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THE BEREAVED SONGWRITERS' PROJECT

By

LAURA A. FIGUEROA

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the  
College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Education  
in Organizational Leadership

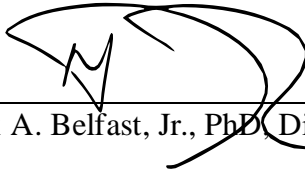
Southeastern University  
September, 2023

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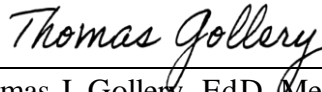
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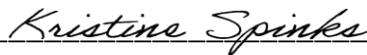
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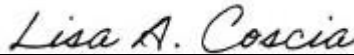
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## DEDICATION

To Raquel, Roberto, Speedy, and Papa. Your lives continue to inspire me and my worldview, exponentially. To Tina and Tony. Your example and encouragement mean more to me than you realize. To Mama and Sonia, you are my pillars, holding me up when I desperately want to quit, and consistently pushing me forward to reach new goals and dreams. I aim to be as strong as you both are. To my Zion, Jericho, and Ocean, you boys are my joy and motivation. To Jason, thank you for your undying love and support, especially during the intensity of the past two years. And lastly and most significantly, to Jesus, you are my best friend. You helped me remain confident that He who began a good work in me would carry it on to completion (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Phil. 1:6). Thank you for surrounding me with your love and favor. You never left me. You never will.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this quantitative, quasi-experimental study was to evaluate bereaved individuals' responses to a reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI). The purposive and convenient sample included 30 bereaved adults who were members of the teaching staff at a private, Christian, K-12 school in the southeastern United States and/or past or present members of the church with which the school was affiliated. The researcher developed a simple and succinct RSPI in which study participants were prompted to create an original musical piece using personal reflections, memories, and descriptions in song form to commemorate a deceased loved one. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was implemented to assess the study participants' self-perceived levels of mental well-being before and after the utilization of the RSPI. Levels of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations with others, and overall well-being were evaluated from the WEMWBS questionnaire results. The results revealed differences in the participants' levels of all four constructs of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations with others, and overall well-being. The data suggest an RSPI had a positive effect on bereaved individuals' levels of well-being.

*Keywords:* bereavement, grief, reflective songwriting, music therapy intervention, music education, music therapy education, creative art therapy, grief intervention, micro intervention, grief counseling, mental well-being, Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, WEMWBS, cognitive therapy, self-reflecting, self-coping mechanism, rumination

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Grief is an ongoing process bereaved individuals may experience for the rest of their lives (Bat-Or & Garti, 2019). If appropriate therapeutic and professional support measures are not taken to handle the intense emotions that come with losing a loved one, the bereaved's psychological, emotional, and sometimes physical well-being is compromised (Bat-Or & Garti, 2019; Flahault et al., 2018). Art therapies have become increasingly popular methods to assist individuals with emotional difficulties, psychological distress, and intense grief regarding the death of a loved one. More specifically, reflective songwriting therapy can be a non-invasive means to help individuals mitigate and process grief by practicing positive cognitive patterns and coping mechanisms (Davis & Tungol, 2019; Kinghorn, 2021). Perhaps therapeutic and reflective songwriting techniques may aid the bereaved to process the death of a loved one while practicing positive cognitive patterns through structured lyrical improvisations for eventual emotional and psychological healing.

### **Background of the Study**

Although grieving the loss of a deceased loved one is a shared human experience, research regarding effective therapies to help individuals through the difficulties of bereavement is limited (Davis & Tungol, 2019; Flahault et al., 2018). Davis and Tungol (2019) conducted a study with 42 parentally bereaved adolescents. The researchers used a mixed-methods approach integrating the transactional model of acceptance art therapy (TAAT). TAAT is a six-week

program consisting of allowing bereaved individuals to become acquainted with the program and facilitators; easing the exploration of art therapy interventions; and providing awareness of stress triggers, grief therapy, and lessons on how to manage stress and implement healthy cognitive patterns. The research question to be answered was “What effect does TAAT have on levels of distress in parentally bereaved female adolescents?” After analyzing the results, the researchers found TAAT reduced depression, anxiety, and stress levels, as well as helped individuals practice calming routines to promote positive thinking patterns in conjunction with art intervention therapies. Methods of data collection included a pre-test and post-test of experimental design and control groups using a Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS). The *p*-value of DASS on participants revealed the level of significance  $p < 0.05$ . Implications of such helpful findings could provide a reason to promote funding for health interventions of artistic and cognitive therapeutic natures, including reflective songwriting therapies for the bereaved.

### **Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Framework**

Bereaved individuals can experience the loss of a loved one and process grief in various ways (Rodríguez-Álvaro et al., 2020). Because music evokes emotions, using art as a personal and supportive medium for the bereaved might help bring therapeutic elements to individuals experiencing mental, emotional, or physical pain (Juslin et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2022). According to Rubin et al. (2003), a bereaved individual goes through an adaptive process of adjusting to a new life without the deceased. Although the researcher ascertained knowledge from previous scholars focusing on death studies, a noticeable deficiency became apparent regarding the relational aspect of the deceased to the bereaved. Thus, the two-track model of bereavement was designed. The bereavement framework by Rubin et al. (2003) is the theoretical

basis of the research problem on reflective songwriting therapy as an intervention for the bereaved.

Rubin et al. (2003) analyzed bereavement from available literature on death studies. The researchers noted the depth of studies on how individuals respond and adapt to life after losing a loved one but struggled to find data on how individuals continued to maintain a connection to the deceased. The premise of the two-track model of bereavement entails two multi-dimensional and simultaneous behavioral modes or frameworks.

The first track of the model of bereavement embodies a person's adaptive functioning while grieving (Rubin et al., 2003). An individual may experience anxiety, depression, repressed emotions and cognition, continued familial and interpersonal relationships, an inventory of self-esteem and self-worth, rumination and philosophizing, and investment in meaningful work and life tasks. Psychological and clinical assessments are considered measurements of anxiety or depression. Familial and interpersonal support becomes the priority of the bereaved, as well as the investment in a cause outside of one's grief. All such factors contribute to the bereaved individual's conscious or subconscious need to find homeostasis (Rubin et al., 2003).

The second track of the two-track model entails the grieving individual's continued relationship with the deceased (Rubin et al., 2003). An individual can experience negative or positive affect in response to images and memories of the person who has died. Cognitive and emotional distress may occur depending on the individual's relationship with the deceased. Processing the loss, the bereaved may go through a state of shock and analyze transpired events leading to the death. Rubin et al. (2003) described "reflecting disorganization versus reorganization" (pp. 686-687), where the grieving individual attempts to make sense of the death and assesses whether the death evokes a negative or positive self-image. A conclusion to all such

processes occurs when mourning individuals memorialize the deceased, thus, transforming and interweaving the deceased into the lives of the bereaved.

Rubin et al. (2003) created the two-track model of bereavement after conducting a study with 30 young, bereaved mothers from Illinois. The researchers documented similar behavior patterns throughout the mourning process with each mother. Rubin et al. (2003) also conducted a study with bereaved parents after losing adult sons at war. The researcher even pursued a different perspective on death studies by assessing societal views on bereavement. A limitation of the model is that the framework is an attempt to gather an understanding of the complex phenomenon of grief. Nevertheless, the researchers' findings add another dimension to the existing body of research on bereavement.

Rubin et al.'s (2003) findings brought about a sharper definition of the two-track model of bereavement to include four main points or responses to consider (pp. 697-698). The first response of the grieving individual is a time of shock and homeostasis, in which a period of adaptation to a new life without the deceased takes place. The second response is for the individual to process and attempt to accept the loss. The third response is the ability of the grieved individual to resume life, where the emotional intensity of grief decreases and the relationship with the deceased is no longer the focal point. The fourth and last response is the ability of the bereaved to function without the deceased.

The two-track model of bereavement is a theoretical framework connecting to the research topic on reflective songwriting therapy practices as interventions for the bereaved. Rubin et al. (2003) sought richer and more robust research on death studies and education. The researchers noticed a surplus of studies related to the biopsychosocial responses to grief and a paucity of literature about how mourning individuals continued relationships with lost loved



ones. The two-track model covers more areas of what grieving individuals experience through the frameworks of two simultaneous or bifocal lenses. Reflective songwriting could provide a therapeutic element to the bereaved by allowing an individual to organize thoughts regarding the deceased, possibly evoking homeostasis and positive adaptations, leading to the memorialization of the lost loved one through an original work of art.

### **Problem Statement**

Bereavement is challenging for individuals of any age (Myers-Coffman et al., 2020). Prolonging the stages of grief or bereavement could account for more complicated issues within a person's mental health and well-being throughout the rest of their life (Brunick, 2021). The processes of change or adaption to a new life without the existence of a lost loved one may cause trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and even complications in one's physical wellness. Neurological thought processes begin to pave pathways of sadness, loss, and negativity, potentially positioning a person in an unhealthy holding pattern (Davis & Tungol, 2019). Specific music therapy interventions might help direct neural wiring to trace and retrace pathways of positive thought patterns, thus sustaining a healthier mindset.

Myers-Coffman et al. (2020) posited that certain types of music therapy interventions could help bereaved individuals with coping mechanisms and self-perceptions. According to Brunick (2021), music therapy has unique and valuable elements to offer individuals during times of crisis to restructure thought processes. Due to the insurgence of mental health issues such as clinical depression or anxiety brought about by the aftermath of COVID-19, individuals are searching for more creative and less costly solutions for therapeutic measures (Charles et al., 2021). Music therapy is a creative and non-invasive process that can promote mental health

through reflection and expression (Mitchell, 2019). Music therapy interventions have been linked to beneficial outcomes in individuals' social, emotional, communicative, behavioral, and physiological aspects (Keyes, 2022).

For example, Kinghorn (2021) explored how music listening and rumination evoked affective responses or emotions and yielded deep, philosophical thinking. The researcher investigated individuals' ( $N = 157$ ) cognitive processes and mood valence in conjunction with purposeful music experiences.

Kwok (2019) incorporated mental health and well-being concepts with a resource-oriented music therapy framework. The researcher implemented an educational program for students ( $N = 106$ ) in grades six to eight using emotional regulation through music therapy. Participants in the experimental group scored significantly higher in hope, emotional competence, and happiness than the control group participants.

Additionally, Mitchell (2019) conducted a case study in which members of a healthcare facility participated in a music performance and gathering event called the Coffee House Experience. Semi-structured interviews revealed emergent codes and themes within participants' descriptive experiences, including therapeutic components such as self-healing, self-identity, and self-discovery through artistic expression. Providing meaningful group and individual experiences through music therapy interventions could offer the type of support bereaved individuals need to avoid mental and physical distress (Cheatley et al., 2022; Myers-Coffman et al., 2020). Furthermore, although researchers have explored the effects of music therapy interventions on grief and cognition, a dearth of literature exists regarding reflective songwriting music therapy for adults.

Research on the use of music therapy with children is available, but literature on how

bereaved adults can regulate their emotions through music and songwriting interventions is scarce (Kwok, 2019). Nevertheless, adults risk developing unhealthy mindsets if traumatic experiences, such as losing a loved one occur, and their cognition remain unchecked (Davis & Tungol, 2019). Further explorations into the field of music therapy, specifically reflective songwriting, are necessary to determine whether music therapy interventions can be used as a viable medium for the bereaved to find solace. Investigating the effects of individuals engaging in rumination, reflection, and expression through songwriting therapy might provide insight into an effective means of mental health and wellness. Quantitative research, using descriptive statistics, could provide the data necessary to support the significance of a reflective songwriting grief therapy intervention.

Bereaved adults' perceptions of reflective songwriting therapy interventions could provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of such therapeutic interventions. Obtaining such information from a quantitative study may be beneficial to those seeking federal or state financial grants assigned to mental health institutions or higher education curricula expansions related to musical therapy education. At a time when humanity has experienced extreme loss and an insurgence of mental health issues, creative solutions may be necessary to support well-being (Brunick, 2021). Additionally, such research could bring communities together through reflective songwriting therapies, enabling individuals to ruminate beneficially through artistic expression. In doing so, perhaps the bereavement process could be supported by training thought processes to follow healthier neural pathways leading to emotional healing and wellness.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this quantitative, quasi-experimental study was to investigate bereaved individuals' responses to a reflective songwriting therapy session. Additionally, the correlation

between the level of well-being before and after the songwriting therapy session was examined. Reflective songwriting therapy was generally defined as finding meaning within personal experiences through a semi-structured process of writing in song form (Cheatley et al., 2022, p. 3).

