

Religious Trauma and the Role of Music



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Foreword

I hand in this thesis with a sense of relief and accomplishment, although I must admit some nervousness I feel in regard to addressing many of these issues. For those of you who have been on this journey with me at NMH (both classmates and professors), I thank you from the depths of my heart for your patience and understanding and extreme kindness you have shown while I have asked questions, tried to be academic about it all, and at the same time was working through many of these issues at a deeply personal level. I feared that at times my “lostness” might make you leery of me, but I only ever received support and I am so very grateful to all of you for that. I can honestly say that these years at NMH have pivotally changed me, both in discovering myself as an independent and capable human being, but also in the way that I too have been able to start changing my associations to music. I have learned to see beauty in music again and recognize the value of it in my life and in the lives of others. I really truly thank all of you for helping me to learn and experience this.

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To my family and friends who have been in endless conversations with me, listening to me rant and ramble and actually just be there with me and for me through all my ups and downs in dealing with this subject matter, it is you who have really held me up through this time. I could not have done it without you.

All of my love and gratitude!

Abstract

In the field of music therapy, the concept of manipulation through music is known and careful consideration is taken in these therapeutic contexts. However, there has been little research performed concerning its negative and potentially damaging effects. In the church, music plays an important role in many of the ceremonies, rituals, and in communicating with God. Although many people have positive and affirming experiences, there are those who have experienced adverse effects and even trauma. Through this master's thesis I have explored the question, *“How have music experiences in the church played a role in the lives of ex-fundamentalists who claim to have religious trauma?”*

This thesis is based on four interviews with individuals who have been part of the charismatic Christian church. The interviews explored questions such as: How is the music being used when certain rituals take place? What are the messages being told? Is there group pressure or influence to participate in activities while in a heightened emotional state? Results are presented through the three analytical themes: 1) Identity, 2) Role of music in the church, and 3) Hindsight, and are then discussed in the framework of theories on religious trauma and music experiences.

Sammendrag

Innen musikkterapi er manipulasjon gjennom musikk et kjent begrep, og det tas nøye hensyn til dette i terapeutiske sammenhenger. Det har imidlertid vært lite forskning utført angående manipulasjonens negative og potensielt skadelige effekter. I kirken spiller musikk en viktig rolle i mange av seremoniene og ritualene, og i kommunikasjonen med Gud. Selv om mange mennesker har positive og trosbekreftende opplevelser knyttet til dette, finnes de som har opplevd uheldig effekt, og noen har til og med pådratt seg traumer. Gjennom denne masteroppgaven har jeg utforsket spørsmålet «Hvordan har musikkopplevelser i kirken spilt en rolle i livene til eks-fundamentalister som hevder å ha religiøse traumer?»

Denne masteroppgaven er basert på fire intervjuer med personer som har vært en del av karismatiske kristne kirkesamfunn. Intervjuene utforsket spørsmål som: Hvordan brukes musikken når visse ritualer finner sted? Hva er budskapene som formidles? Opplever deltakerne gruppepress til å delta i aktiviteter mens de er i en forsterket følelsesmessig tilstand? Resultater presenteres gjennom de tre analytiske temaene 1) Identitet, 2) Musikkens rolle i kirken, og 3) Etterpåkløkskap, og diskuteres deretter innenfor rammen av teorier om religiøse traumer og musikalske opplevelser.

Human spirituality connects to longings for something life-giving, vitalizing, unifying, and integrative in life. It goes beyond the limited or controlled self and touches the human being's deepest value as a creation. These connections make us stronger and vulnerable at the same time (Trondalen, 2016, p. 135).

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the relationship between religious trauma and the role of music. Music in the church, and especially in the context of charismatic Christian church services, plays a large and prevalent role. It welcomes you in while you enter the church, and music follows you out when the service is over. The kinds of musical experiences and corresponding emotional responses mixed with a purposeful message that happen in these services can clearly be seen in other areas of society as well. These include larger settings in the form of concerts, motivational speaker events, sports games, out-door advertising campaigns, parades, and political rallies, to smaller settings such as private home parties, TV commercials, background music in classrooms, and music therapy both privately and in group situations. I am exploring the idea of collective emotions in these types of settings and the group dynamics of being involved in music with a purpose, especially in the context of the charismatic Christian church service. There are many believers who claim that music is their strongest communication with God and that it is through music where God truly convicts them of problems in their lives, and where they feel that God speaks to them the most. Through these musical worship times, many people say they feel the undeniable presence of God and therefore receive confirmation that their god and beliefs are real and true. However, music can also be used actively for social synchronization, and can for some even be experienced as manipulative. For a religious trauma survivor, I wanted to know if any of their adverse religious experiences were connected to these musical worship services.

The literature on religious trauma is scarce and it has been difficult to find a variety of references on the subject. There are three main sources I have found: The Religious Trauma Institute, Leaving the Fold, Alyson M. Stone, and Hjelpeskilden, which, I use throughout the thesis. However, it is my own experience with religious trauma that initiated this project and has motivated me to delve deeper into the phenomenon.

1.1. Personal motivation

My motivation for this project stems from my own personal experience of decades of deep involvement in a fundamentalist Evangelical-Charismatic Christian community, where I was also a worship leader for many years. Musically I became involved in the church at a young age and was recruited as a member of the worship team, “giving back to God the gift he gave me.” Music plays a large and important role in every church service, and the experiences I had as both a worship team member, and also as a member of the congregation were both uplifting and positive, but often very emotionally charged and self-deprecating. These experiences regularly left me confused, insecure, and alone trying to make sense of what I had been told, the emotions I felt, and what I had witnessed in the behaviours and responses of other people who were also present in these services.

About four years ago my brother came across a book, written by a psychologist and ex-fundamentalist of the same religious background, that was asking critical questions and providing help for people who had been a part of these types of communities. After reading the book myself, I was sent into a spiral of deep soul-searching, asking my own critical questions and wanting to do further research into anything I could get my hands on regarding ex-fundamentalists and their experiences of life after having left their faith. What I have discovered is that many thousands of people are doing what they call “deconstructing” their faith and sharing their stories on all social media platforms. Groups of researchers are also coming together to delve into these shared stories to try to gain some understanding around shared symptoms that seem to be common for many. It has been a slow and painful, yet enlightening experience to be able to understand some of the reasons why myself and many others seem to struggle with a lot of the same issues. I am finding healing through the explanations and answers of brave people who are willing to share their stories, and through the researchers who are putting their efforts into gathering this information and attempting to make religious trauma a more known and understood phenomenon. As previously mentioned, music has a prevalent role in these types of church services and thus in this thesis I want to further explore specifically the role of music in the church and the experiences that ex-fundamentalists have had in the worship services.

1.2. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this project is to contribute to the existing research of religious trauma, and to help build a bridge between this fairly new acknowledgement of a trauma sub-type, and music therapy. Included in my research is my hope to bring further awareness to the use of religious music, and music used in groups of people where there is a leader and specific purpose. Hence, I have sought to address the following research question:

How have music experiences in the church played a role in the lives of ex-fundamentalists who claim to have religious trauma?

As I will be using the term *ex-fundamentalist* regularly throughout this thesis, I will give a brief explanation. Fundamentalism is a type of conservative religious environment, characterized by strict allegiance to sacred texts that are interpreted literally (Munson, 2019). The sacred texts are believed to be inerrant, and it is crucial to both promote and uphold rigid adherence to its teachings. When I use the term *ex-fundamentalist*, therefore, I am referring to individuals who either no longer have any form of religious belief, or whose religious beliefs have become more liberal in the way they interpret the teachings and message of the Bible, including the way they choose to live out their beliefs in daily life. Ex-fundamentalists no longer believe that there is only one true religion or belief system.

I have explored the research question through qualitative interviews with four people in Norway and Canada, who have been involved in Evangelical Pentecostal-Charismatic Christian churches. They have shared stories of their religious involvement, experiences of worship activities, and how they feel their lives and relationship to music has been affected as a result.

