard people saying they want to start foundations so I think, people in this space have got experience	Slam S7		
Dreams to start a non-profit organisation and give back to her community	Lovely S7		
Goals to be an entrepreneur and inspire others with her story	Rose S7		
Gaining new perspectives			
Enjoying other people's song suggestions when you didn't expect to	S6		
Miley Cyrus *The Climb* changing perspective on our struggles	S5 Cecilia		
"we express ourselves differently and that's just always beautiful to observe. Different things mean different things to different people in different places. So it's always nice, I always enjoy to see how other people express themselves creatively" LT S6			
Change our perspective (e.g. changing the way you think or feel about a situation	S6 In response to the question "How can music help?"		
Exploring & expressing through symbols and metaphors			
Referring to a dinosaur as an exhaustosaurous to match her energy level	LT S7		
Sticking down a picture of a bed and saying the space should be warm and comfortable	Cecilia S3 poster creation for what we want the space to look like		
Using an aloe vera leaf as a symbol for the bitter times in life	Cecilia in reflection session		
Using lemon verbena leaves to symbolise how she didn't expect to enjoy the experience just like she didn't expect the leaves to have such a beautiful smell	Chilli-Bite in reflection session		
Musical problem-solving (something isn't working, so we need a solution)			
Adjusting her beat to suit the phrasing of the song	Cecilia S1		
Asking for a simpler beat			

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ISOLATION VS TOGETHERNESS		MUSIC AS THERAPY		RESOURCES	
We drift towards isolation but benefit from togetherness		**Mood modulation**		**What is already here**	
Prefer to isolate myself & don't usually enjoy group activities, but found value in being with others (Used word harmony to describe being together)	Rose S2	Feeling angry when coming in and leaving feeling calm	Sweet Mamma in reflection for S3	Already listening to music for mood regulation	Lee S2
Each member designed their own separate space on the large page instead of one combined space	S4 during poster creation of music space	Music helps us to be calm	Group reflection S6	Having access to music through phones/ TV music video channels	
Expressing difficulty connecting with other women in the shelter (fighting & disagreeing)	Chilli-bite & Mimi S6	Music is uplifting	S6	Already existing healthy coping strategies (e.g. meditation, exercising,	S2 discussing ways that we cope
Expressing lack of trust of others	LT S7	Music releases negative energy	Goddess S6		
"When I'm alone, it feels like the world is falling apart"	Cecilia S2	**This was a therapeutic experience**		**Spirituality as an empowerer**	
Rose: "I realised that we are not meant to be an island during difficult times, we just have to stand for yourself", I reply "and rely on others to help you stand sometimes right?" Nadia replies: "but you have to choose who you rely on "		"The music group showed me that I am enough even though I doubt myself"	Tamia reflection session	The first song suggestion was *When Jesus Say Yes*	S1
Just having the opportunity to do something together as a group	When asked about goals for the group ____ S3	"At first I didn't want to attend the session but then I tried to commit myself and the experience was so therapeutic"		Constantly reflecting on how she feels strengthened and encouraged by her faith	S3 Chilli-Bite
Stayed in the group because she didn't want to be alone when she was feeling down	Chilli-bite 2	"I was not even aware that music could be therapy, grateful to be able to access another side of music"	Cecilia S6	Singing gospel songs and praying with ladies from a church who were visiting	S2
Music helps us connect in positive ways		**Music as a building block of subjectivity**		Music helps me in prayer and meditation times to focus and to activate her spirit	S6 Goddess
It helps us connect (for example at church or at a wedding or celebration)	Cecilia: How music helps S6	Lyrics that speak to your situation and resonate with you on a personal level	Cecilia in response to the lyrics of *The Climb* S5	Suggesting a gospel song and making her feel like she's "got it"	S6 Lovely
When we played music on the speaker in the kitchen we all danced and sang together. The environment was lighter and everyone was joyful and happy	LT S7 reflection	The music resonated with my low mood	Chilli-Bite S2		
I enjoyed how everyone contributed in their own ways	Goddess reflection on S1	**Musical experiences are meaningful**			
Connection, healing, hope & peace	S2 in response to the question "What can we get out of moments together in music?"	"the dancing and singing, because you can let go of everything"	Lovely S7 what was meaningful		
		"The dancing and singing and just the children's reaction to it as well"	AM S7 what was meaningful		
		Needs from a therapy space (Poster creation S4)			
		Warmth, love, healing, relaxation, acceptance when you're feeling down, physical needs met, connection to nature, space to just be creative, comfort & safety (closed doors), feeling like myself again			

Appendix E: Reflexivity Journal

All aspects of this process required constant reflexivity and self-reflection. As a PAR process, I was constantly aware of the relational dynamics between myself and the participants. The nature of this relationship was impacted in many ways just by who I am and who they are. I was constantly challenging and critiquing my personal biases as well as how they impacted my practice as a music therapist and my presence as a fellow human being in the group.

My whiteness was something that I was constantly aware of throughout the process. The contrasting and imposing nature of my white presence in a predominantly Black community was highlighted constantly by the stares of people on the street or even the children in the shelter whose mothers chuckled and said: "They've never seen anybody so pale before". The political and historical strings attached to my whiteness were also important to reflect on. Because of the nature of white people being forced into superiority in our country's history, a white person is often placed in a position of leadership and dominance in many social settings. This history (in addition to my presence as "the professional music therapist") created a power dynamic that needed to be dismantled in accordance with the goals and outcomes of the study. From the first time meeting the ladies, I was aware of how imposing my

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presence felt, and the potential questions that might've been going through the ladies' heads. "Why is she here? What does she want with us? What does she want from us? Why now? Why us? Why you?". I do believe, however, that I did manage to dismantle this power dynamic to some extent and became more like a friend to the ladies in the group, as indicated by one group member affectionately calling me "Stephie". I did this partially through the research methodology which strives to break down participant-researcher power dynamics as well as through my facilitation of the sessions where I constantly ensured options and choice as well as spaces for the ladies to lead the group. More than in my actions, I also reminded the ladies regularly that the space belonged to them and that I was not in charge.