## **Overview of Methodology**

### **Sample/Sample Selection**

The study had a projected sample of more than 30 participants who were 18 years of age or older. The sample was both convenient and purposive. The subjects within the sample were bereaved individuals, meaning someone important to each participant or someone they love had passed away. Participants included members of the teaching staff at a private, Christian school, and/or past or present members of the church organization from which the school presided.

### **Variables/Research Instrumentation**

The study's independent variable was the reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI). The dependent variables were levels of well-being, optimism, self-confidence, and human connection according to the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) measurements. The first version of Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed's (2008) WEMWBS was utilized to determine the measured levels of the study's dependent variables.

### **Study Procedures**

Participants were asked to complete an online survey comprised of the 14 items of the WEMWBS, containing a 5-point Likert scale, before and after the implementation of the RSPI. Respondents' identities were anonymous and protected each time assessments were implemented. Data collected from the pre-test and post-test provided the information necessary for a *t*-test of dependent means.

Bereaved subjects met with the researcher for an initial songwriting orientation consisting of brief training on how to format and create their original songs. After the RSPI orientation, the participants worked on their songs for an hour. At the end of the focused hour of songwriting, the participants were asked to complete the WEMWBS one additional time after the RSPI.

WEMWBS embodies two perspectives of mental well-being including the subjective, affective emotion of happiness and the cognitive recognition of self-confidence to include positive relationships with oneself and others. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) has produced a high test-retest reliability score and an adequate validity score among individuals aged 16 and above. The instrument's internal consistency yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89. Subjects' scores represented perceptions using a 5-point Likert scale to statements regarding optimism, affect emotions, cognition, confidence, relationships, and overall well-being.

### **Researcher Positionality**

The researcher in the study had personal connections to the institutions from which participants were selected. She was a teacher at the school and a member of the church; therefore, she knew the participants. Nevertheless, researchers have postulated the presence of supportive and familiar individuals may enable participants to be more open to creative and therapeutic processes, even within a group setting (Cheatley et al., 2022; Mitchell, 2019).

### **Research Questions/Hypotheses**

The following four research questions and hypotheses were stated to address the study's topic and research problem:

1. To what extent will a reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI) affect bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future?

2. To what extent will an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of self-confidence?
3. To what extent will an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others?
4. To what extent will an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of overall well-being?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. To what extent will a reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI) affect bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future?

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There will be no statistically significant difference in bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There will be a statistically significant difference in bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

2. To what extent will an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of self-confidence?

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There will be no statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of self-confidence before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There will be a statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of self-confidence before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

3. To what extent will an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others?

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There will be no statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

$H_a$ : There will be a statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

4. To what extent will an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of overall well-being?

$H_0$ : There will be no statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of overall well-being before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

$H_a$ : There will be a statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of overall well-being before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

### **Overview of Analyses**

#### **Preliminary Analysis**

The study's preliminary analyses were addressed using descriptive statistical techniques. Demographic data were analyzed using frequencies ( $n$ ) and percentages (%). Initial response set findings were addressed using measures of central tendency, variability, standard errors of the mean, and data normality (skewness; kurtosis) for comparative and illustrative purposes.

The internal reliability of study participant responses to survey items represented on the research instrument was addressed using Cronbach's alpha. The interpretation of internal reliability was conducted using the conventions of alpha proposed by George and Mallery (2020). The study's extent of missing data was evaluated using descriptive statistical techniques. Little's MCAR was used to assess the randomness of the study's missing data.

#### **Statistical Power Analysis**

Statistical power analysis using the G\*Power software (3.1.9.2, Universität Düsseldorf, Germany) was conducted for sample size estimates associated with statistical significance testing using the  $t$ -test of dependent means. The study's statistical power analysis was delimited to

anticipated medium and large effects, a power  $(1 - \beta)$  index of .80, and a probability level of .05. In research questions one through four, a *t*-test of dependent means was used for statistical significance testing purposes. An anticipated medium effect ( $d = .50$ ) would require 27 participants to detect a statistically significant finding and 12 participants for an anticipated large effect ( $d = .80$ ) in research questions one through four.

### **Data Analysis by Research Questions**

A *t*-test of dependent means was used to evaluate the statistical significance of the findings in the four research questions. The probability level of  $p < .05$  represented the threshold value for study findings to be considered statistically significant. Cohen's *d* was used to evaluate the magnitude of the effect in the study findings. The conventions of effect size interpretation proposed by Sawilowsky (2009) were applied to numeric effect sizes achieved in the analyses associated with research questions one through four.

### **Delimitations**

Although this study pertains to research involving the mental well-being of bereaved individuals, delimitations are evident. The convenient sample was obtained from a single location, both a church and school; therefore, the viewpoints may not represent all bereaved individuals. Unintentional biases of the participants may occur due to the connections the bereaved within the convenient sample had to the mediator and researcher of the study, who was a fellow church attender or coworker.

Additionally, personal biases may have affected the study because the researcher was a bereaved individual, a musician, and a music educator. The data were acquired within the 1.5-hour time frame of the RSPI; thus, events that affected respondents before or during the study may have also influenced participants' survey responses. The generalizability of the study may



come into question due to the small sample size and the succinctness of the single session to complete the RSPI. Generalizations of the findings were limited because future inferences about the effects of the study cannot be made. Finally, participants who did not have a background in music may have felt uncomfortable with the musically creative persuasion of the intervention, and they may have struggled to develop a song in a meaningful way.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following words and phrases are key terms for the study.

- **bereavement:** the condition of having endured a loss, being in a despondent state, or having a cognizant understanding that someone important is gone and life will never be the same for the survivor (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017).
- **grief:** an outcome or adjustment process the bereaved experience after a significant loss, including acclimations in their physical, mental, and psychological health, to adapt to a new phase in life (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017; Rodríguez-Álvaro et al., 2020).
- **reflective songwriting:** the process of ruminating and philosophizing personal life experiences through the action of writing in song form (Cheatley et al., 2022).
- **mental well-being:** a state of condition related to positive self-perceptions and self-reflections regarding inner strength, resiliency, and mindfulness to handle hardships and challenging life experiences (Barkham et al., 2019).
- **music therapy intervention:** a musically creative, exploratory, and structured activity implemented to positively enhance an individual's cognition and affect responses (Wilson et al., 2022).

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this descriptive and quasi-experimental quantitative study was to investigate bereaved individuals' responses to a reflective songwriting therapy session. Additionally, the participants' well-being before and after the songwriting therapy session was examined. Reflective songwriting therapy is generally defined as finding meaning within personal experiences through a semi-structured process of writing in song form (Cheatley et al., 2022, p. 3). This literature review concentrates on the current trends in clinical research pertaining to music and art therapy interventions and cognitive practices to improve the mental health and well-being of the bereaved. To provide context for this study, a meta-analysis of the literature was implemented to highlight the execution of reflective songwriting therapy or similar therapeutic practices designed to help individuals mitigate bereavement and grief processes, specifically through the affect constructs of overall mental well-being such as optimism, self-confidence, and positive relationships.

### **Creative Therapy for the Bereaved**

Should a bereaved or grieving individual experience severe trauma or emotional duress due to the loss of a loved one, proactive steps are necessary to acquire personal resolution for mental healing and well-being (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017). The phenomenon of bereavement is profound in nature due to how diversified individuals grieve. Therefore, psychologists have

sought to explore and educate others in creative therapeutic approaches and interventions to help individuals mitigate grief and bereavement processes.

### **Bereavement and Grief**

According to Abi-Hashem and Div (2017), bereavement is having a cognizant understanding that someone important is gone and life will never be the same for the survivor, while grief is an adjustment process or outcome the bereaved experience immediately after a significant loss, including biopsychosocial acclimations (Rodríguez-Álvaro et al., 2020). The difficulty of tending to the psychological wounds of grief and bereavement lends to the need for non-invasive and non-threatening approaches to healing and restoration. Furthermore, the way in which a person passes away or the type of relationship the deceased had with the survivor may cause more complexity within the process of bereavement. To that end, more and more psychologists have ventured into the implementation of creative and music-based interventions as acceptable and viable options for counseling practices (Silverman, 2022; Wilson et al., 2022).

Music psychologists have explored the use of musical therapy to relieve individuals of mental health issues and to aid in emotional regulation (Kinghorn, 2021). In recent years, clinical counselors have employed both art and music therapy interventions to assist bereaved individuals experiencing mental duress. Music interventions have been implemented through reflection, documentation, and sharing public displays of memorialization to a supportive group, whether in groups of two or in front of larger gatherings (Evans et al., 2021; Metzl & Gronner Shamai, 2021; Mitchell, 2019; Rubin, 2003). More specifically, sharing dialogue about the deceased, rumination, and reflection can establish safe environments for the bereaved to find self-efficiency to overcome anxiety or trauma caused by the loss of a loved one (Mitchell, 2019; Myers-Coffman et al., 2020).

Mitchell (2019) conducted a case study of seven adolescent performers and 11 faculty members after presenting music performances at a biannual Coffee House event. The performances were held at a mental healthcare facility in Ontario, Canada and used as an outlet for self-expression and mental health through music. The researcher investigated the effects of music therapy techniques, such as performing for a supportive audience, establishing a human connection, and creating artistic expression. Mitchell observed the performances, journaled the experience, and conducted semi-structured interviews with the seven adolescent patients of the mental healthcare facility in conjunction with the Arts Express creative arts camp.

Mitchell (2019) uncovered therapeutic components within themes when observing community music performances and interviewing the subjects. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and coded. Thematic material within the post-performance interviews included feelings of connectedness, overcoming anxiety, safety in risk-taking, self-efficiency, and finding self-identity and self-healing through narration and storytelling within the performances.

The researcher expressed concerns about participants' inability to be more vulnerable during interviews because they did not know her or were uncomfortable discussing personal issues (Mitchell, 2019). The researcher extrapolated, from emergent codes within thematic material, the need for further studies into the combination of music education and music therapy through community performances as a non-threatening, non-invasive means of allowing subjects to process internal mental health issues and traumatic experiences.

Another exploration into creative art interventions for bereavement processes was conducted by Metzl and Gronner Shamai (2021). After they experienced the personal losses of loved ones, the researchers initiated the study while implementing theoretical frameworks

regarding grief. The researchers used art as a medium to aid in narrative discussions on personal loss and expressive and emotional grief. The study was unique in that Metzl and Gronner Shamai were the researchers while also being art therapists, psychotherapists, and participants in the study exploring ways art could help individuals like themselves understand grief and coping mechanisms. Metzl and Gronner Shamai created a dialogue about coping and reflection and discussed the phenomenon of grief. When words were inadequate, the artists used the artwork to provide avenues of deeper expression.

Metzl and Gronner Shamai (2021) also infused an element from bereavement theory or the two-track model of bereavement, posing that grieving evokes personal imagery through memories of the deceased (Rubin et al., 2003, as cited in Metzl & Gronner Shamai, 2021). According to the theory or model, bereavement yields two components or tracks for an individual. The first component relates to how a person functions or adapts to life after losing a loved one. The second component relates to the bereaved individual's connection with the deceased. The bereavement theory, also known as the two-track model of bereavement, is a valuable framework encompassing psychoanalytical and therapeutic connections for the bereaved (Rubin et al., 2003, as cited in Metzl & Gronner Shamai, 2021). Additionally, art or music therapy interventions can be useful tools for coping mechanisms for grieving. Such mechanisms help the bereaved make meaningful connections to the deceased.

Psychotherapists Metzl and Gronner Shamai (2021) may have had researcher bias because the authors deemed art as a valid mediator or intervention to support grief, while some individuals may not view art in the same fashion. Although the results of the study cannot be generalized because of the small sample ( $N = 2$ ), the qualitative descriptions of the researchers may offer some valuable insight through their responses as grief and bereavement are shared

human experiences (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017; Wilson et al., 2022). Perhaps non-invasive music therapy techniques, such as listening to music for affect and rumination responses or semi-structured songwriting sessions, offer remedial components to guide the bereaved in exercises to promote healthier thought processes and mental well-being.