1.3. Delineation of the thesis

In the next chapter, I will present some background information on social uses of music, purposes of music in the charismatic Christian church, music therapy and trauma, and how

music can be experienced as a trigger for some. I will then define some of the terms I will be referring to regularly throughout the paper and present the theoretical framework of the thesis which includes understandings of music, emotions, identity, and strong emotional responses to music. In the methods section I will explain my approach and research process, including a section on reflexivity and ethics. Following that I will present the results organized by themes from my analysis and illustrated through quotes from the interviews. The thesis concludes with a discussion section on the results of the analysis in light of the background information and theoretical frameworks I presented earlier on.

2. Background

2.1. Literature search

I started my research into religious trauma by looking for books and online articles. The subject of religious trauma is fairly new and the literature on this topic is scarce and seems to exist mainly through online publications, websites, social media platforms, blogs, and podcasts. It also seems that this knowledge and research of the subject is written from the inside - by people who have had adverse religious experiences, or experienced religious trauma themselves (Hjelpekilden, 2020, Anderson & Peck, 2019).

Religious trauma has not been recognized among psychologists until recently, and its definition is also still in the process of being researched and defined. "Hjelpekilden" is a group of ex-fundamentalists in Norway who volunteer to help others who are going through the process of breaking out of their strict religious communities, or who need help on the other side of leaving them. Their experience is that the Norwegian public health system often refers clients to their group as many therapists do not feel they have enough expertise in the area of religious trauma to be able to adequately help them (Hjelpekilden, 2020).

Consequently, the literature I have been able to obtain on this subject comes from The Religious Trauma Institute, Hjelpekilden, a psychologist and ex-fundamentalist who has written an article on religious trauma (Stone, 2013), and Marlene Winell's book, *Leaving the Fold* (1993). I have therefore been dependent on going to the source of religious trauma experiences and realized early in my research process that I needed to conduct interviews with those who would be willing to share their stories.

Regarding the aspects of my project that do not deal with religious trauma, I have searched for "music and trauma", "music in religious settings", "music in social settings", "destructive uses of music", "music and manipulation" and "emotions and group influence". I have used search engines such as: Google, Google Scholar, Oria, Core, and Semantic Scholar. I will present the most relevant research in the next sections.

2.2. Music and social synchronization

A group experiencing an emotion together operates at various levels, and researchers in collective emotions have considered if this “could be the result of the emotion bubbling up from the individual level to the top, or a top-level “hive mind” transmitting it down to the ranks” (van der Löwe & Parkinson, 2014, p. 125). However, it is mostly likely a process that happens simultaneously as people in groups experience emotions in relation to one another (van der Löwe & Parkinson, 2014). The influence of music in social bonding and cooperative behaviours in groups of people is significant (Pearce et al. 2015, Dunbar et al., 2012). It has the capacity to create personal connections in groups of people, in part because of its ability to affect and arouse physiological responses, and also because of the emotional bonding experiences that music can afford (Bispham, 2006). This allows for the group to feel a sense of unity and shared experience, which can commonly happen in the context of group ceremonies and other activities where the pulse in the music can influence motivations and the regulation of emotions (Bispham, 2006).

It has been theorized that the physiological and emotional effects of music can act as a framework for the structure of rituals, which can have intricate effects on the social behaviour of people in religious environments (Alcorta & Sosis, 2005). The ways in which music has been analyzed in having an effect on social movements has mainly been through messages in the lyrics, however, it is also very much about the emotional impact created when participants are moving, dancing, and singing together (McNeill, 1995). The social contexts in which music experiences take place also has an influence on the the musical relationships and social identities that are formed there (Garrido et al., 2017). As far as motivation and what keeps people involved, Jasper (2014), wrote that in various movements and social networks, collective and reciprocal emotions, as well as the commitment people can feel to each other in these groups plays a large role.

The uses of music in society are varied; from personal to commercial use, performance to healthcare, and the reactions are also just as varied and dependent on the time, place, context, and other people who are present in the situations (North & Hargreaves, 2008). Areas of society where music is being used to exploit the emotions of listeners is evident in advertising (Juslin & Laukka, 2004, Hecker, 1984), which has shown persuasion in people’s purchasing

habits when it has been associated with information connected to a specific product (North et al., 2004). In their research to find the impact of music on consumers in advertising, North and Hargreaves (2008, p. 257) propose that the explanations are likely “classical conditioning, elaboration likelihood, and the more recent notions of sonic branding and sponsorship”.

In the next section I will attempt to give an overview of some of the most common beliefs and understandings of the role of music in the charismatic Christian church.

2.3. Purposes of music in the charismatic Christian church

In describing the purposes of music in charismatic Christian churches, I have taken references from various Christian books and articles, written by Christian scholars and worship leaders, explaining from their point of view the origins of music and its function both in the church and as a personal vehicle for communication with God. According to contemporary worship music ideology, music in and of itself is neutral and has meaning only when messages are added (Ingalls, 2008). Christians believe that music is a gift of God to all his people in every culture, and when used in ministry “takes on a servant role to the kingdom of God” (Corbitt, 1998, p. 37). In this belief system, music has a sacred purpose to draw people from their present realities and to focus all thoughts and emotions towards God and communing with him: “It is commentary, reflection, and proclamation of the message of God’s redemption of a fallen world” (Corbitt, 1998, p. 39). Music in the church is meant to bring glory to God, reconcile people’s relationships with each other, their own personal relationships to God, and to be used as a vehicle for evangelizing to unbelievers (Corbitt, 1998).

In charismatic Christian faith traditions, the role of music is significant, unavoidable, and expected (Porter, 2017). The physical places of worship hold deep spiritual and emotional significance, and the spiritual offerings that believers offer here give an explanation and meaning to their lives outside of the church (Ward, 2005). In these worship services, there is an expectation to encounter the presence of God (Porter, 2017), and the content of the songs that are sung must be inspiring and able to stimulate esteemed thoughts and feelings with the full intention of the worshipper to honour and glorify him (Adnams, 2013). The church

leaders and worship team members spend time in advance of these praise and worship times, in prayer and Bible study, pursuing guidance from God about how the music can draw attention to him instead of themselves (Corbitt, 1998).

2.4. Music therapy and trauma

Music therapy's first use in trauma treatment recovery dates back to the second world war in helping soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder (Slotoroff, 1994). It continues to be used in various war- and post-war zones, other disaster recovery situations, and with individuals who have experienced trauma as a result of emotional distress from "chronic pain, chemical addiction, child abuse, asylum-seeking, domestic violence, incarceration" and premature infants in neonatal intensive care units (Weidlein, 2018, p. 1). In mental health care, music therapy is being used as a treatment option for trauma and its various forms (American Music Therapy Association, n.d.). The traumatized brain can have difficulties in bridging its emotional and analytical capacities, leaving a person feeling either numb or overwhelmed (van der Kolk, 1997). Music in this case can be a link, sung dialogue specifically, in helping to put words on frightening experiences, as the right side of the brain (emotions) is activated through music, and the left side of the brain (rational) is activated through text/lyrics (Montello & Coons, 1998).

In a therapeutic process, music has been found helpful to balance our nervous system and its ability to regulate our moods and internal organs, reduce defensive behaviours, amend trust and connection with others (Porges & Rosetti, 2018) and help to give survivors insight and new understandings of their experiences (Bruscia, 1998). In addition, music can offer a safe and alternate means of communicating the feelings around their trauma (Bruscia, 1998). In some cases, the body experiences a freeze response in reaction to trauma, and sensory-based activities like art, sound and music, dance and movement, and dramatic enactment can "help individuals express the body's "felt sense" of trauma" (Malchiodi, 2020, p. 13). Music therapeutic improvisation can help "to turn frozen emotions or verbally consolidated experiences into dynamic forms that live in time" (Bruscia, 1998, p. 9). Bruscia (1998) also writes that in the case of trauma survivors experiencing a fragmentation of the self, music seems to help in re-building the connection between body and mind. Using music in the

context of trauma-informed therapy has also shown benefits in helping children to connect with their feelings (Johns, 2017). In a study performed by Krüger et al. (2018), on trauma-informed music therapy in child welfare institutions, there were positive results in helping to establish relationships, also in the context of belonging in groups, coping, expressing and processing difficult emotions, and how over time the children's experiences in music therapy contributed to continuity and a rippling effect over various aspects of life that helped in establishing a sense of stability. An imperative aspect in recovery is the individual being able to create connections to themselves and to society, which, can be made possible through discovering the unique combination of life factors that connect their identity and musical experiences (Ruud, 2008). The goal is not to avoid or remove all stressors and difficulties in life, but rather find ways of coping in managing tensions and stress (Skånland, 2011).