In addition to my reflections on my presence as a human, further reflection was needed on my presence as a therapist, a title that is often met with skepticism and mistrust. The management of the shelter was constantly forcing the ladies into trauma workshops, talks on domestic abuse and partner violence, and signing them up for therapies that they had not asked for. For this reason (and in line with my research questions), I strongly held to the voluntary and collaborative nature of the space, regularly reiterating that the space was dictated by the needs and wishes of those who were in the group and was not guided by those managing the shelter. This meant that at times it was necessary for me to surrender my research aims, as they had not been collaboratively formed with the group members. I had to carefully balance pursuing data in line with my research questions with following the needs and the lead of the group members.

The space began as a formless and somewhat unstructured group for us to experience music together, and the aims of the study came later. This formless approach was still in line with my research aims, however, as it allowed me to assess the agency of those involved in terms of active steering of the session's direction. Towards the end of the process, and once the group members became familiar with me, I began introducing more experiences directly relating to the research questions.

I also became acutely aware of the amount of apathy experienced by the group members and exactly how relevant a process focused on agency could be for them. On some days, it felt as though apathy oozed from every corner of the building. I often waited anywhere from half an hour to a full hour-and-a-half for the ladies to come and join the group. I thought in depth about whether or not it was necessary to maintain my non-pushy presence that was infinitely patient and what this might offer them and weighed it against the constant demanding and controlling presences in their lives. I found myself also becoming apathetic at some points in response to their apathy. Perhaps this could be made sense of in terms of countertransference, however, it was also linked in depth to my own feelings of discouragement at their apparent disinterest. They were able to engage with their feelings of not wanting to attend but

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struggled to think of ways to get around it. Equally frustrating was the numerous scheduling conflicts with visitors (such as donors and other organisations) also wanting some of their time.

In the processing of data, I often felt as though I was sitting, looking through a mop of hair with a fine-tooth comb and a magnifying glass. I was looking for the smallest glimmer of any agentive behaviour, any indication of the ability to creatively solve problems. I felt as though I was a sniffer dog, tracking a scent from something miles away. As the process unfolded, I came to acknowledge that creative problem-solving, and how I had framed it, was not as relevant to the ladies as I initially thought it might be. The issue of one's own power to act seemed to be a necessary precursor to creatively solving the relevant social issues concerning each group member.

I have also given a lot of thought into how I would approach this process differently if given the chance to do it again. Firstly, I would place greater emphasis on sustainability of a community musicking space. This was only discussed in one group session, and I am not convinced that the suggestions will be taken on board by either the group members or the shelter managers. Secondly, I failed to address interpersonal conflicts that arose between the ladies while I was there. The ladies would come to the group and complain about other people in the shelter and I avoided reflecting on this, as I was worried that it might do more damage than good. Thirdly, although I made a concerted effort to direct the ladies to counselling services when they needed more help, I failed to put enough referral processes in place for other areas (such as referrals to skills-based training centres etc.). Lastly, I believe that more collaboration and discussion between the ladies and the shelter managers was necessary. I would have liked to facilitate a space where the two groups could've discussed their thoughts and wishes regarding the management of the shelter, for instance, how busy the shelter keeps them (with visitors and chores) that they seldom actually had time to attend full groups and look after their mental health. This was difficult, however, due in large to the over-compliance of the ladies in the group and their wishes not to 'upset the apple cart', not to mention the risk of being thrown out of the shelter if they caused too much drama. A true CoMT intervention would've carefully considered these other, systemically situated factors and carefully considered how best to address them.
I could think about these things that I have mentioned, but I must also remind myself that shelters are highly complex systems, often filled with "wicked problems" and that I would never be able to address every 'pathological' element that I was witness to. I was bound by the pragmatic limitations of time and my research questions.

Finally, I want to mention the tension I experienced in terms of the requirements of academia in contract with what a reflexive stance was calling me to do. Figure 7 shows an image of a creative processing experience where I asked myself the following questions, and responded creatively to them:

- How do I as a therapist and a researcher relate?

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- Why am I asking these research questions?
- How might a different 'self' have asked these questions?
- Is there someone who might not view this as a problem?
- What do the theories used enable me to see / blind me from seeing?
- Who are the participants?
- Who am I?

Figure 7

Reflexivity Creative Processing Exercise

During this exercise, I became confronted with difficult feelings around my own discomfort with not having collaboratively formed the research questions, as well as an overwhelming feeling of voyeurism in terms of how I would observe the group members and then write about them. These feelings seemed too late to make any changes, as this exercise was conducted after the study was completed. I was confronted with the question "Who am I doing this for?", and although I believe that my intentions were sound throughout the study, these types of questions seem necessary to ask when working in such complex and messy circumstances. This thought led me to another important question: "Who owns this story?". I have concluded that this story belongs to the group members, I take no credit for their experiences and for the wonderful content they have contributed to the literature, as such, I will be writing up my research once more in a different format that I can disseminate to the shelter and the group members themselves, so that they might have access to their own work.

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