### **Music Therapy Intervention**

According to Wilson et al. (2022), music therapy interventions are musically creative, exploratory, and structured activities implemented to positively enhance an individual's cognition and affect responses. Kinghorn (2021) conducted a quantitative study to explore individual affective outcomes of music listening and rumination. The researcher's sample comprised 157 American or Canadian adults between 17 and 61. Kinghorn (2021) investigated whether music listening yielded changes in mood valence or emotion, whether a listener's mood predicts music listening choices, and whether trait rumination predicts changes to the listener's mood valence (p. 11). Through an online questionnaire and the MuPsych app, participants were prompted to answer questions when listening to music on their phones for two weeks.

Although Kinghorn's (2021) study offered only short-term outcomes, generalizability was limited to North Americans and Canadians, and the app was only tested on Android users, the findings may have revealed insight into the relationship between cognition and music. According to Cronbach's alpha, the study's internal reliability scores yielded good to moderately good significance with a sub-scale of  $\alpha = .92$ . Regarding mood valence analyses, the significance testing maintained a good threshold of  $p = .05$ . The knowledge obtained from emotional regulation through rumination, listening to music with a positive message, and reflection could be applied to social science research on regulating mental health, anxiety, and stress. Perhaps

further studies using long-term conclusions could provide richer data for music educational purposes and music therapy interventions for the bereaved.

Silverman (2022) conducted a phenomenological study with two subjects from a mental health organization in Minnesota. The researcher selected willing candidates for the study due to the mental health conditions identified. One participant identified with paranoid schizophrenia and the other participant had depression, anxiety, sleep disorder, and PTSD mental health conditions. Silverman sought to explore perceptions of experiences in songwriting, recording music at a professional studio, and having a CD release party. Both participants had previous experience with music; however, neither participant had experienced recording in a professional studio nor had a CD release party prior to the study.

The study encompassed interpretivism, epistemological, and inductive approaches to find emergent codes and themes in the data (Silverman, 2022). Silverman's participants' narratives of experiences were recorded and transcribed during interviews. Analyzation of the content allowed the researcher to decode seven emerging themes: valued collaboration, anticipation in future songwriting, songwriting benefits, a desire to inspire others, enjoyment in studio recording experience, positive experience in having a CD release party, and commitment to the songwriting process despite adversity. A music therapist worked with the researcher to ensure questions used in the semi-structured interviews were not leading and reviewed the coded data post-interviews. Another music therapist worked with the subjects during songwriting and studio recording. Although a small number of participants in the study lends to the limited generalizability of the research, the descriptive measures of participants' experiences could be applied to the body of literature regarding social behaviors of the bereaved and how such intervention activities might provide therapeutic agents to aid individuals suffering from mental and emotional duress.

## **Reflective Songwriting**

According to Cheatley et al. (2022), reflective songwriting is the process of ruminating and philosophizing personal life experiences through the action of writing in song form. Myers-Coffman et al. (2020) infused reflective songwriting with the development of a theory-driven intervention of a specific type of music therapy through the Resilience Songwriting Program (RSP). The intervention program targeted adolescents dealing with bereavement and offered non-invasive coping mechanisms to process the loss of a loved one. The program infused a combination of improvisation, music-listening exercises, and songwriting within the therapy sessions. RSP used eight sessions to provide adolescents with the tools to cope with grief and bereavement through artistic and emotional expression. The sessions were designed to assist the bereaved to reframe cognitive and neurological pathways while undergoing the songwriting process in a group setting. The combination of therapies provided avenues for coping mechanisms for bereaved adolescents.

Myers-Coffman et al. (2020) created a theoretical model based on ontological, epistemological, and axiological frameworks of qualitative studies, which were about bereavement therapies in conjunction with music and songwriting therapy. The researchers implemented a type of songwriting intervention with a protocol that included eight 90-minute sessions designed to build self-expression, self-esteem, rumination, and coping. Strategies for treatments included positive thinking, cognitive reframing, and psychological education to enhance emotional awareness and regulation using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Myers-Coffman et al. (2020) implemented adolescent group therapy interventions through open discussion and reflection to initiate the songwriting process. The researchers analyzed individual and group responses, while recognizing that songwriting processes can easily be infused with



CBT strategies to enable adolescents to discover coping mechanisms for mental healing while grieving internally.

Myers-Coffman et al. (2020) explored the feasibility of the Resilience Songwriting Program (RSP) on bereaved adolescents, thus, implementing the theoretical model onto subjects for analysis. Participants were recruited from three sites where the research took place: a behavioral health clinic in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; a middle school in Gainesville, Georgia; and a pediatric hospital's bereavement support program in Indianapolis, Indiana. Implementation encompassed a total of eight 60- to 90-minute sessions, at the sites of the study, in a community-based environment. The researchers administered a mixed methods approach, which included applying descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of the data collected throughout the group songwriting sessions and processes.

The researchers used a deductive analysis of participants' semi-structured interviews (Myers-Coffman et al., 2020). First, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Next, the organized data were thematically coded by the lead author. Finally, the coded data were deciphered by another coder to confirm the organization of themes. Themes included making meaningful bonds within the community group setting, motivation to complete a song, journaling being tedious, songwriting being enjoyable, and song sharing being moving. After the implementation of the Meaningfulness of Songwriting Scale (MSS), subjects scored an average of 85.7 ( $SD = 10.31$ ). Despite the difficulty in finding and obtaining participants, the researchers identified RSP as a valuable resource to assist adolescents through the bereavement process.

Cheatley et al. (2022) conducted a mixed-method research study on how ALYSIA, an AI songwriting program, aided the bereaved through grieving. The researchers investigated how implementing ALYSIA could assist individuals through creative self-expression and emotional

inventory, thus, recognizing suppressed affect by therapeutic and creative means in an affordable, online, and supportive context. Subjects ( $N = 7$ ) were introduced to ALYSIA at their homes and were aided in using the songwriting program. Initially, the subjects expressed doubt in their songwriting capabilities, but through the promptings of the user-friendly software, all seven were able to complete songs to memorialize the deceased. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was implemented pre- and post-ALYSIA to measure participants' well-being. Results indicated younger subjects (ages 16 to 30) had a statistically significant greater change in well-being scores than older subjects ages 55 and above ( $t(5) = 3.709, p = 0.014$ ).

Subjects in Cheately et al.'s (2022) study also participated in semi-structured interviews. The researchers transcribed the data and then analyzed thematic data using NVivo 12, a qualitative analysis software, after coding data and finding emergent themes. Emergent themes from the interview data included comfort, self-efficiency, creative control, reminiscence, relational bonds, and a reframing of engagement with grief and bereavement. Participants expressed favorability toward ALYSIA, due to the creative process in which one could experience grief and bereavement in a more focused and safer environment.

Similarly, Evans et al. (2021) designed a project to aid students' expression of personal life experiences to include the difficulties of phenomena such as grief and bereavement. The researchers created a lesson plan to enhance English Language Arts (ELA) skills through reflective writing, songwriting, and podcasting. The project design was established before the global coronavirus pandemic of 2020, but the study was ultimately conducted via distance learning. During the pandemic lockdown, ninth-grade students from Bentonville High School in Bentonville, Arkansas, took part in the project entitled The Podcast of Our Lives and were able to connect their experiences through music, narration, reflection, and student-led community

engagement. No musical knowledge was required of students. Subjects used email, Google Classroom, instructional videos, and asynchronous sessions with a songwriter to complete the distance learning ELA lesson and group project.

Evans et al. (2021) analyzed the data through thematic material drawn from students' journal entries, songwriting drafts, recorded soundtracks, and narrated podcasts. Participants' ideas were organized to form songs and narration for the class podcast and recorded soundtracks. Doing so enabled additional processing of ELA concepts through metacognitive exercises and a deepening of expression and communicative abilities. The themes discovered in the study were an initial struggle to find the right words, an eventual realization of self-efficacy through creative expression, students' focus on a pivotal moment in life (the pandemic), recognizing current self-identity, and vision casting of whom they hope to be in the future (Evans et al., 2021, pp. 71-72). The researchers identified ways in which students made cognitive ELA connections while making community connections with each other throughout the Podcast of Our Lives project. Such exercises in cognition and reflection, infused with songwriting, provided expressive outlets for students experiencing duress during the pandemic. Similar exercises in reflection and songwriting could help individuals process difficult circumstances, such as the experience of going through a global pandemic, including losing loved ones and the mental health and well-being of the bereaved.

Reflective songwriting may offer a combination of therapeutic elements to help process grief, discover coping mechanisms by reframing neural pathways through cognition and emotional expression, and by providing support for mental well-being (Evans et al., 2021). Non-pharmaceutical methods of improving an individual's mental health and well-being have been explored through remedial art interventions and music therapy, according to Wilson et al. (2022).

Further, Williams et al. (2019) attributed arts-based programs such as creative writing and choral singing to improving individual well-being, specifically in the constructs of positive relationships with others, reducing stress, and improving optimism and self-esteem.

### **Mental Well-being**

Barkham et al. (2019) defined mental well-being as an important public health issue, especially in recent years, pertaining to positive self-perceptions and self-reflections regarding inner strength, resiliency, and mindfulness to handle hardships and challenging life experiences. Wilson et al. (2022) studied clinical psychologists' perceptions of the acceptability of music interventions employed to improve mental well-being and mood regulation. The purposive sample included 43 participants who were recruited through a Facebook page and e-newsletter of the Division for Counseling Psychology in the United Kingdom. An online survey regarding music therapy interventions was conducted on the sample. Examples of music intervention implementation discussed in the survey included subjects' participation in activities promoting personal engagement and reflections on life experiences. The researchers hypothesized that music-based therapy interventions would be considered adequate tools for counseling services conducted by clinical counselors. Additionally, subjects' personal engagement would be a predictive factor in psychologists' views of acceptability.

Instrumentation utilized by the researchers included the Music Use and Background Questionnaire (MUSEBAQ), which assessed participants in constructs of personal engagement with music and the permissibility of using music interventions with counseling clients (Wilson et al., 2022). Different constructs included musicianship, musical capacity, music preference, and motivation for music. The aspect of music preference was intentionally excluded from the assessment so no personal bias would influence the participant's completion of the study. As for

the constructs of musicianship and capacity, the specific elements of formal and informal training were assessed and were accurately predicted to have no impact on the outcomes of the acceptability of the test. The construct of motivation for music included measuring elements of emotional regulation, artistic expression, and identity.

Of the 43 participants, over 79% were females, which may have resulted in some level of skewing (Wilson et al., 2022). The sample yielded one significant predictor or covariate that contained a positive relationship to acceptability ( $p = .001$ ), which was personal engagement being considered a motivation for music usage in therapeutic measures. In other words, clinical psychologists who had personally benefited from music therapies in the past more significantly considered music-based interventions as an acceptable counseling practice. Moreover, participants deemed motivations for music use acceptability attitudes were due to personal engagement, such as finding personal identity, social connectivity, and emotional regulation. All such motivational aspects are constructs related to mental well-being and are measured in the WEMWBS (Barkham et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2022, p. 26).

Limitations of the study included the exclusion of qualitative responses due to insufficient respondent commentary and content for analysis (Wilson et al., 2022). Qualitative responses may have provided a more in-depth description of why personal engagement in music interventions was a priority to participants. Additionally, the structure of the study did not account for differentiating psychologists who were currently using or had previously used music interventions within their practices.

Nevertheless, Wilson et al. (2022) purported existing and evidentiary studies that music interventions can increase one's level of well-being and are seen as an acceptable and viable means to do so by psychologists and participants. Wilson et al. (2022) also found that

respondents who had the propensity to utilize music for personal well-being were more likely to view music interventions as acceptable. Wilson et al. (2022) regarded the findings as support to consider when recruiting individuals to fill training positions or leadership positions in the field of psychology where music interventions will be implemented, especially for the improvement of clients' mental well-being.