In the context of trauma-informed care, music and music-based activities have shown to be helpful in the awareness and regulation of emotions, connection with the self and others, building trust, and gaining confidence through the experience of choice and capability.

2.5. Music as a trigger

It is important to underscore the potential music has to trigger various emotional responses, including trauma reactions and memories. We now know that music has an ability to fast-track directly to our emotional center (Pereira et al., 2011, Brean & Skeie, 2019) and activate physiological responses (Levine, 1997, van der Kolk, 2014). Traumatic memories (van der Kolk, 1997) and emotions evoked by music, including music that has earlier been a part of our lives, when triggered in the present-day, may be experienced as an unrecognizable memory (Skånland, 2020). Music can set off a range of sensory reactions related to past traumas being triggered and this can make it difficult for a person to be in the present reality (Skånland, 2020, Sorensen, 2015). Keeping distance to music associated with painful or traumatic experiences may be necessary, at least for a while, and instead try to create positive associations to music that is new for the person (Skånland, 2020). In this way perhaps the general fear of music being perceived as manipulative could lessen over time.

In the next chapter I will give a brief overview of the main definitions and theoretical perspectives that will make it helpful in understanding the concepts I will be discussing later on in the paper.

3. Defining terms and theoretical perspectives

3.1. Evangelical and Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity

Although there are defining differences between the movements, Evangelicals, and Pentecostal-Charismatics often consider themselves to be a part of the same movement (Schäfer, 2009). Evangelicals place their emphasis on scripture, whereas Pentecostals focus on religious experience, however, these two movements have become more unified since the 1980s (Schäfer, 2009). There has been “an Evangelization of the Pentecostal movement as well as a Charismatization of Evangelical groupings” (Pollack & Rosta, 2017, p. 357) and there are strong similarities between them, however, the distinct differences are important to those in the groups (Pollack & Rosta, 2017). Therefore, I will give an overview of the common features:

- Recognition of the inerrancy and authority of the Bible
- Rejection of the metaphorical and historical-critical interpretation of the text
- A belief that the Bible provides bullet-proof certainty and that we cannot interpret it only in light of specific circumstances, or in a particular age
- Uncompromising and steadfast commitment to Christ is necessary for salvation, which includes making personal sacrifices; a type of martyrdom
- Sanctification of everyday life
- All aspects of life are for the glory of God; every thought and deed must be considered and judged to see if it meets the ethical standards required
- Belief that human beings are sinful by nature, the world is corrupt; the only way to save the world and ourselves is through Jesus
- Orientation towards the family
- Life as a community
- Expectation of the approaching and unavoidable return of Christ

(Pollack & Rosta, 2017).

The difference between these movements lie in that Evangelicals accept the unconditional authority of the Bible, have a strong orientation towards the family and its holy structure, and emphasize evangelism and sharing the Christian message (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Pentecostal/Charismatics have an enthusiastic style of devotion, hold an expectation that they can experience the Holy Spirit, and have an emphasis on the experiential and observable benefits of faith (Pollack & Rosta, 2017); including spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, the ability to prophesy, and to practice divine physical healing (Pew Research Center, 2011). Although, as mentioned earlier, these groups have become more unified and the members themselves might not even be aware of these specific distinctions.

In light of a phenomenological philosophical approach, I wanted to stay true to the lay language of the ordinary church member. Although there are strict definitions and understandings for the various types of Christians and their specific beliefs and doctrines, the term many of them often use in Evangelical and Pentecostal-Charismatic churches is 'charismatic Christian'. For the purposes of this study, I will also adopt that term and use it throughout the rest of the paper.

3.2. Trauma

Malchiodi (2020) writes that "the nature of trauma is to impact the mind and body in unpredictable and multidimensional ways...a highly subjective experience that is difficult or even impossible to explain with words" (p. 1). However, there are three aspects agreed upon amongst scholars that are central to understanding trauma: "shock, wound and a lasting effect" (Sutton, 2002, p. 22). The understanding of trauma has been debated and discussed since the 1970s and therefore providing a definition of it is a slightly complicated task (SAMHSA, 2014). The current definition provided by the American Psychological Association is:

An emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea (2022a, p. 1).

Following the event(s), some people may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and may experience recurring flashbacks, nightmares, or avoiding things or situations that remind them of the event (APA, 2022b). Some common PTSD symptoms include difficulties in

sleeping, remembering, concentration, experiencing extreme startle responses, and feelings of guilt if they survived the event when others did not (APA, 2022b).

A trauma diagnosis is given to those individuals who qualify for a “Criterion A” stressor, which is given to a person who was actually endangered or witnessed death, sexual violence, or serious accidents, and who also show signs of PTSD symptoms (APA, 2022b).

3.2.1. Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (cPTSD)

Individuals who have chronic adverse experiences, such as emotional abuse, neglect or separation from a caregiver, and also exhibit PTSD symptoms but who have not experienced a “Criterion A” stressor are considered to have complex PTSD (cPTSD) (Abrams, 2021). As a result, there is a gap in the health system where people are let down as their symptoms are not being recognized and treated appropriately (Abrams, 2021). However, the World Health Organization added cPTSD to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11) in 2019, and it has since been getting more attention in clinical settings (Abrams, 2021). It is now a growing interest amongst some psychologists and psychiatrists to study complex trauma cPTSD (complex PTSD) and Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD) (Abrams, 2021). The aim of their research is to show the impacts of these individual’s adverse events and try to include them in various classification systems of trauma, so as to be able to better provide treatment, such as trauma-informed care which would perhaps be more suitable and beneficial (Abrams, 2021). The complicated, complex, and subjective nature of trauma, as well as the many definitions that have been generated over the years, led Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to recognize a need to collaborate with national experts, researchers, those in clinical practice, and trauma survivors themselves to review existing definitions and create a new understanding of trauma. Their definition as of 2014 is:

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7).

Traumatic experiences can make it difficult for traumatized individuals to make connections and relationships that are meaningful both with their families and communities, and for a person to be able to make sense of their life in general (van der Kolk, 2014). In addition, it is nearly impossible for a traumatized individual to regulate their actions and expression of emotions (SAMHSA, 2014). SAMHSA's research has also shown that many trauma survivors find it difficult to make sense of their experiences as a result of their spiritual beliefs being impacted by the event(s) (2014).

“Trauma is contagious” (Herman, 1997, p. 140) and the repercussions of trauma are far-reaching to not only the person(s) involved, but they also extend in an intricate web of influences to connected families, friends and even the community (Sutton, 2002).

3.3. Religious trauma

Many religiously traumatized individuals have stunted emotional growth as a result of their belief systems, as well as captive thought patterns revolving around fear, shame, and guilt, and in many religious groups their members are forbidden a broad range of thoughts and feelings, which can potentially have a great impact on these individuals' emotional development (Winell & Tarico, 2014). Winell and Tarico (2014) explain that particularly when a person from a young age grows up in a fundamentalist religion, their entire psyche is formed within this framework – a framework that states a child is born sinful, rebellious, weak and in need of discipline, otherwise they won't understand obedience. If and when they eventually leave the religion, they are often numb to many emotions and don't trust themselves or their own feelings (Winell & Tarico, 2014).