Williams et al. (2019) conducted a study to investigate individuals who suffered from mental health conditions, who identified as being socially marginalized due to those conditions, and who participated in arts-based interventions for the purpose of improving mental well-being. The researchers explored a social identity theoretical approach to investigate how subjects fared after participating in a creative arts program. Additionally, the researchers inspected participants' levels of mental well-being in a longitudinal study.

The sample consisted of 59 adults recruited through the Arts Based Group (ABG) program in Brisbane, Australia (Williams et al., 2019). Recruited members were individuals with chronic mental health conditions (CMHC) to be assessed throughout the study. Respondents were adults between the ages of 25 and 67. Of the 59 participants, 34 were assigned to the choir and 25 were recruited to a creative writing group. Subjects were informed that their levels of mental well-being would be assessed for the purposes of the research study. Participants were recruited by case workers, voluntarily signed consent forms, and were provided with a \$30 voucher for their time and contribution to behavioral science research.

The ABG choir met for a 10-week term on Friday mornings for 2.5-hour rehearsals (Williams et al., 2019). Songs were taught by a professional choir director, and rehearsals were implemented with the assistance of ABG program facilitators. Members of the choir were not required to have prior experience in music or formal music training; therefore, no sheet music

was used for rehearsals. The choir performed at different venues in Brisbane. Choir facilitators reinforced social connectedness in the groups by proactively prompting choir members to support one another, by encouraging members to wear matching t-shirts with the choir insignia to practices and performances, by texting reminders of upcoming rehearsals, and by scheduling an ABG choir member teatime prior to rehearsals. All such concerted efforts to prompt participant embracement of community gathering and connection formed social bonds within the cohort.

The ABG creative writing assembly was held for 10 weeks, one time each week, for two-hour sessions (Williams et al., 2019). Participants were encouraged to brainstorm together and to continue to work on their writing at home. Bonding exercises, such as conversation prompts prior to the writing session, were implemented to increase the cohesiveness of the team. The instructors and participants exchanged writing ideas and feedback with each other. Creative writing and storytelling prompted subjects to reflect and share personal experiences, feelings, and emotions. Participants' written works could be shared at the end-of-term performance in tandem with the ABG choir concert.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was used to assess score ranges indicating possible changes in participants' mental well-being (Williams et al., 2019). According to the WEMWBS instrument guide, a 3- to 8-point difference from pre- to post-tests indicates a significant change. According to the sample by Williams et al. (2019), the measure revealed good reliability ( $\alpha = .96$ ). The survey sample also revealed reasonably good reliability measures of group identity ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

Two types of analyses were implemented: a *t*-test of dependent pairs and a linear longitudinal model over time (Williams et al., 2019). Surveys were implemented at three designated times. Not all members of the ABG choir or writing team were present at all three

scheduled survey times. According to Williams et al. (2019), 68% of choir participants provided more than one data point ( $n = 25$ ), and 44 % of the creative writing group members provided one data point ( $n = 11$ ). Members' ability to complete the study affected attrition rates. Barriers to attendance included relocation, employment, education, or hospitalization of members in distant locations, or because participants lost meaningful connection to the ABG groups.

Regardless, participants' WEBMWBS scores, on average, revealed improvement per month at a rate of .39 points yielding a moderate ( $d = 0.52$ ) Cohen's  $d$  effect size (Williams et al., 2019). Changes of significance were considered "meaningful" if scores increased by eight points or more. Of the 49 total participants in the study, a total of 34 subjects completed two data points. Approximately 38.2% of the 34 respondents revealed experiencing "meaningful" improvement of overall mental well-being during ABG team participation, according to the WEMWBS results.

Limitations to the research included the attrition rates of the sample (Williams et al., 2019). Participants did not consistently attend rehearsals or meetings, which weakened the power of the research and the overall level of accuracy. Due to the stretch of time between analysis testing, the threat of external validity affected the robustness of the study. The researchers noted participants who prematurely dropped out of the study could have reflected higher levels of mental well-being, unfortunately, the participants never returned to be assessed.

Another limitation the researchers expressed was that each participant had experienced different levels of chronic mental health issues (CMHC) and was at multiple points of recovery (Williams et al., 2019). Notwithstanding the delimitations of the study, the reported improved changes in participants' levels of mental well-being were attributed to their engagement in the Arts Based Group (ABG) intervention. Implications of the study include the various ways music



interventions led by art professionals can be employed, such as providing ways of belonging, self-reflection of affect emotions and self-expression, social connection, and identity. Individuals with low levels of mental well-being may suffer within societal norms, which could otherwise cause personal isolation or feelings of being marginalized (Williams et al., 2019, p. 23). Arts professionals may be used to help employ music interventions, such as ABG, which are designed to improve individual levels of mental well-being, thus, combating feelings of marginalization and isolation.

de Witte et al. (2021) provided a meta-analysis of the previous 10 years of research to investigate how and why creative arts' therapies (CATs) yielded positive effects. CATs include art therapy, dance/movement therapy, drama therapy, music therapy, psychodrama, and poetry/bibliotherapy. Like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), CATs have been implemented to help individuals cope with threats to health and mental well-being. The researchers also wanted to raise awareness of the necessity of change process research (CPR), which is the investigation into change mechanisms, not for outcome research, but for pinpointing how a single session within a series of consecutive sessions becomes the agent of change to improve therapeutic executions. Furthermore, de Witte et al. (2021) wanted to provide CPR research within CATs for policy change purposes and to promote funds for educational and therapeutic organizations.

To provide a thorough scope of the literature review pertaining to CPR in CATs, de Witte et al. (2021) formed a group of 10 field experts from different countries. Experts were specifically chosen to focus on drama, music, and dance therapy. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, but the review only focused on psychological well-being outcomes derived from therapeutic factors and mechanisms of change.

Of the drama, music, and dance studies meeting the inclusionary criteria, 24 music therapy studies were permissible to be scoped in the meta-analyses (de Witte et al., 2021). Of the 24 music therapy studies, the researchers reviewed 11 qualitative studies, eight quantitative studies, three systematic reviews, and one theoretical review. Inclusionary criteria encompassed empirical studies covering change mechanisms in music therapy interventions provided by a certified therapist, written in English, with a focus on mental well-being outcomes. Studies dealing with physical or medicinal outcomes were excluded from the analyses.

Trends in the music therapy studies included participants working in the present time of the intervention and active engagement in the creative process (de Witte et al., 2021, p.16). Participants organized thoughts and patterns and pieced together a collective body of original creative work. Through the analyses, the researchers posited that the acts of musical creativity embodied the mechanism of change, which is the initial transfer of the artists' intangible experiences into a definitive and coherent organism of expression, reflecting the unseen subconscious nature of an individual. Furthermore, active engagement in the arts makes space for interpersonal communication in which the director or implementer of the intervention creates an inviting atmosphere where clients are comfortable enough to engage, create, and share personal reflections in the musical art form (de Witte et al., 2021).

Positive change mechanisms in music therapy interventions are associated with collaborative and interactive music participation (de Witte et al., 2021). The cohesiveness and shared bonds within group therapy environments become agents of change evoked by the therapeutic elements in the music. Therapeutic elements include positive human connection, positive affect in conjunction with neurological calmness, and a reduction of stress and anxiety, which allows for an optimistic outlook.

Despite a delimitation in the study that the scope only included literature written in English and while many valuable works in the music therapy field occur in Nordic countries, another trend in the research concentrated on how music therapy related to global connections across diverse populations (de Witte et al., 2021, p. 19). Furthermore, the advancement of training and educating healthcare professionals, mediators, and moderators in CATs may provide more tangible and non-invasive resources for the implementation of music interventions in different countries. In doing so, improving the mental well-being of individuals cross-culturally can be attributed to the enhancement of music therapy education.

According to de Witte et al. (2021), moderators may influence the change mechanisms of the intervention, even though they are outside of the intervention. However, the director of the intervention has a stronger propensity to guide the change, especially if a strong rapport is established, thus, allowing for more engagement, self-reflection, rumination, behavioral change, and a change in well-being.

A chain of events can occur, but de Witte et al. (2021) expressed the need for more quantitative than qualitative studies on the function of moderators and mediators within CATs. The reasoning is that qualitative studies often rely on self-reported data, which could allow for biases to pervade factual data. Empirical studies using statistical analysis would be necessary to pinpoint change mechanisms within music therapy interventions.

Additionally, de Witte et al. (2021) indicated the need for micro-interventions, which are segments of overall music therapy sessions. In such segments, the analysis of specific change agents may be more readily recognized by researchers and implemented in counseling practices. Consequently, the development of more meticulous methodologies in music therapy

interventions could reveal the genesis of change mechanisms that can be transferred to clinical practices for the improvement of individuals' mental health and overall well-being.

de Witte, Pinho, et al. (2022) provided a 47-study meta-analysis on music therapy practices. Both clientele and moderators of the interventions were assessed, yielding a total of 2,747 subjects in the review. Studies revealed music therapy interventions resulted in an overall medium to large effect size, ( $d = .723$ , [.51-.94]), for stress-related outcomes. Additionally, clinical control trial groups yielded larger stress-level effect outcomes than randomized control trial groups.

According to de Witte, Knapen, et al. (2022), musical therapy techniques are too general and a need for more research into specific intervention techniques, such as micro-interventions, is necessary because the therapeutic needs of individuals are varied. The researchers performed another meta-analysis of the literature, but specifically focused on 52 empirical studies pertaining to the effects of music therapy interventions on stress-related outcomes. The researchers discovered that micro-interventions are well-suited to the fluid nature of music therapy practices implemented in the present time. Therefore, therapists can pinpoint components that directly affect an individual's responses to remedial exercises such as improvising, musical dialogue, storytelling, and reflective songwriting practices. de Witte, Knapen, et al. (2022) also found the types of therapeutic practices that required intentional cognitive reflections in creative applications were strongly related to positive change in therapeutic outcomes. Positive therapeutic outcomes include a reduction in individual stress levels on both physiological and psychological levels (de Witte, Pinho, et al., 2022). Furthermore, such cognitive therapeutic practices could be implemented to assist bereaved populations with emotional regulation and well-being in conjunction with positive changes in therapeutic outcomes.

Huang et al. (2021) conducted a bereavement grief study in Taiwan to investigate the effects of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) on emotional regulation and well-being. Nineteen bereaved individuals were recruited to participate in the 8-week MBCT program intervention. The researchers' goal was to utilize MBCT to assess functional connectivity in the resting and emotional arousal states of the brain and to investigate connections and self-perceived changes via questionnaires. Longitudinal studies of brain activities were employed during resting and emotional arousal states following MBCT. Additionally, the connection between MBCT and neurological plasticity changes, or the brain's ability to modify or self-regulate, was explored. The elements of anxiety, difficulty in emotional regulation, and mindfulness were constructs measured in the survey instrument. The researchers also focused on the correlation between neural functioning and individual views on grief and mindfulness.

Participants were asked to complete five surveys to measure levels of grief, anxiety, depression, emotional regulation, and mindfulness prior to MBCT implementation (Huang et al., 2021). The instruments used were the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG), the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), the 18-item Taiwanese Depression Questionnaire, the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), and a Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). Additionally, the 19 participants completed brain scans and imaging data analyses.

The primary focus of the eight-week MBCT program was to guide participants in allowing thoughts related to grief and bereavement to enter their minds while simultaneously being in the present moment (Huang et al., 2021). Although many bereaved individuals suppress sadness or the difficulties related to bereavement and grief, the exercise was designed to practice emotion regulation by allowing negative emotions to surface and to practice calming techniques, such as focused breathing. Specifically, the purpose of the exercise was to train the neural wiring

of one's thought processes to avoid the habitual nature of being ensnared in an unsettling cognition. In other words, the calming practice was structured to keep participants from getting stuck in a pattern of attempting to organize unresolved issues related to the deceased. Such practices could help release individuals from being entrapped in a negative cognitive holding pattern and guide the bereaved into healthier mindfulness practices of acceptance, resolution, and hope (Cheately et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2021; Kinghorn, 2021).