The term “Religious Trauma Syndrome” (RTS) was first coined in 2011 by a psychologist and ex-fundamentalist named Marlene Winell, who defined it as:

The condition experienced by people who are struggling with leaving an authoritarian, dogmatic religion and coping with the damage of indoctrination. They may be going through the shattering of a personally meaningful faith and/or breaking away from a

controlling community and lifestyle. RTS is a function of both the chronic abuses of harmful religion and the impact of severing one's connection with one's faith. It can be compared to a combination of PTSD and Complex PTSD (C- PTSD) (Winell, n.d., p. 1).

The Religious Trauma Institute (RTI) is a research group, founded in 2020, consisting of licensed mental health professionals, graduate students, academic researchers, advocates, and survivors. Their purpose is to diversify and expand the conversation around religious trauma, and their current working definition of religious trauma is:

The physical, emotional, or psychological response to religious beliefs, practices, or structures that is experienced by an individual as overwhelming or disruptive and has lasting adverse effects on a person's physical, mental, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (Anderson & Peck, 2019, 30:25-31:33).

The RTI acknowledges that not all people who have negative experiences in their faith communities will have trauma, but they emphasize the need to define what adverse religious experiences are, as it is often a culmination of these experiences that result in a person being traumatized. The definition they present for Adverse Religious Experiences is:

Any experience of a religious belief, practice, or structure that undermines an individual's sense of safety or autonomy and/or negatively impacts their physical, social, emotional, relational, or psychological well-being (Anderson & Peck, 2019, 6:23).

According to the RTI in a webinar they released in 2019, the current clinical theory of PTSD is evolving, but it still places an emphasis on the severity of the event, ignoring slightly the countless other factors that contribute to a person processing a horrific episode as traumatic, or not. They argue that complex trauma is not yet widely recognized, and attention needs to be given to the role of intergenerational trauma, genetic factors, neurological factors, environmental factors, social/cultural factors, et cetera (Anderson & Peck, 2019). There is a

distinction between religious abuse and religious trauma, and this is important because not all people who experience abuse will be traumatized; abuse is about the things that happened to you, trauma focuses on how the mind and body respond to the event (Anderson & Peck, 2019).

It is also important to note that people who are researching religious harm acknowledge that religion has many functions for people and is not in and of itself harmful or traumatizing. In one way, it can be argued that trauma is trauma, but to offer the best treatment, understanding of the unique context is important, and the religious context is unique (Anderson & Peck, 2019). The RTI explain that it is neither necessary or helpful for religious trauma to have its own diagnosis, and that religious trauma can be understood under the classification of “Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders”, perhaps as a subset of OCD, or a form of complex grief (Anderson & Peck, 2019). It can be compared to other forms of trauma, such as developmental, sexual, and medical, et cetera, in that it describes the similar context in which the trauma is experienced (Anderson & Peck, 2019).

3.4. Music, emotions and identity

The explanation of music is dependent on its cultural and historical context and therefore does not lend itself to be adequately described or defined (Juslin, 2019), however, it is evident that the experience of music in human beings has the ability to intensely and powerfully effect our emotions (Gabrielsson, 2011a). Juslin (2016), explains that it is important to recognize the difference between the perception and induction of emotions. He writes that “we may simply *perceive* (or recognize) an emotion expressed in the music or we may actually *feel* an emotion in ourselves” (p. 197), and that listeners may struggle to understand the difference in themselves without proper instruction (Zenter et al., 2008). In various studies that have been done to try to ascertain an overview of the typical emotions induced by music, it is clear that although music can arouse a wide range of emotions (Gabrielsson, 2001), it is often positive emotions that are induced (Juslin et al., 2008). The possibility to experience both basic and complex emotions (Juslin et al., 2011), as well as “mixed” emotions (joy and sadness) occur as well, however, “mixed” and negative emotions are less common (Gabrielsson, 2001, Juslin et al., 2011). Additionally, studies have shown

that the effects of music on our emotions have a rather short duration period (Scherer et al., 2001), but that there are obvious physiological changes that occur as well (Krumhansl, 1997). Musical elements such as intensity, quality, tempo, volume, et cetera, can change regularly and often throughout the same piece of music, which can alter the complexities of an emotion, moment to moment (Juslin, 2019). The ways in which people use music vary greatly, however, it is often used for emotional self-regulation (Saarikallio, 2011), changing emotions, comfort and enjoyment, and for the alleviation of stress (Behne, 1997, Skånland, 2011). On the other hand, there is disagreement amongst researchers about whether music induces emotions, as some claim the capabilities are great and significant (Sloboda, 1992), whereas others claim that instrumental music does not have the ability to induce authentic emotions in people (Konečni, 2008).

The ways in which people engage with music vary, and as an unhealthy method, studies have shown its use in dealing with negative emotions (Garrido & Schubert, 2015, McFerran & Saarikallio, 2013, Skånland, 2011), using music to evoke them, and resulting in increased depressive states (Garrido & Schubert, 2013b). Individuals dealing with depression have been found to spend a lot of time listening to sad music and that listening to music in this way is a form of rumination (Garrido & Schubert, 2013a). Studies undertaken by McFerran & Saarikallio (2013), found that young people dealing with mental illness or low self-esteem used music in ways they knew would result in negative consequences. These young people felt that music had a stronghold on them, that somehow it understood something they did not, and even when it made them more angry, sad, or alone they were still inclined to continue following its lead (McFerran & Saarikallio, 2013).

Music and identity in adolescence specifically plays a significant role in aspects of life ranging from sexual and gender orientation to choosing career paths (MacDonald & Saarikallio, 2022). Music functions interpersonally, with emotional and political associations in social groups and bonding (Christensen et al., 2017), and is often used by adolescents as a means of self-regulation, self-reflection, and for managing and dealing with personal experiences (Saarikallio, 2017). The way music is used in social settings clearly plays a role in establishing social formations and creating emotions in these contexts (Ruud, 2011). In a therapeutic setting, music in use with vulnerable and troubled adolescents has aided in re-connecting with the self, re-building identity (Oosthuizen, 2019) and encouragement to be with others (Krüger, 2019). Considering how music can function as a means of social action,

the physical synchronization of moving with others has been used to explain how music encourages a sense of unity and togetherness (Hari et al., 2013).

Our understanding of who we were, who we are, and where we belong in our current social landscape have also been shaped by our musical identities (Ruud, 1997). Various aspects of a musical experience can give associations to certain moods, conditions, and stereotypes, but also to individually private, random, and situationally-based experiences (Ruud, 2011). Major life events can influence how we experience and understand music, and discovering our musical identity must be understood not only in reflecting on our personal histories, but also in relation to our current lives and what we identify ourselves with (Ruud, 2011).

3.5. Worship music

Worship music is different from traditional organ-led church music in that it stylistically adapts to pop-culture and its related popular music styles (Hartje-Döll, 2013). It can imitate various music genres and therefore does not have a fixed ‘sound’; however, praise songs were originally inspired by folksongs and are often simple with catchy repeating choruses (Hartje-Döll, 2013). The instrumentation typically used in worship bands include keyboards (piano and synthesizers), guitars, bass, and drums; choirs have been replaced by small amplified vocal ensembles; and hymnbooks replaced by screens and projectors (Adnams, 2013).

3.6. Peak and transcendental experiences

Transcendent experiences are a phenomenon that take us out of our normal everyday realities and perceptions (Winkelman, 2000), and according to Maslow (1970), the essence of humanity “has a higher and transcendent nature” (p. 13). Although peak experiences are a natural occurrence, it seems that because of the lack of suitable language to describe and explain the “spiritual” aspect of them, they are looked at with some skepticism by scientists (Maslow, 1970, Smith, 1991) and therefore tend to be referred to when talking about religion only (Maslow, 1970). In more recent studies however, neuroscientific research now shows

that these experiences are created by structures in the human brain (Alper, 2010; Lynch, 2010) (as cited in Crowe, 2017). Transcendental experiences are believed to be a true coming together of our emotional and rational states and can provide a versatile state of awareness which allows greater access of our mental processes (Winkelman, 2000).