Following the eight-week intervention, participants took the five-part survey again (Huang et al., 2021). A paired *t*-test was implemented to analyze psychological variables using the data yielded by the 19 subjects who completed the entire program. After analyzing the results of TRIG, GAD-7, and Depression surveys, Huang et al. (2021) noted grief, negative emotions, and the difficulty of emotion regulation yielded significant decreases. Conversely, the data scores of mindfulness yielded a significant increase. Regarding FFMQ sub-categories, the constructs of observing and non-reacting increased significantly, and the constructs of describing, awareness, and non-judging yielded marginal significance ( $0.1 > p \geq .05$ ).

Huang et al. (2021) expressed that the delimitations of the study were that a control group for comparison was not utilized due to ethical concerns and the duration of MBCT was succinct. However, the study provided significant results to confirm the hypothesis that an MBCT would improve functional connectivity of brain networks in the resting state but did not provide significant results during the emotionally induced state. In other words, MBCT did not decrease emotions but allowed for shifts away from emotion perception in the resting state of the brain within bereaved individuals. According to the researchers' findings, bereavement and grief influence the entire brain function, interconnectivity, and neural pathways, not just during

emotional cognition, but even when an individual's cognition is balanced (Huang et al., 2021, p. 518).

### ***Optimism for the Future, Self-Confidence, and Positive Relations with Others***

Music therapy practices, such as reflective songwriting for the bereaved, may enhance the neural passages of the brain. If therapeutic measures, such as a semi-structured, non-invasive exercise in remediation, are not employed, then bereaved individuals may be in danger of suffering from mental and physical health issues (Cheately et al., 2022; de Witte, Knapen, et al., 2022; de Witte, Pinho, et al., 2022; de Witte et al., 2021; Kinghorn, 2021; Rubin, 2003). The mental health and well-being of the grieving or bereaved may be mitigated by the simple practices of guiding one's thought processes to engage in remembering, honoring, and memorializing the bereaved. The act of assembling in a remedial group, designed specifically for the bereaved to write down organized thoughts and to place them into song form, may provide a disarming and non-threatening avenue for individuals to face otherwise sad or painful emotions by transforming them into artistic expression (Myers-Coffman et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2022).

Additionally, de Witte et al. (2021), noted how common therapeutic goals and factors identified in music therapy practices, such as reflective songwriting, are the improvements of positive regard, emotional release, collaboration, community, acceptance, support, problem actualization, and hopefulness (p. 5). Therefore, engagement in reflective songwriting exercises may improve upon the bereaved individuals' optimism levels, self-confidence, positive relationships with others, and overall mental health and well-being.

Rosado (2019) expressed how having eight years of experience with music therapy allowed her to observe patients' engagement in music therapy interventions, such as group songwriting and improvising. According to the researcher and music therapist, such practices

made space for individuals to reflect and find hope during recovery through facilitated music intervention therapies. Clients engaged in exercises designed to help them consciously process emotions, develop coping mechanisms, improve self-esteem, make connections with others, and obtain a clearer sense of identity.

Rosado (2019) conducted a methodological, qualitative study based on grounded theory that encompassed six music therapy sessions, within seven days, and the information yielded from the subjects. The researcher implemented the study with 14 female adolescents in an inpatient mental health rehabilitative care facility. Rosado (2019) aimed to investigate the feelings and experiences patients developed during the intervention in conjunction with mental health challenges. The participants had a range of diagnoses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder. Participants had to attend at least three music therapy group meetings and to engage in clinical interventions.

Participants engaged in musical therapy interventions such as group music lessons, lyric analysis, songwriting, and instrumental improvisations (Rosado, 2019). Semi-structured interviews post-intervention yielded prominent codes and themes from the constituents. According to the researcher, such practices facilitated increased group cohesion, emotional regulation, self-awareness, validation of feelings, empathy, anxiety reduction, self-discovery, agency, anxiety tolerance, and emotional expression. A research advisory team helped to examine the participants' transcript interview data. Upon examining the interviews holistically, the team found the following themes: increased comfort in a hospital setting, positive connections, self-expression, self-discovery of strength, music can be used as a coping instrument, emotional regulation, and engagement in treatment (Rosado, 2019).



The researcher further discussed how skill-based interventions, such as songwriting or group music therapy, assisted participants with the agency of emotional regulation, positive connections or relationships with others, and coping strategies (Rosado, 2019). The study contained delimitations such as being gender specific and the possibility of containing research bias, thus, the participants may have felt obligated to respond in a certain manner agreeable to the researcher who was also the therapist. Despite such delimitations, the relationships between the researchers and the subjects allowed for trust and rapport to be established, in which case, participants may have not felt comfortable being open and vulnerable (Rosado, 2019, p. 135).

Like individuals needing mental health and well-being remediation, bereaved populations may be positively impacted by music therapy interventions designed to help individuals navigate through the pain of losing a loved one (Cheately et al., 2022). Because grief profoundly affects the bereaves' psychosocial well-being in such a complex manner, it, therefore necessitates creative solutions for such populations to find emotional and even physical consolation (Mondanaro, 2021). Consequently, reflecting upon and memorializing the deceased through songwriting may offer therapeutic agents for the bereaved.

### **Summary**

Implementing reflective songwriting interventions for the bereaved may offer therapeutic elements to help process grief and discover coping mechanisms by reframing neural pathways through cognition and emotional expression (Kinghorn, 2021). Providing avenues to connect the bereaved to the deceased through reflection and rumination within musical therapies may help individuals find mental solace (Kinghorn, 2021; Rubin, 2003). Additionally, enabling the bereaved to share personal stories, narration, and dialogue through reflective songwriting may offer safe environments for the vulnerability of the artistic expression of bereaved populations

(Cheately et al., 2022; Metzl & Gronner Shamai, 2021). In doing so, the phenomenon of the grief process may be experienced in a more bearable manner. Implementing research-based strategies for affect and emotional regulation and rumination, and finding a connection with a lost loved one may be implemented to help the bereaved. A reflective songwriting program intervention may provide a practical, creative, and artistically expressive means for the bereaved to access healthy cognitive processes that mitigate grief and provide support.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this descriptive and quasi-experimental quantitative study was to investigate bereaved individuals' responses to a reflective songwriting therapy session. Additionally, the participants' well-being was examined before and after the songwriting therapy session. Reflective songwriting therapy is generally defined as finding meaning within personal experiences through a semi-structured process of writing in song form (Cheatley et al., 2022, p. 3). Chapter III contains a description of the methodology implemented in this quantitative study, research context, participants, intervention, instrumentation, the validity of the instrument, data collection procedures, analysis, and an overall summary.

#### **Description of Methodology**

A quantitative, quasi-experimental research design featuring a within-subjects, repeated measures approach was used to address the study's topic (Edmonds et al., 2017). The quasi-experimental research design approach was selected for study purposes as experimental designs in general are most persuasive supporting "cause and effect" relationships in research. The within-subjects, repeated measures approach was, moreover, advantageous in controlling for individual differences inherent in study participants that are more challenging to control in true experimental designs (Frankel et al., 2019).

Considering its benefit of generating noteworthy statistical power and ability to amass a considerable amount of data on a research topic of interest, a survey research approach was

selected for study purposes (Jones et al., 2013). The closed structure 5-point Likert scale used in the study, moreover, provided the advantage of assessing the intervention's effect through the application of a robust, inference statistical technique in the analysis of data.

### **Research Context and Participants**

The study's anticipated sample was 30 to 40 participants who were 18 years of age or older. The non-probability sampling technique used in the study was both convenient and purposive (Adams & Lawrence, 2019).

The subjects within the sample identified as bereaved individuals, specifically defined as people who have a cognizant understanding that an important person or someone they love has passed away and that life will never be the same (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017). Participants included members of the teaching staff at a private, Christian, K-12 school in the southeastern United States and/or past or present members of the church with which the school was affiliated.

### ***Procedures for Sample Participant Recruitment and Data Collection***

Potential participants were sought before and after church services and/or at the offices of staff personnel at the church and school. After an explanation of the type of study was given, informed consent forms were handed to the recruits to review and sign. The meeting place, date, and time were established for the participants. For participants to be considered for the study, they had to be bereaved adults of at least the age of 18 years. After agreeing to participate in the Bereaved Songwriters' Project study, the recruits signed an informed consent form and were provided a copy of their own to take and review before the study took place.

Participants were informed that the RSPI study would take place in the music department section of the school. To begin the session, recruits were provided pre-test questionnaire as an instrument to assess their mental well-being during the first 15 minutes of the agreed-upon

appointment. Secondly, the participants were provided a brief explanation of the reason everyone was invited to attend the session: that they were grieving and/or bereaved and had agreed to participate in the study. Participants were reminded if they experienced any emotional duress during the RSPI, or if they were simply interested in receiving professional counseling services, they would be immediately connected with the counseling department at the church. Moreover, the recruits were reminded that they were under no obligation to participate in the study and could walk away at any time. The number and email address of the counseling department were made available within the informed written consent prior to the study; additional copies were made available to them during and after the RSPI session as well.

Next, the participants were informed on how to compose a simple song. Hard copies of written lyrics were passed out to study participants and an audio recording/lyric video of the simple song was played to provide an example for respondents to emulate when given the opportunity to create their own songs. The RSPI researcher explained how each participant was to use the next segment of time to create their own songs to the best of their ability. Bereaved individuals were allowed to work in groups if they desired, especially if they shared the loss of the same person in common. Participants were prompted to use memories, reflections, and any information they deemed necessary to honor the life of the deceased they were grieving within an organized written pattern or song form. The researcher provided paper and pencils and offered the use of any three classrooms and hallways in the school's music wing as spaces to use throughout the RSPI.

Additionally, 12 guitars and four pianos were offered for participants to use should they desire the assistance of a musical instrument or accompaniment. Participants were also encouraged to use voice memos through their phones if they wanted the use of technical devices

to help them keep track of any melodies they originated. The researcher remained present and available in the music wing, should the participants have any questions or needed more materials throughout the duration of the RSPI. At the end of the session, participants were gathered in the initial meeting space. Respondents were asked to fill out the short, digital well-being post-assessment.

### **Instrumentation and Variables**

The first version of Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed's (2008) Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was specifically utilized to determine the measured levels of the study's dependent variables. WEMWBS embodies two perspectives of mental well-being, including the subjective, affective emotion of happiness and the cognitive recognition of self-confidence to include positive relationships with oneself and others.

The dependent variables were defined as overall well-being, optimism, self-confidence, and human connection according to the measurements of the WEMWBS. The study's primary independent variable was the reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI).

#### ***Validity of WEMWBS***

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) has produced an adequate validity score among individuals aged 16 and above. The instrument's internal consistency yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89.

#### ***Reliability of WEMWBS***

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) has produced a high test-retest reliability score among individuals aged 16 and above. The internal reliability of study participant responses to WEMWBS questionnaire items represented on the research instrument

was addressed using Cronbach's alpha. The interpretation of internal reliability was conducted using the conventions of alpha as proposed by George and Mallery (2020).

### **Intervention**

The researcher developed a simple and concise reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI) in which participants were briefly instructed on how to format a simple song as a frame of reference. Participants were prompted to create an original piece using reflections, memories, and descriptions in written song form as a homage to their deceased loved one.

### **Procedures**

Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire comprised of the 14 items of the WEMWBS, which contained a 5-point Likert system before and after the implementation of the RSPI. Data collected from the pre-test and post-test phases of the research instrument implementations provided the data necessary for the analyses by research question using a *t*-test of dependent means for statistical significance testing purposes.

Bereaved participants met with the researcher at a designated time and place for the data collection. The subjects were invited to complete a digitized version of the WEMWBS before the RSPI began. Once the participants completed the questionnaire, the researcher initiated a songwriting orientation briefly explaining how to create their own original songs. The subjects worked on developing their songs for an hour. Study participants concluded the focused hour of songwriting by completing the WEMWBS for the post-test phase of the study. Respondents' identities were anonymized and protected at both phases of the survey administration.

WEMWBS comprises dual perspectives of mental well-being, which include the distinctive, intuitive emotion of happiness and the cerebral recognition of self-confidence to include positive relationships with oneself and others. Moreover, the WEMWBS measures the

constructs of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations to others, and overall well-being through the responses to specific statements listed in the 14-item questionnaire. The survey has produced a high test-retest reliability score and an adequate validity score among individuals aged 16 and above. The instrument's internal consistency yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .89. Subjects' responses to survey items on the research instrument represented perceptions using a 5-point Likert scale to statements regarding optimism, emotions, cognition, confidence, relationships, and overall well-being.

### **Data Analysis by Research Questions**

A *t*-test of dependent means was used to evaluate the statistical significance of findings in the four proposed research questions (Banda, 2018). The probability level of  $p < .05$  represented the threshold value for study findings considered statistically significant. Cohen's *d* was used to evaluate the magnitude of effect in study findings. The conventions of effect size interpretation proposed by Sawilowsky (2009) were applied to numeric effect sizes achieved in the analyses associated with research questions one through four. The analysis of study data was conducted using the 29<sup>th</sup> version of IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS).

### ***Preliminary Analysis***

The study's preliminary analyses were addressed using descriptive statistical techniques. Demographic data were analyzed using frequencies (*n*) and percentages (%). Initial response set findings were addressed using measures of central tendency, variability, standard errors of the mean, and data normality (skewness; kurtosis) for comparative and illustrative purposes.

The internal reliability of study participant responses to survey items represented on the research instrument was addressed using Cronbach's alpha. The interpretation of internal reliability was conducted using the conventions of alpha proposed by George and Mallery



(2020). The study's extent of missing data was evaluated using descriptive statistical techniques. Little's MCAR was used to assess the randomness of the study's missing data.

### ***Statistical Power Analysis***

Statistical power analysis using the G\*Power software (3.1.9.2, Universität Düsseldorf, Germany) was conducted for sample size estimates associated with statistical significance testing using the *t*-test of dependent means (Faul et al., 2009). The study's statistical power analysis was delimited to anticipated medium and large effects, a power ( $1 - \beta$ ) index of .80, and a probability level of .05. In research questions one through four, the *t*-test of dependent means was used for statistical significance testing purposes. An anticipated medium effect ( $d = .50$ ) required 27 participants to detect a statistically significant finding and 12 participants for an anticipated large effect ( $d = .80$ ) in research questions one through four.

### ***Researcher Positionality***

The researcher in the study was a teacher at the school, a member of the church representing the study's research site, and she knew most of the participants. Researchers have postulated the presence of supportive and familiar individuals may enable participants to be more open to creative and therapeutic processes, even within a group setting (Cheatley et al., 2022; Mitchell, 2019).

### ***Research Questions/Hypotheses***

Four research questions and hypotheses were stated in the study. A *t*-test of dependent means was implemented on the sample to determine whether significant differences existed between pre-and post-test scores through applying the WEMWBS before and after the RSPI. The WEMWBS contained questions specific to the elements of optimism, self-confidence, and positive relationships with others. The means score difference for the questions addressing each

element was used for the analysis of the research question outcomes. The overall mean score for the 14 items of the WEMWBS was assessed for the analysis of the final research question that pertained to overall mental well-being. The following research questions and hypotheses were stated to address the study's topic and research problem.

***Research Question 1***

To what extent will an RSPI intervention affect bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future?

***Research Question 2***

To what extent will an RSPI affect the participants' perceived levels of self-confidence?

***Research Question 3***

To what extent will an RSPI affect the participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others?

***Research Question 4***

To what extent will an RSPI affect the participants' perceived levels of overall well-being?

***Research Hypotheses***

***H<sub>0</sub> 1***

There will be no statistically significant difference in bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

***H<sub>a</sub> 1***

There will be a statistically significant difference in bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

***H<sub>0</sub> 2***

There will be no statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of self-confidence before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

***H<sub>a</sub> 2***

There will be a statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of self-confidence before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

***H<sub>0</sub> 3***

There will be no statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of self-confidence before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

***H<sub>a</sub> 3***

There will be a statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

***H<sub>0</sub> 4***

There will be no statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of overall well-being before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

***H<sub>a</sub> 4***

There will be a statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of overall well-being before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

**Summary**

The quantitative, quasi-experimental study assessed bereaved participants' levels of mental well-being before and after implementing a music therapy intervention. The WEMWBS was used to measure participants' mental well-being, which included the specific constructs of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations with others, and overall mental well-being. The

Reflective Songwriting Program Intervention (RSPI) was implemented to investigate the levels of well-being of the bereaved individuals who participated in the research study.

A within-subjects design was conducted to obtain data using the WEMWBS and assess the levels of participants' mental well-being before and after the RSPI was implemented. The effect size was determined using Cohen's *d*. The mean score changes of the pre- and post-tests of the WEMWBS were assessed using the statistical significance of the RSPI to provide the rationale for data analysis to each research question. Chapter IV presents the results of the study.

## IV. RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to evaluate bereaved individuals' responses to an intervention using a reflective songwriting therapy session. Chapter IV contains the formal reporting of findings achieved in the study. Four research questions and hypotheses were stated to address the study's topic and research problem. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyze study data at the foundational level and for the research questions and hypotheses.

The following represents the formal reporting of findings achieved in the study at the foundational descriptive statistical level and for the four research questions and hypotheses.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

#### **Foundational Descriptive Statistical Findings**

##### ***Descriptive Statistics: Study Constructs (Optimism, Self-Confidence, Positive Relationships, and Overall Well-being)***

Descriptive statistical techniques were utilized to assess the study's response set data within the constructs identified for study purposes. Specifically, frequencies ( $n$ ), measures of typicality (mean scores), variability (minimum/maximum; standard deviations), standard errors of the mean ( $SE_M$ ), and data normality (skew; kurtosis) were investigated. Table 1 contains a summary of findings for the descriptive statistical analysis of the study's response set data associated with the constructs of optimism, self-confidence, positive relationships, and overall

well-being.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics Summary Table: Pre-Test/Post-Test Difference Scores for the Constructs of Optimism, Self-Confidence, Positive Relationships, and Overall Well-Being*

Pre/Post-Test Difference	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SE<sub>M</sub></i>	Min	Max	Skew	Kurtosis
Optimism	0.20	0.92	30	0.17	-2.00	2.00	0.13	0.20
Self-Confidence	0.31	1.04	29	0.19	-2.00	2.00	0.13	-0.38
Positive Relationships	0.28	0.73	30	0.13	-1.00	1.67	0.41	-0.64
Overall Well-Being	0.32	0.60	31	0.11	-0.79	1.77	0.52	-0.19

### Internal Reliability

The internal reliability of study participant responses to questionnaire items associated with the constructs featured in the study was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ). Applying the conventions of alpha interpretation offered by George and Mallery (2020), the internal reliability level achieved in the study across all 28 questionnaire items (pre-test/post-test) was considered good to very good at  $\alpha = .83$ . Table 2 contains a summary of findings from the evaluation of internal reliability of the participant responses to questionnaire items.

**Table 2**

*Internal Reliability Summary Table: All Survey Items (Pre-Test and Post-Test Study Phases)*

Scale	# of Items	$\alpha$	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Reflective Songwriting	28	.83	.75	.90

*Note.* The lower and upper bounds of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  were calculated using a 95% confidence interval.

### Data Analysis by Research Question and Hypothesis

Four research questions and hypotheses were stated in the study. To address the topic and research problem, the following represents the formal report of findings achieved in the analysis of each of the four research questions and hypotheses.

## Research Question 1

To what extent does a reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI) affect bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future?

### *H<sub>a</sub> 1*

There will be a statistically significant difference in bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

### *Analysis*

The *t*-test of dependent means was used to assess the statistical significance of changes in participants' perceptions of optimism for the future. The assumption of normality was first assessed through inspection of the skew and kurtosis values reflected in the difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Using the conventions of interpretation for data normality offered by George and Mallery (2020), the difference score skew value (0.13) was well within  $-/+2.0$  and the kurtosis value (0.20) was well within  $-/+7.0$ ; therefore, the assumptions of data normality were satisfied.

The mean score increase from the pre-test to post-test phase of the study of 0.20 ( $SD = 0.92$ ) for study participant perceptions of optimism for the future was not statistically significant ( $t_{(28)} = 1.19; p = .12$ ). The magnitude of effect of the study's intervention variable for study participant perceptions of optimism for the future was considered small ( $d = .22$ ). Table 3 contains a summary of the findings for the statistical analysis conducted to evaluate the effect of the study's intervention variable upon study participant perceptions of optimism for the future.

**Table 3**

*Summary Table: Intervention Effect for Study Participant Perceptions of Optimism for the Future*

Post-Test		Pre-Test		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
3.80	0.66	3.60	0.67	1.19	.12	0.22

*Note.*  $N = 29$ . Degrees of freedom for the *t*-statistic = 28. *d* represents Cohen's *d*.

## ***Findings***

Considering the non-statistically significant finding in research question one for study participant perceptions of optimism for the future, the alternative hypothesis was rejected.

### **Research Question 2**

To what extent does a reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI) affect bereaved participants' perceived levels of self-confidence?

#### ***H<sub>a</sub> 2***

There will be a statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of self-confidence before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

## ***Analysis***

The *t*-test of dependent means was used to assess the statistical significance of changes in participants' perceptions of self-confidence. The assumption of normality was first assessed through inspection of the skew and kurtosis values reflected in the difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Using the conventions of interpretation for data normality offered by George and Mallery (2020), the difference score skew value (0.13) was well within  $-/+2.0$  and kurtosis value (-0.38) was well within  $-/+7.0$ ; therefore, the assumptions of data normality were satisfied.

The mean score increase from the pre-test to post-test phase of the study of 0.31 ( $SD = 1.04$ ) for study participant perceptions of self-confidence was statistically significant at a borderline level ( $t_{(28)} = 1.61$ ;  $p = .059$ ). The magnitude of effect of the study's intervention variable for study participant perceptions of self-confidence was considered small to medium ( $d = .30$ ). Table 4 contains a summary of the findings for the statistical analysis conducted to evaluate the effect of the study's intervention variable upon study participant perceptions of self-confidence in the wake of the grieving process.



**Table 4***Summary Table: Intervention Effect for Study Participant Perceptions of Self-Confidence*

Post-Test		Pre-Test		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
3.62	0.62	3.31	0.76	1.61	.05(9) <sup>t</sup>	0.30

*Note.* *N* = 29. Degrees of freedom for the *t*-statistic = 28. *d* represents Cohen's *d*. <sup>t</sup>*p* < .10

**Findings**

Considering the borderline, statistically significant (Dahiru, 2008) finding in research question two for study participant perceptions of self-confidence, the alternative hypothesis was retained.

**Research Question 3**

To what extent does an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others?

***H<sub>a</sub> 3***

There will be a statistically significant difference in participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

**Analysis**

The *t*-test of dependent means was used to assess the statistical significance of changes in participants' perceptions of positive relationships. The assumption of normality was first assessed through inspection of the skew and kurtosis values reflected in the difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Using the conventions of interpretation for data normality offered by George and Mallery (2020), the difference score skew value (0.41) was well within  $-/+2.0$  and kurtosis value (-0.64) was well within  $-/+7.0$ ; therefore, the assumptions of data normality were satisfied.

The mean score increase from the pre-test to post-test phase of the study of 0.28 (*SD* = 0.73) for study participant perceptions of positive relationships was statistically significance (*t*

( $t_{28} = 2.08; p = .02$ ). The magnitude of effect of the study’s intervention variable for study participant perceptions of positive relationships with others was considered small to medium ( $d = .38$ ). Table 5 contains a summary of findings from the statistical analysis conducted to evaluate the effect of the study’s intervention variable upon study participant perceptions of positive relationships with others in the wake of the grieving process.

**Table 5**

*Summary Table: Intervention Effect for Study Participant Perceptions of Positive Relations with Others*

Post-Test		Pre-Test		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
3.96	0.49	3.68	0.61	2.08	.02*	0.38

*Note.*  $N = 30$ . Degrees of freedom for the *t*-statistic = 29. *d* represents Cohen’s *d*.  $p < .05$

**Findings**

Considering the statistically significant finding in research question three for study participant perceptions of positive relationships with others, the alternative hypothesis was retained.

**Research Question 4**

To what extent does an RSPI affect participants’ perceived levels of overall well-being?

***H<sub>a</sub> 4***

There will be a statistically significant difference in participants’ perceived levels of overall well-being before and after the implementation of an RSPI.