According to Privette (2001), there are three elements that peak experiences have in common which include: fulfillment, significance, and spiritual (a sense of losing track of time). Some common characteristics of a transcendent state of mind are: “an altered state of consciousness (ASC), altered state of time, ineffable quality, noetic quality, intense positive emotions, sense of presence in the body, experiences of natural flow, and appreciation for unity” (Crowe, 2017, p. 46). Our altered state of consciousness typically happens when: 1) our critical faculty recedes and imagery overrides the tendency to censor ourselves, 2) our controls are loosened, 3) we are more sensitive to feeling, 4) time barriers dissolve and feelings are expressed through the body, 5) there is deep significance of images, and 6) a rejuvenation through cathartic release occurs (Tart, 1975, as cited in Crowe, 2017, p. 47).

Maslow wrote that one of the most common triggering and accessible ways to have a peak experience is through music (1970). Music for humanity has been an integral part of worship in religions, rituals, and “magic” (Boxberger, 1962, Gabrielsson, 2016), as it seems to promote an altered sense of time and consciousness, mystical experiences, symbol imagery, and generates ethereal and often unexplainable experiences (Crowe, 2017). Peak experiences in music are also typical in that they involve both strongly felt emotions with corresponding physiological responses (Gabrielsson, 2001). It is important to note, however, that peak and transcendental experiences are not the same as having strong emotional experiences (Gabrielsson, 2016). Peak experiences are never negative or uncomfortable but are rare and often described as being one of the most wonderful and memorable experiences in a person’s life (Maslow, 1999, Gabrielsson, 2016). They often lead to a more positive view of the self and others, the world, and a belief and hope in the value of life (Maslow, 1999). Peak experiences can also have positive physical and mental therapeutic effects such as “relief from physical pain, relief from stress, uneasiness, anxiety, grief, and depression, a release of personal and social barriers, and increased self-confidence” (Gabrielsson, 2016, p. 753). It is also interesting to note that even the memory of the experience has aided individuals in having hope and strength in difficult situations (Gabrielsson, 2011b).

In the next chapter I will explain the methods and approaches I used to help me inquire on a deeper level the questions I am addressing in this thesis.

4. Method

In this chapter I will describe the methodical and scientific theoretical approach I used in my study. The goal of my research was to inquire on a deeper level about the experiences of music in a typical charismatic Christian worship setting of self-professed religious trauma survivors. The foundation of this study is based on my research question:

How have music experiences in the church played a role in the lives of ex-fundamentalists who claim to have religious trauma?

4.1. Philosophical approach

I chose to explore my research question through the lens of a hermeneutic phenomenological philosophical approach. This framework seemed the most suitable as I wanted to get as close as I could to people's personal experiences. Phenomenological research revolves around obtaining the intricate and complex descriptions of human experience, and to reveal underlying meanings that encourage "discovery and description" (Ghetti, 2016, p. 770). There is an emphasis on meaning making for both the individual and finding meaning in the essence of the experience, with the thought it might share commonalities with the experiences of others (Ghetti, 2016). Human beings experience the world subjectively, and their unique perspectives and relationship to it is valued and explored in phenomenological research (Gadamer, 2004). In the context of religious trauma survivors, there can be much complexity and diversity in their stories, and I wanted to try to understand the meaning of their lived experiences, rather than depending on the very little knowledge and research that has been done on the subject thus far. The hermeneutic aspect of this approach allows for interpretation and understanding in consideration of the context (Gadamer, 2004). An integral part of this approach is reflexivity in the researcher to recognize their individual biases and understandings of intersubjectivity and temporality, while continually keeping focus on the participants and their experiences (Regan, 2012). The meanings that result then, are a representation of both the researcher and the study participants and their subjective experiences and contexts (Regan, 2012).

4.2. Qualitative interviews

The purpose of using qualitative interviews in research is to try to understand individual unique experiences and perspectives (Kvale, 1996), so it seemed like the most suitable method to obtain the complex descriptions of music experiences in relation to religious trauma that I was looking for. According to Kvale (1996), interviews for research are professional conversations with a structure and purpose, but based on conversations of every day life. I was drawn to the semistructured interview template specifically as it left room for expanding on certain themes, and kept the informants and I on track for the purposes of the interview (Kvale, 1996). I used Kvale's seven stages of an interview investigation framework to begin my process: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting (1996, p. 81). I wrote an interview guide, which included themes and questions I had after my initial literature search (attachment #2). I also used inspiration from my personal history with religious trauma and musical experiences in the church to find relevant questions.

As religious trauma is only a newly recognized phenomenon and there is a great deal missing in the literature about it, I wanted as many stories as possible to be told. Unfortunately, because of time constraints and the qualitative nature of my project and looking for meaningful personal stories (Kvale, 1996), I was advised to narrow it down to between 3-5 participants. In the end I managed four interviews.

In the next section I will describe my process of recruiting the informants of my study.

4.3. Recruitment and participants

Following in line with the phenomenological approach I have taken with this research project, I used purposive sampling to recruit my participants to ensure they have the lived experience of the phenomenon I am studying (Patton, 2002). I was looking for detailed descriptions of the religiously traumatic experiences of my informants, and that is also why I needed to have a small sample size in the end.

I have been involved in numerous church communities throughout Canada and there are many people I know personally who could have participated in my project. I was advised, however, to find participants who I have not had relationships with so as to help in keeping my personal experiences detached from my informants. Therefore, my recruitment process was through word of mouth and I asked friends and family in both Canada and Norway if they knew anyone who would be willing to participate in my project. I wanted to have at least one perspective from a worship leader point of view, and in the end two of my informants ended up being worship leaders. One of them is from Canada, the other is from Norway.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with four individuals, all from different charismatic Christian churches in both Canada and Norway. All of my participants had grown up in their faith communities, and most did not leave those communities until they were in their 20's. All interviewees were over the age of 30 when they spoke with me.

4.4. Data collection

My interview guide was inspired by Kvale and Brinkman (2015), as a help to frame my interviews. In advance of my interviews, I wrote a list of topics and some specific questions I wanted to ask, and throughout my actual interview process the order of my questions changed as each person took their answers to places I was not expecting. I followed each person's answers, but also brought the conversation back to my specific topics and questions. The questions I asked revolved around their involvement in their churches and what their general experiences were in those communities. I inquired about their relationship to music (then and now), how they experienced worship music in their churches, and if they associate music outside of the church (secular music) to worship music and any of their religiously traumatizing experiences. I also asked questions about the levels of involvement each participant had in their churches, if they could explain some of the ways in which they experience their religious trauma, and if they felt music has triggered any of those reactions. A full list of my questions is attached in the interview guide at the end of this paper (attachment #2).

Conducting qualitative interviews for this research project has helped me understand themes from my participant's lived experience of religious trauma (Kvale, 1996).

All of the interviews were approximately one hour in length, conducted on FaceTime, audio recorded on a separate recording device, and transcribed.