**Analysis**

The *t*-test of dependent means was used to assess the statistical significance of changes in participants’ perceptions of overall well-being. The assumption of normality was first assessed through inspection of the skew and kurtosis values reflected in the difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Using the conventions of interpretation for data normality offered by

George and Mallery (2020), the difference score skew value (0.52) was well within  $-/+2.0$  and the kurtosis value (-0.19) was well within  $-/+7.0$ ; therefore, the assumptions of data normality were satisfied.

The mean score increase from the pre-test to post-test phase of the study of 0.32 ( $SD = 0.60$ ) for study participant perceptions of overall well-being was statistically significant ( $t_{(30)} = 2.96; p = .003$ ). The magnitude of effect of the study’s intervention variable for study participant perceptions of overall well-being with others was considered medium ( $d = .38$ ). Table 6 contains a summary of findings from the statistical analysis conducted to evaluate the effect of the study’s intervention variable upon study participant perceptions of overall well-being in the wake of the grieving process.

**Table 6**

*Summary Table: Intervention Effect for Study Participant Overall Perceptions of Well-being*

Post-Test		Pre-Test		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
3.79	0.40	3.47	0.44	2.96	.003**	0.53

*Note.*  $N = 31$ . Degrees of freedom for the *t*-statistic = 30. *d* represents Cohen's *d*. \* $p < .01$

**Findings**

Considering the statistically significant finding in research question four for study participant perceptions of overall well-being, the alternative hypothesis was retained.

**Summary**

A good to very good level of internal reliability was achieved using the study’s research instrument. Increases in study participant perceptions of optimism for the future, self-confidence, positive relationships, and overall well-being were reflected in the wake of the study’s intervention variable. The greatest intervention effect was reflected in study participant perceptions of well-being. Statistically significant intervention effects were reflected for study

participant perceptions of positive relationships and overall well-being. A borderline statistically significant effect was reflected in study participant perceptions of self-confidence.

Chapter V contains a discussion of the study's findings as reported in Chapter IV.

## V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to evaluate bereaved individuals' responses to an intervention using a reflective songwriting therapy session. The study was quantitative and quasi-experimental by design. As previously expressed, reflective songwriting therapy is generally defined as finding meaning within personal experiences through a semi-structured process of writing in song form (Cheatley et al., 2022, p. 3). This chapter embodies the exploration of a sample of bereaved adults and the assessment of self-perceived levels of mental well-being before and after the implementation of a reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI). A *t*-test of dependent means was administered to assess the significance of the study's intervention. The following represents a thorough discussion of the findings reported in chapter four.

### **Review of Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between self-perceived levels of mental well-being before and after one session of an RSPI. Once the date and location were solidified for the intervention to take place, 30 bereaved adults were recruited to participate in the study. Participants agreed to meet with the mediator and co-investigator for a scheduled appointment projected to last 90 minutes. Prior to the RSPI, an online Google document of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) questionnaire was emailed to each participant. The respondents were given 10 minutes to fill out the survey instrument. After

participants completed the WEMWBS, the RSPI began with a short greeting and explanation of how the session would proceed. The mediator explained how to format a simple song for individuals who had no prior songwriting experience. An example of a simple and familiar song was played, and hard copies of the written lyrics were distributed to provide an example for participants to emulate and expound upon.

The site location reserved for the RSPI was the music wing of the school; therefore, four keyboards and 12 guitars were available for participants to borrow if they chose to use them for accompaniment or to help propel inspiration for lyrical or musical improvisation for songwriting. Additionally, three empty classrooms and three hallway corridors were available for participants to have a space to reflect and create songs. Participants were instructed to ruminate on memories regarding the deceased and were prompted to write meaningful lines or lyrics pertaining to memorializing their lost loved one. The preparation and instruction period took approximately 15 minutes and the time given for reflective songwriting was approximately 45 minutes. Participants were allowed to work in groups if they preferred, especially if they were grieving the loss of the same individual. When the RSPI was completed, the bereaved individuals were gathered in the same room and were asked to fill out the WEMWBS a second time.

After collecting data, debriefing procedures were followed. The RSPI researcher thanked everyone for their participation and contribution to social science research studies. A few respondents volunteered to share their pieces. Participants were reminded that performing or sharing their original work was not a part of the research and was not required, but they could share their pieces as a special closing to the session if they wanted. Many of the participants laughed and cried together during the debriefing procedures before they were formally dismissed.

### **Preliminary Descriptive Findings and Internal Reliability**

At the outset of the study, 33 bereaved individuals were recruited and began the study. However, due to different contributive factors of attrition, the study's final actionable sample of participants was 30. Contributive attrition factors ranged from scheduling conflicts to the inability to complete the study as it was too difficult of a topic to reflect upon for some individuals because the RSPI took place on Father's Day, and some of the participants were grieving the loss of fathers. Despite the complexities of attrition factors, the intervention was found to be effective for the participants who chose to complete the RSPI.

The intervention was successful on all counts, with noticeable gains pertaining to the subjects of bereavement and self-perceptions of mental well-being. The RSPI yielded positive increases for the four dimensions of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations with others, and, most considerably, overall well-being. The study's intervention affected participant perceptions for all constructs according to the results from pre- to post-test mean score differences ranging from 0.20 to 0.32. Moreover, the construct of overall well-being reflected the greatest pre-to post-test difference of 0.32. The data results were particularly remarkable for the retained alternate hypotheses, because the RSPI appears to be a credible means by which the grieving and bereaved can find catharsis and healing.

The internal reliability of the instrument was valid and provided sound data. A high level of internal reliability of the usage of the WEMWBS for the study was yielded. As previously mentioned in chapter four, the internal reliability of all 28 survey items (pre-test/post-test) was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). Applying the conventions to all 28 survey items yielded  $\alpha = .83$ . In other words, the internal reliability of the study's participant responses among all constructs was considered good to very good according to the evaluation. As a result, the study's

instrument was accurate and reliable in producing sound data associated with the study's constructs. Thus, the data validated the instrument and the constructs.

### **Discussion by Research Question**

#### **Research Question 1**

To what extent does a reflective songwriting program intervention (RSPI) affect the bereaved participants' perceived levels of optimism for the future?

A one-sample *t*-test of dependent means was utilized to assess the RSPI's statistical significance by mean score change from pre- to post-test responses of participant perceptions of optimism for the future. The assumption of normality was determined through the investigation of the skew and kurtosis values yielded in the difference between pre-and post-test scores. The conventions of interpretation of the data normality were satisfied. The mean score increase from the pre- to post-test phases of the study regarding study participant perceptions of optimism for the future was considered small ( $d = .22$ ) and non-statistically significant.

Despite the non-statistically significant increase of the mean score yielded in the data of participant perceptions of optimism for the future, the small sample size still afforded a small increase. Perhaps the brevity of the length of the RSPI or the singularity of the session did not enable participants to evoke enough effectual elements within the intervention to yield results considered to be significant pertaining to the construct of optimism.

The findings corroborate with a previous study conducted in Hong Kong on the mental health and well-being of 106 students in grades six through eight in conjunction with a music education program (Kwok, 2019). The researcher infused mental health and well-being concepts with a resource-oriented music therapy framework. Randomized experimental and control groups were compared. To assess the influence of the music therapy intervention, the Chinese



version of the Children's Hope Scale, the Wong and Law Emotional Competence Scale, and an anxiety subscale of the Chinese version of the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale were implemented.

The music education protocol with exercises in positive psychology enhanced participants' emotional competence, thus verifying emotional regulation, reducing adolescent anxiety, and increasing hope and optimism (Kwok, 2019). According to the researcher's findings, the ability to express emotions through musical and therapeutic exercises yielded an agency component of hope. Therapeutic exercises included lessons in musical improvisation, self-reflection, goal setting, and the development of positive emotions and hope enhancement through lyrical rumination and reflection. Participants in the experimental group scored significantly higher scores in the areas of subjective happiness, emotional competence, and most notably in the area of hope. Thus, providing evidentiary substance from which one can draw conclusions that purposive and reflective improvisations in musical therapy exercises may yield heightened levels of the construct of optimism within one's mental well-being.

## **Research Question 2**

To what extent does an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of self-confidence?

The *t*-test of dependent means was used to assess the statistical significance of changes in participants' perceptions of self-confidence. The assumption of normality was investigated through the determination of the skew and kurtosis values reflected in the difference between pre-test and post-test scores. The conventions of interpretation of the data normality were satisfied. The mean score increase from the pre-test to post-test phase for the study participant perceptions of self-confidence was statistically significant ( $p = .059$ ). Based on the evidence, one can conclude the implementation of the RSPI variable yielded a heightened level of the self-

perceived construct and dependent variable of self-confidence, according to the WEMWBS scores yielded from the sample's data set.

Similarly, Evans et al. (2021) implemented an English Language Arts (ELA) program embodying educational exercises that evoked self-perceived feelings of self-confidence. The researchers and educators structured an ELA unit project to develop students' communicative learning skills through personal narrative storytelling, reflective writing, songwriting, and podcasting. The kismet timing of the unit was created through a methods course for preservice teachers at the University of Arkansas a year previously to being executed during the global pandemic shutdown in March 2020. The project provided a creative means for student engagement through the processes of songwriting and organized verbal reflections, and the podcast provided a platform to showcase learned concepts. Students were encouraged to keep a reflective journal or use voice messages to keep track of their song passages and then share their pieces on the podcast and explain the song in their own words before showcasing the original work. According to Evans et al. (2021), students expressed that the ELA unit project, entitled the Podcast of Our Lives, allowed for feelings to be drawn out in a somewhat challenging, yet purposeful manner.

During the global coronavirus pandemic of 2020, students were experiencing grief, confusion, and fear (Evans et al., 2021). The process of the Podcast of Our Lives allowed students to face their fears and share raw emotions. The experiences gave individuals self-confidence to present their reflective narrations in song form. The metacognitive exercises in which students created original and reflective songs allowed them to process emotions and share them in a positive and encouraging atmosphere among peers and teachers. Such findings would corroborate the findings of the Bereaved Songwriters' Project using the elements of the reflective

songwriting project intervention (RSPI), in which data revealed an increase in participants' self-perceived levels of self-confidence. These data contribute to the literature pertaining to metacognitive exercises initiated to evoke heightened levels of self-confidence within the well-being of bereaved populations.

### **Research Question 3**

To what extent does an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of positive relations with others?

The *t*-test of dependent means was used to assess the statistical significance of changes in participants' perceptions of positive relationships. The assumption of normality was assessed, interpreted, and inspected using conventions of interpretation and the differences in pre- and post-test scores. The assumptions of data normality were satisfied when using the conventions of interpretation. The mean score increase from the pre-test to post-test phases of the study regarding participant perceptions of positive relationships was statistically significant ( $p = .02$ ) in the wake of the grieving process. One can conclude the implementation of an RSPI aided in promoting participant perceptions of positive relationships.

The findings support previous research data drawn from the participants of the Arts Based Group (ABG) program structured by Williams et al. (2019). The researchers investigated the responses of 59 adults with chronic mental health conditions (CMHC) who were assigned to be a part of a choir or a creative writing group. Thirty-four participants were assigned to the choir, and 25 individuals were recruited as part of the creative writing group. Members of both the choir and creative writing groups were encouraged to work together through the rehearsal and brainstorming sessions. Social connections were created throughout the intermediate

cohesion of the team-building exercises of storytelling, reflection, and verbal or written exchanges of personal experiences, feelings, and emotions.

According to Williams et al. (2019), data collected from the ABG team members' WEMWBS scores revealed a significant increase from pre- to post-test scores to include the specific construct of positive relations with others. One of the purposes of the study was to investigate how highlighting social identity for the members of the group affects their mental well-being, because individuals with CMHD expressed feelings of being marginalized. The researchers noted the improvement in mental well-being did not differ from members of the writing group and the choir, and more poignantly, greater identification with the ABG group was related to significantly heightened levels of well-being. According to the body of literature, including the findings of Williams et al. (2019), one can preclude musical interventions implemented in a supportive group format, such as the Bereaved Songwriters' Project RSPI, may promote heightened levels of self-perceived positive relations with others. Although, the RSPI did not require any member to share their original pieces about their deceased loved one, all participants knew they had one thing in common required to participate in the session: They were bereaved individuals allowing themselves to take part in a shared experience.

#### **Research Question 4**

To what extent does an RSPI affect participants' perceived levels of overall well-being?

The *t*-test of dependent means was used to assess the statistical significance of the study's intervention by mean score change from the pre-test to post-test phases of the study for participant perceptions of overall well-being. The assumptions of data normality were satisfied through the assessment and inspection of the skew and kurtosis values revealed in the difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Additionally, the mean score increase from pre- to post-test

scores of participant perceptions of overall well-being was statistically significant ( $p = .003$ ). Moreover, the greatest effect and most statistically significant effect of all was manifested in the findings of participant self-perceptions of overall well-being. The broad conclusion one might draw from the study's findings is that an RSPI intervention can significantly affect bereaved individuals' overall well-being. Such therapeutic exercises or micro-interventions could be considered beneficial means of catharsis for bereaved populations seeking non-invasive measures for healing and mental well-being.

de Witte, Knapen, et al. (2022) implemented a meta-analysis of the literature focusing on 52 empirical studies on music therapy interventions, which yielded data that corroborates with the present study's RSPI findings. de Witte, Knapen, et al. (2022) expressed that musical therapy interventions are too general in nature, but micro-interventions may be necessary to focus on individuals' immediate needs as they respond to therapeutic practices, including musical improvisation, narrative storytelling, and reflective writing exercises. The reason behind the focused micro-interventions is the fluidity of music therapy practices that can occur in real-time. The researchers found that the intentional musical therapeutic practices in micro-interventions concerning creative and meta-cognitive applications were strongly related to positive change outcomes and induced a reduction in physiological and psychological stress levels (de Witte, Pinho, et al., 2022). The therapeutic exercises provide further evidence that metacognitive practices and/or micro-intervention, such as reflective songwriting or an RSPI, can contribute to emotional regulation, positive changes in therapeutic outcomes, and overall heightened levels of mental well-being in individuals in need of solace such as the bereaved.

The present study's findings of all four research questions regarding the constructs of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations to others, and overall well-being are appropriate in

the context of the two-track model of bereavement, also known as the bereavement theory (Rubin, 2003). According to the researcher and founder of the bereavement theory, the theoretical framework of the two-track model of bereavement encompasses four main points or responses for grieving individuals. The responses include initial shock and homeostasis, a time to process and attempt to accept the loss of the deceased, the ability to grieve the individual with a decreased emotional intensity, and, lastly, the ability of the bereaved to function without the deceased. Moreover, Rubin (2003) posited a segment of the final process of the bereaved to be able to function without the deceased is to seek and find means to honor or memorialize the lost loved one.

The two-track model of bereavement connects with the nature of the RSPI study as the fluidity of the micro-intervention can hold true for bereaved individuals despite their spectrum of emotions and experiences within bereavement, as well as the contributing factors of one's mental well-being throughout the grieving process (Rubin, 2003). The study participants were at different points of the bereavement process, as well as held different perspectives. The procedures within a micro-intervention such as an RSPI could align with elements of the bereavement theory where reflective songwriting could be used not only as a cathartic practice but also as an artistic means to memorialize the deceased. Regardless of the point of reference or the timeframe of the death, the bereaved continues to experience a connection with the deceased. The findings could contribute to the gap in the literature regarding how bereaved individuals continue relational bonds with the deceased, despite the relationship being essentially one-sided on the part of the mourner and can offer a therapeutic exercise that would honor the life of the lost loved one.

## **Implications for Future Practice**

Members of bereaved populations need support to help redirect the emotional and psychological toll grief entails and channel it back into positive projects, goals, and endeavors (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017; de Witte, Pinho, et al., 2022). The findings from this study can be implemented into grief support practices at the individual, organizational, or societal levels. For example, the RSPI was implemented within a sample of 30 participants, and while some bereaved individuals worked in groups, many of the subjects worked alone. After the mediator and researcher gave permission for participants to split up and use the allotted time to work on their songs, some of the study participants chose to work on their reflective songwriting projects individually to create an original musical piece of art that would honor the person they were grieving, simply because it was their preference. Everyone grieves differently, and some prefer to work out their process alone (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017). Due to the positive change revealed in the data concerning the constructs of well-being, one can conclude individual participants still benefited from the intervention. It is possible that benefit came from the supportive group setting that initially met at the introduction of the RSPI and the final assembly at the conclusion because each participant shared a commonality; they were all bereaved individuals. Faith-based communities can also benefit from an RSPI at either organizational or societal levels as communities of faith offer social, cultural, spiritual, and philosophical support regarding practices in ceremonies, grief rituals, grief resolution, and/or trauma support (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017; Williams et al., 2019).

Recommendations for practice can be offered to schools, churches, and communities in light of the results that revealed an increase in participants' self-perceived levels of mental well-being. Practical applications of the findings are indicative of the positive data yielded from the

RSPI within the Bereaved Songwriters' Project, and such practices in micro-interventions can be used to help support families, communities, or corporations who have been severely affected by a common loss that could disturb the equilibrium of systems within the organization (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017). Additionally, the findings can be implemented in music education pedagogy, music therapy practices, and the training of mental health counselors in clinical institutions where micro-interventions to aid in remedial practices to assist grieving and bereaved individuals are utilized (de Witte, Pinho, et al., 2022). The study contributed to the body of knowledge by providing a sample that yielded positive results in all constructs of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations with others, and overall well-being in the short period of time that the RSPI took place. The study and the findings matter because bereavement occurs to everyone at some point in their lives, but if the grieving process is interrupted or suppressed, the psychological trauma and aftermath of prolonging grief could require more invasive treatment measures (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017; Williams et al., 2019).

### **Significance**

Data obtained by the merging of psychology and music fields are novel contributions to professional practices of ameliorating grief through the songwriting process. Potential contributions of the bereavement study could be implemented for the advancement of knowledge of the topic of music therapy interventions in the fields of music education, music therapy, and bereavement therapy. The data obtained from the RSPI study could contribute to the literature regarding grief and bereavement studies and it can offer non-invasive measures and low-cost means to achieve healing in mental wellbeing. The data could also be implemented in the training of clinical counselors and leaders in rehabilitative institutions, schools, churches, or other organizations to help raise awareness for grieving and bereaved individuals who need



immediate support (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017; de Witte, Pinho, et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2019).

Considering the data collected from the study regarding reflective songwriting interventions to help improve the level of mental well-being of the bereaved, potential advances in policy or practices could be employed. Policymakers could use the data obtained from the study to persuade government officials on the federal and state level to make amendments for the improvement in legislation policies regarding creative solutions to help citizens find emotional and psychological support during the mourning process. If a person or people group is suffering from prolonged grief, they run the risk of experiencing deep-rooted psychological trauma (Abi-Hashem & Div, 2017). Policies could be instituted to provide funding to schools, therapeutic institutions, rehabilitation centers, community and cultural centers, and religious organizations who want to facilitate programs such as the Bereaved Songwriters' Project, where an intervention such as an RSPI is implemented to provide solace and mental well-being for the grieving and bereaved. Additionally, funding can be attributed to the training of counselors to initiate RSPIs for the remediation of individuals suffering trauma incurred from bereavement and grief in the wake of the mourning process. Nevertheless, more research is necessary to substantiate the plausibility of the long-term effects of an intervention, such as an RSPI in the Bereaved Songwriters' Project, because future inferences warrant more evidence to avoid conjecture.

### **Study Limitations**

The study's generalizability limitations include the population sample, which encompassed English-speaking, American adults. However, one of the participants wrote his reflective song in Spanish, as Spanish is his first language, and although completely bilingual, he

felt compelled to write in his native tongue to express himself better, and in doing so, could more accurately and easily honor his late mother.

Due to the purposive convenience sampling, members of the church and school in which the researcher works and attends embodied the study participants. Possible and unintentional biases may have influenced the outcomes of the data and/or trustworthiness, validity, and reliability that arose from conducting the study due to the connections the bereaved participants within the sample had to the intervention mediator and researcher. Additional biases may have affected the study on the part of the researcher, as she is a bereaved individual, musician, and music educator.

Limitations may have affected respondents before or during the study in relation to the Bereaved Songwriters' Project (RSPI) occurring on Father's Day. The symbolic importance of the day could have affected the emotional status of participants before or during the RSPI, especially for bereaved individuals who were mourning fathers. Additionally, the data acquired within the concise time frame of the RSPI may have influenced respondents' questionnaire answers as well as the singularity of the session given to the participants assigned to create a song or at the very least, a portion of a song. Some participants struggled to create a song in a meaningful way because they had never written a song before, were uncomfortable, or were confused with the mechanics of creating a reflective musical piece about their loved one whom they grieved.

Generalizations of the findings were also limited because of the sample size, and future inferences about the effects of the study cannot be made. The number of participants did not sufficiently provide power to detect strong statistically significant findings to the constructs.

The researcher did not focus on identifiable variables and/or controlled variables such as how long the participants were grieving and what type of loss was being experienced. For example, infant, perinatal, spousal, parental, and sibling loss may offer different insights and more meaningful data. The data were committed to quantitative research. No qualitative or mixed methods of data collection were retrieved; therefore, the description of participant experiences was restricted to the information that was gathered through the WEMWBS items.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of the current study indicated the RSPI had a positive effect on bereaved individuals. Additional studies that merge the fields of psychology and music are certainly warranted. Studies that involve mental health counselors completing the training processes of an RSPI and those that survey clinical professionals to gain perspective on the effectiveness of RSPI interventions would be particularly beneficial. Furthermore, future research should utilize a larger sample of diverse participants.

Future researchers on the topic of bereavement and therapeutic reflective songwriting could delve deeper into the subject matter by providing more descriptive statistics and demographic factors, as well as offering the study in different languages. Descriptive statistics and factors in demographics could include gender, age, religion, or culture to sort through compounding factors that may influence statistical outcomes. Another specific demographic to measure and consider would be the type of bereaved individuals that take part in the study, such as parentally or perinatally bereaved individuals or participants grieving sibling loss or spousal loss. The comparison of each type of loss could offer valuable data to the body of literature on death studies, bereavement or grief therapies, music education, and music therapies. One could also focus on increasing the duration of the intervention session or the number of successions of

the same intervention to investigate any notable changes and effects on the well-being of the participants.

Because the researcher was wholly committed to quantitative studies, some items were lacking such as follow-up communication with participants through individual or focus group interviews. Qualitative or mixed-method approaches to the study would afford richer details and descriptions of the individual participants' experiences and perspectives. A stand-alone case study of three to five people with different perspectives could also allow for a more robust discussion of micro-interventions to be implemented in future music therapy practices.

Future, future studies could include segments in the RSPI where participants could perform their pieces and then measure respondents' well-being through WEMWBS an additional third time. Some of the participants of the Bereaved Songwriters' Projects were eager to share their pieces, so the researcher allowed the participants to share, even though it was not a part of the study, nor was anything being measured or manipulated in any way. Nevertheless, one could measure the effects of participants' self-perceptions of the constructs of mental well-being according to the WEMWBS after performing original pieces created during a finale segment added to the end of the reflective songwriting portion of the RSPI.

### **Conclusion**

The internal reliability of the study participant responses among all constructs of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations with others, and overall well-being was considered good to very good. As a result, the study's instrument, the WEMWBS, was accurate and reliable in producing data associated with the study's constructs. The RSPI intervention was effective and the use of the WEMWBS in the study was validated and provided sound data. In conclusion, the study revealed substantial evidence, inside the 90 minutes of the allotted time for the RSPI, to

influence outcomes of increases in bereaved participants' self-perceptions of the constructs of optimism, self-confidence, positive relations, and overall well-being. Additional research is warranted to gather further information pertaining to the use of RSPIs or similar musical therapy intervention formats to assist bereaved individuals in navigating through the grieving process. In doing so, perhaps micro-interventions of this nature could be replicated or more specifically designed to help members of bereaved populations find healing in applicable, affordable, non-threatening, and non-invasive measures. Programs providing practices for the grieving and bereaved, such as an RSPI, can offer training in emotional self-regulation and coping mechanisms through the creative process of organizing memories, thoughts, and personal reflections in song form to commemorate the deceased, to ameliorate the grieving, and to enrich the well-being of the bereaved.

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