4.5. Analysis

I chose to use reflexive thematic analysis to analyze my data. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) is “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (p. 79). Braun and Clarke (2022) now refer to this method as *reflexive* thematic analysis as they want to emphasize the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the role as a researcher, especially in qualitative research. It is especially important for me in this project to acknowledge the reflexivity aspect throughout my entire research process, as my personal experiences are very close to the experiences of my participants. I will come back to this point a bit later. Reflexive thematic analysis values this subjective and situated position and believes it gives the research logic and validity, as well as what differentiates it from other versions of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Once my interviews were transcribed, I began the process of reflexive thematic analysis using the six steps laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase revolves around becoming familiar with the data, and I did this by both listening to the recordings afterwards, and reading through the interviews many times before I started the next phase of coding. I was looking for interesting and meaningful information that was relevant to my research question, and I used a variety of different colours of markers to highlight specific words and sections of conversation, which helped me in finding the foundation for the themes. Next, I started my process of identifying themes in my participant's stories to see if there were relevant patterns and similarities in the data that could help give some meaning into their religious trauma experiences. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe themes as “*patterns* of meaning (eg. concepts, ideas, experience, sense-making) that are underpinned and unified by a central idea” (p. 229). There were obvious themes that became apparent at once when reading through my transcripts, and other themes that I felt were more implied, what Braun and

Clarke describe as a 'latent' theme (2022). I continued the next step of developing my themes, combining some, and letting some of them go. This was after going back to my transcripts and reading the interviews again, and making sure my themes were still relevant and making sense in relation to my codes and research question. In the fifth phase I started narrowing down the themes and sub-themes and making sure the theme was clearly explaining the stories of my data. The sixth phase revolves around writing familiarization notes and reflexive journaling, which I started early on in the process. This helped focus my thoughts, helped in making connections, keeping track of my ideas, and assisted in helping me keep a balance between my objective and subjective perspective. I used a more latent and constructionist approach in my analysis as my coding and theme development was based on some assumptions that I had underlying the content, as well as I was exploring the facts that I found in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The themes I identified in my analysis fell into three main categories; 1) Identity, 2) Role of music in the church, and 3) Hindsight. The sub-themes included under Identity are; a) as a Christian and church member, and b) all-encompassing worldview. The main theme Role of music in the church includes; a) connection/belonging, b) emotional expression, c) manipulation, d) responsibility, and e) group influence. Under the main theme of Hindsight; a) adverse reactions, and b) connection/belonging/healing.

4.6. Reflexivity

I have done a great deal of reflection around the ethics of my particular research project. My own relationship to the church and religious trauma undoubtedly effects the way I ask questions, research literature, and interpret the data. I share experiences with the participants of my study, and therefore I have needed to keep myself in check in regard to how my own beliefs and biases play a part in my collection and interpretation of the data. It has been a fine line between keeping a balance of what is personal and what is universal (Berger, 2013) for me, and I have been very open about this potential conflict of interest with my supervisor, professors, classmates, and therapist, and have asked for accountability throughout the entire process. As much as is possible, I have tried to keep an open mind and to remain as unbiased

as possible when analyzing my data and discussing the results. In part, I have also used reflexive journaling throughout the process (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Although reflexivity and subjectivity can be seen as biased and narrow-minded, qualitative research conducted from this framework view those standpoints as valuable (Braun & Clarke, 2022). There are systems in place to keep the researcher accountable and to ensure quality, including; consensus coding, and reflexive journaling, which, is used to reflect on assumptions, emotional responses, and research practices throughout the entire research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022, Nadin & Cassell, 2006). Although it can be argued that I am possibly too close to the subject matter, Berger (2013) explains three major ways in which my similar experiences may impact my research and indeed be beneficial: 1) the participants may be more willing to share experiences with someone they know already has an understanding of the situation, 2) the relevant positioning of the researcher affects the relationship with the participant (eg. a person of a specific sexual orientation may be more willing to share their experiences with another person who also identifies that way), and 3) the background of the researcher and their personal beliefs shapes their worldview, which has an effect on the questions they would ask, the language they would use, as well as how they view and filter the information received from the participants; which can inevitably play a role in what they discover and conclude from their study (Kacen & Chaitin, 2006) (as cited in Berger, 2013). I have had to be constantly aware through the entire research process of who I am in relation to my subject matter and the ways in which that may help or hinder the process (Lietz et al., 2006). Reflexivity has been a vital component in this process, not only because I do not want to colour the data, but also because I have not wanted to miss out on nuances and the complexity of my participants stories and explanations (Russel & Kelly, 2002).

4.7. Ethics

Before I started the interview process, ethics approval was received by Norsk Senter for Databehandling (NSD), now called Sikt (attachment #3). Written information was sent to my four interview participants for them to read and sign for their consent (attachment #1). I placed a strong emphasis on ethical considerations in this project and ensured that each participant received comprehensive information about the purpose, methods and potential

risks of my research, maintaining transparency throughout. I received informed written consent from each participant, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw at any time without facing any consequences. Fictitious names were assigned to all participants to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality, and the data was securely stored with limited access. This ethical framework, in line with established guidelines and institutional protocols not only safeguarded the rights and well-being of my participants, but also preserved the integrity of my research findings.

In regard to the subject matter and my participant's personal histories, and sharing of experiences they found traumatic, I have tried to be very sensitive to the way in which I asked questions and commented on their answers. I have also been aware of the power dynamics in our interviews. My role as researcher and interviewer, who has both an insider and outsider position, and the roles between myself and my participants, have been a "constant interplay of fixity and flexibility, stability and instability" (Kaaristo, 2022, p.760). I have been aware of the various hierarchies and power dynamics in the interview process, and tried to be as considerate and sensitive as I could, while simultaneously attempted to provide a sense of security through the structure of the questions and the research I had done in advance of the interviews.

Each person was told in advance the topics I was going to ask about, and I informed them that they could choose to not answer any question if it made them uncomfortable. All of my informants were aware that I have also been involved in charismatic churches, which, seemed to have an automatic effect of allowing a sense of ease and comfort. It seemed to allow the conversation to be able to start with a sense of already knowing and understanding. I assured each person of the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews, and that the recordings would be deleted 30 days after my project is submitted. As mentioned earlier, there was written consent in advance of the interviews, and I received verbal consent again at the beginning of each conversation.

4.8. Validity and reflexivity (EPICURE)

Throughout my research process in both trying to discover and understand my participant's stories and the general concept of religious trauma, I have tried to keep myself aware of my positioning – both as a researcher and individual with my own perspectives and experiences. In my attempt to give validity to my research, I have used the evaluation agenda, EPICURE (Stige et al., 2009). EPICURE is a tool to “shift attention from rule-based judgement to reflexive dialogue” (Stige et al., 2009, p. 1508), highlighting the situated position of the researcher to explore individuals' diverse and complex accounts, acknowledging the possibilities for change. It was developed with the aim of strengthening the validity of qualitative research, especially on the grounds that reflexivity is imperative (Stige et al., 2009). The EPICURE acronym is a useful framework to ensure quality throughout the research process: Engagement, Processing, Interpretation, Critique, Usefulness, Relevance, and Ethics.

Through the *engagement* aspect I tried to keep focus on my participant's experiences, keeping my own at a distance since I already am well-acquainted with the phenomenon. I ensured quality through the *processing* aspect, in choosing a method that would allow me to go to the source to discover more about the phenomenon I am researching, and an analysis method to help identify relevance and patterns in my participants stories. In the midst of this I was constantly aware of my positioning as an ex-fundamentalist with similar experiences and have made it clear of my potential bias in every step of my entire research process. When it came to the *interpretation* of my data, I tried to balance my own personal understandings of what I was told, with the literature on the subject that I have found. I also attempted to keep an open mind to discover new themes and connections to the phenomenon that I would not have expected. I was in constant dialogue with my supervisor, and other researchers studying the phenomenon of religious trauma, for insight and accountability in interpreting the various situations and concepts. *Critique* of my positions and perspectives was received through the accountability of my supervisor, classmates, and fellow religious trauma researchers. I did not want to colour the stories of my participants or lean their situations in directions that felt right to me, however, I do feel that my personal experience with religious trauma and music contributes to positive social change and empowerment in this way: a small, relatively unknown phenomenon needs acknowledgement and attention,

and as a researcher who has experience with it, I believe my position strengthens the voices and stories of my participants and allows them a platform to speak. The *usefulness* aspect of the EPICURE framework ensures quality in this particular project in that as a result of my participants being able to share their experiences, other researchers, therapists, teachers, and church leaders may become aware of the hurt and suffering of a group of people whose voices and stories need to be heard so that positive changes can occur. *Relevance* in this context applies most specifically to those people in the charismatic Christian community who feel they have experienced religious trauma through music experiences; however, the way music is motivationally used in other types of groups outside the church is also important to consider. As a result, it is relevant for church leaders and others leading groups of people who rely heavily on music to convey messages. This applies to therapists in being aware of religious trauma, and music therapists specifically who use music as inspiration and a communicative tool. And lastly, in regard to *ethics* I have done my best to hold high ethical and moral standards throughout the entirety of my research process.

5. Results

In this chapter I have explored the question “*How have music experiences in the church played a role in the lives of ex-fundamentalists who claim to have religious trauma?*” and will present the results from my analysis.

All of the people I interviewed claim to have varying degrees of cPTSD symptoms. While each person began describing positive memories and stories from their involvement in their faith communities, it became evident quite quickly throughout our conversations that many of my participants still have unresolved issues and pain. Some explained to me that it has taken years to manage their symptoms. The first question I asked each person was how they experienced their involvement in the churches they were a part of and why they left. This led to the first theme that became immediately evident in each person’s story: the sense of connection and identity they felt in their communities, especially in the context of music experiences. This sense of connection and identity was strong and made them feel a sense of purpose and belonging. Below, I will present results related to the three analytical themes, identity, the role of music in the church, and hindsight, underpinned by quotes from the participants.

5.1. Identity

As a Christian and church member

Feeling connection in the context of the praise and worship sessions in their church services, many of the informants described positive and emotionally charged experiences they felt as a result of the music and group participation. They often felt these experiences drew them closer to each other and to God.

Hannah:

To be in a church that has these kinds of meetings where an important part of the meeting is music, the stage becomes a natural place to be. And some of that is very

positive... everyone was bringing in what they had of talents and energy and it was fun for a long time!

Joining in with others who believe certain forms of worship expressions are especially meaningful gave positive and affirming experiences.

Oliver:

In the beginning it was really positive because I went to a very charismatic church, and you know if you sang and you spoke in tongues, you got a lot of attention, I loved attention!

The church can be a very open and welcoming place to be, offering opportunities for various types of participation, and also music.

Elle:

One of the reasons I was interested in that church I went to in university was because they let me play guitar in the worship band even though I was still kind of a beginner. I loved doing music with other people.

The sense of belonging and identity felt through participation in the worship bands has been experienced as very meaningful and transformative growing up in these types of church communities.

Fredrick:

I think music helped give me an identity in my Christian communities. Because from a young age I was playing guitar and singing - I think I started helping out with the worship team and then leading worship around 13. Throughout high-school and into university as well, that remained a key component of my identity. I spent a lot of time both playing music in Christian contexts, but also thinking about worship and worship services and planning them and picking songs. I did a lot of that.

One of the beliefs of Evangelical Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians is that each person has been given special gifts and talents from God. An act of personal worship in this belief is to give back to God and the church by using those gifts for his service and his glory.

Hannah:

The musical thing is about... they wanted me to sing and have this responsibility on the worship team because I had a talent and gift and you have to use your talents and gifts for God, blah blah blah, but still somehow, I was shamed on “who do you think you are?” It was both. You are both shamed for acting on your talent and also you are needed for your talent. You know, you can’t combine those two things.

All-encompassing worldview

The amount of dedication and involvement in these communities is both willingly given by its church members, but it is also expected. Church attendance and personal faith mean more than just Sunday mornings; it is and requires a lifestyle. This all-encompassing worldview seemed to provide mixed feelings from the participants of my study.

Elle:

It really dominated my life and I had moments of being very connected and feeling very alive within that bubble, but I also had a lot of moments of shame and guilt and fear. I would say that that cycle of being so scared and feeling so much shame and then you know, something would happen like we would pray or whatever, or there would be some kind of special event and I would get all fired up for God. Those cycles of ups and downs were really difficult. At one point, I was doing church things 6 days a week - so we would go to prayer group, Bible study, young adults, we were youth leaders, we would go to a young adult's service across the city, and we would go to church twice on Sundays. So, I was doing so much church stuff.

I asked one of my participants how he felt now about believing that the transcendental musical experiences he had in worship were actually experiencing God:

Frederick:

When I look back on it, I think that was the logical assumption for me at the time because I didn’t have alternative worldviews to compare. There was only one truth and growing up with that being built into every aspect of your life, I didn’t even have the ability to question that.

Many people who grow up in the church as children are given very high moral standards to live up to, as well as being denied access to the outside secular world.

Oliver:

When we were younger we always listened to Christian music, that was the only thing that we had at home. We had these records, only Christian music, because anything else was the devil... so I remember I was visiting one of my first girlfriends, and I was 9 or 10, and I was going to sleep over at her house. She had The Wham cassette, the most amazing Wham cassette! I told her, "We can listen to it, but you can't tell my parents." I was so scared... but the music was awesome, haha. But I was scared they would find out because I was so afraid if they knew I would get punished! They punished me for listening to music that wasn't worshipping God.

In sum, the participants express positive emotional connections and a sense of belonging resulting from their participation in the church community. However, complexities emerge as some experience pressure to utilize their talents for God while simultaneously facing occasional shaming. This all-encompassing perspective had mixed effects, with some participants experiencing moments of deep connection and vitality within the church "bubble" but also facing periods of shame and guilt. The results also shed light on the stringent moral standards imposed on churchgoers, including restrictions on secular music, which created a sense of fear and apprehension among some participants about engaging with the outside world.

5.2. Role of Music in the Church

The role of worship music according to Christian academic texts and to individual congregation members seems to vary. There is, however, agreement in that it brings people together and provides the opportunity to worship and experience God.

Connection/belonging

Every week, often several times a week, there are opportunities to join others in musical celebrations and praise and worship services that for the most part uplift people's spirits and strengthen bonds between the attendees.

Oliver:

It really gives you this good feeling and everyone puts their hands up and it just becomes this collective thing, and you really feel like "Oh, this is really special!" because of the music and because everyone else is doing it...everyone sang, and you were included, and you were part of something.

There has been acknowledgment from every one of my participants that although they felt connection and belonging through these musical experiences and that the worship times gave them an opportunity to express deep-felt emotion, they also experienced conflicting feelings of worthlessness and often shame and fear in their congregations and before God.

Frederick:

Music in the church is a unifier. It builds community, it builds connections. I think it does work as an emotional conduit – so it's a way to express and share emotions that otherwise maybe aren't dealt with. On a negative side, I think it is one of those conditioning things that like... these aren't just any old songs that you're singing, they do have theology wrapped in them. They are communicating a message. And like I said, a lot of them are basically treating us as worthless and God as perfect.

As well as feeling a sense of belonging (combined with a mixture of negative emotions), it was also mentioned many times by the participants in my interviews that they often felt emotionally manipulated.

Hannah:

I think the church uses music for worshipping/meditation. I think for community too, and well I don't know if that is their intention but in fact, they are using music to emotionally manipulate people. That is what is happening, but music is always something that effects people emotionally. It opens you up, allows you to let your

guard down, and you can be brainwashed easier, haha. But music opens up people's hearts and emotions. It is both good and bad, I think.

The act of singing known songs as a ritual in a group of people can be a powerful way to strengthen bonds and make people believe they are a part of something important.

Oliver:

It's as if things become extra powerful when you sing them... there was one special song that goes "to God be the glory, great things He has done..." and it's a song that's all about what the Lord has done for us. And that was a song they sang at the end of every church service. They always played that same song at the end, and everyone knew that song by heart, of course, because they sang it every time church was over.... with his blood he saved me... yeah... even now I remember that song – parts of it at least because it was just a very moving song to play at the end.

Emotional expression

Music therapists are well aware of the emotional impacts of music and the unique way in which music seems to afford the opportunity to express a wide variety of feelings. The idea of emotional contagion in this group setting was mentioned a few times by my participants.

Elle:

So... when you are worshipping in a pentecostal church, people are often speaking in tongues, some people fall down on the ground, and the music will keep playing and the pastor will be praying into the microphone or speaking. You know, similar to a concert, it crescendos to this big intense moment. As I got older, in teenage and young adult years, the intensity of the emotional experience around music got more extreme. We would do these things called Fire Tunnels where... so like I can't really separate the music from the prayer because music was always playing while we were praying. They would often use the music – like at the end of the service the keyboard player would go back up and start playing this soft quiet music from the prayer, and it would start to build and crescendo, like I said, into this kind of fever pitch of emotion. People would be openly wailing and weeping, you know, repenting, and the most

intense emotional experiences I had were in these church services. Sometimes it was elation and joy, and sometimes it was like deep shame and guilt and “oh I am not worthy” kind of stuff. That oscillating back and forth between that black and white and the I’m good, I’m terrible, was how I experienced the music as a young person. It was intense.

One of my participants expressed difficulties in connecting to music that was supposed to elicit feelings of happiness and joy. Perhaps that is a result of so many of the songs being full of messages that highlight the sinfulness of human beings.

Frederick:

The worship music that I found the most impactful was the contemplative, often like self-deprecating “I am so unworthy, but God, you rescued me”, like that kind of message. That’s the stuff that I leaned towards a lot, and I struggled often with the more joyous type of worship music.

I asked Frederick, who has been a worship leader, about the process of planning a church service, the song choices, and when/where music will be played in other parts of the service outside of the praise and worship sessions.

Frederick:

Often a worship service is accompanied by some sort of talk – whether that’s a sermon or just a discussion of the night. Usually you know what that will be ahead of time so you are trying to tailor the themes of the worship songs to meet that. And then there was always the thinking through the emotions of the songs and what they are going to bring out... so there was a very deliberate planning of like, we are going to start off big and fast and up-beat to get people engaged, and then however many songs you have, you kind of want to hit people the hardest at the end of that session. So if you are going into a sermon, you want to leave on an emotional note and then if you are coming back after the sermon you often will start slow and build up again and then maybe you end the whole thing again with another up-beat song.

Manipulation

There was awareness of the heavy use of music in the church services, and it seemed the music was welcomed and appreciated by the participants of my interviews. However, when they reflected back on it, they question the authenticity of their experiences.

Elle:

The music is used to create an emotional connection. And it's so easy for that connection to be manipulated... the reason they choose certain songs with certain tempos or melodies or whatever is to create an emotional response in people. If we take the negative connotation off the word, any time somebody is playing a musical piece and trying to get someone to feel something in response, you can call that manipulative, even if it's not harmful or done maliciously or whatever. I think the leaders of the churches I went to were not trying to harm us, by any stretch, I think they were caught up in it just as much as I was. I think they were brainwashed and indoctrinated by it just as much as I was.

Oliver:

There was always music, like when you give money, when the money thing went around, always music. If you were going to go to the front of the room to get anointed, you know, drinking the grape juice, being touched on the forehead, falling backwards, always music. Always afterwards when you stood up and went back, the music played all the time.

The lyrics of the worship songs sung in church are based on Christian beliefs and on the church's individual theology. There is a duality in this belief system that both acknowledges the preciousness of human beings, but also humanity's innate sinfulness and darkness. In the context of singing songs that are purposefully written to create emotional responses in people, while at the same time being placed in certain points of the service to enhance the message, it is perhaps easier to be drawn into a state of being where you are more vulnerable to accept the messages being told to you.

Frederick:

...the worldview, it breaks you down to the point of needing something. In those moments you are receiving what you think you need. You are singing that you are accepted, despite who you are. You are loved despite your faults and your sins. But the message... you can't have that experience unless you're first torn down.

One of the worship leaders I interviewed knew there were certain things she could do to draw out emotions in people while leading the congregation in worship. There were actions she could make that would help them believe more strongly the messages that were being sung and preached.

Hannah:

I felt shame because I was just being an actor. And I knew how to sing with a kind of emotion so that they would believe that I was touched more by God. I knew how to raise my hands. The point was, everyone did this so I also participated in it, but I felt like this is fake.

Responsibility

The other worship leader I interviewed also gave an acknowledgement of the awareness of bringing people together in group emotional experiences:

Frederick:

I found it exhilarating to lead a group of people in such an emotional action, and subconsciously... you are in a position of power. Music has such an ability to manipulate emotion, and so being that focal point of the person who is like leading the song and choosing when to bring it down slow and more contemplative and building it up to this crescendo of outpouring these emotions... there's a high there. I experienced these really heightened emotions, and without a critical eye on that you just assume it's spiritual and supernatural.

When many of the church's beliefs accentuate the sinfulness of the human condition, combining those beliefs with music has proven harmful for some people.

Elle:

I think it's the combination, music is not the problem. It's the combination of music with a theology centered around shame and fear. The music was used in a way to get the theology so deep into you that that's where it was so risky that it could do damage. If we are singing songs about how we are wretched or whatever, then that is gonna affect people. I don't think it was the music that was traumatic, it was that the music was used to open us up and then that message was put in. And that shame and fear I experienced around hell and my worthiness and stuff was what did damage – more than the music itself.

The ways in which music are used in the church are often considered either only positive, or risk-free. For various mental health issues, the solution to healing was not to seek professional help, but that the church and God could provide; most often through prayer and worship:

Frederick:

I think that faith can paper over the cracks of mental health sometimes and for me, I didn't learn how to care for myself other than a prayer or a worship community model.

Elle:

The best Christians, the best kids, are the ones that cried during worship. That's how you knew you were really engaged with God was if you had this emotional experience of it. I don't think it was healthy and I don't think I was learning how to regulate my emotions around, or how to be safe in that kind of emotional environment – like that wasn't anything that anybody was talking about. When I started having panic attacks around the age of 8 or so and really bad nightmares, usually about demons and hell, cause we talked a lot about hell at the church that I went to, my parent's solution was to put worship music on while I slept.

I asked one of my participants if she has associations to the worship experiences at church when she participates in the music she is involved with now, and if she has any thoughts regarding intense emotional responses through music in general:

Elle:

We are producing an emotion, an experience in a young child, no less, and like, that is a responsibility. Because what you put with that music about who is worthy, who is good, who is right, all those kinds of things... music gets into you in a way that speaking does not sometimes and so I think that is something I will always be careful around. Whether it's a secular or religious environment.

Group influence

It seems that after talking with the participants of my study that there is doubt about whether their experiences in these worship services would have been as powerful or would have brought out the same kinds of responses if there hadn't been the influence of the group.

Elle:

When we were worshipping at the end of a service and we were at the altar and I was kneeling, I was crying, and I said "God just give me a sign"...I was taught to hear God's voice in a certain way. And I was taught that my own thoughts were sometimes God and sometimes not. Sometimes God was speaking to me and sometimes not... I would say weekly I would think I was hearing from God and having these really intense experiences that in my opinion were life changing, but then within a day or two I would be back into struggling with my mental health or with just regular doubt and faith issues.

One of the worship leaders reflects on the difference of experience between herself and the congregation while experiencing the same worship session:

Hannah:

... I don't recall having big spiritual moments while singing on stage... (pause) so for me it was strange to experience that the community had.

One of my participants explained the extreme contrasting feelings she could have in worship to being similar to the manic episodes she sometimes experiences as someone who has bipolar disorder:

Elle:

I do think the intentions are good. The intention is to help people connect to God and to do what the Bible says about giving God glory. I think it is intentional that they are trying to rile you up, they are trying to create an emotional experience within you. But some of these services I would go to where people were prophesying and speaking in tongues and crying and wailing and falling on the floor and rolling around, people there would bark like dogs “in the spirit”, and none of that would have happened without the music swelling the way it does. Because it’s these crescendos and the swelling of the music that really kind of like alcohol in a bar lowered people’s inhibitions to behave in these ways – what I would consider kind of crazy ways. I think that without the music, the social conventions of like you know, people don’t usually bark like dogs in public, people don’t usually roll around on the floor wailing in public, et cetera. The music was what “freed people” to have these experiences of “God” that were really like not all that different from what hyper-mania feels like to me now.

Overall, music is experienced as a unifying force, bringing people together and providing a platform for worship and experiencing God. Music fosters connections and a sense of belonging among participants, often uplifting spirits and strengthening bonds. However, it is acknowledged that these positive experiences are accompanied by conflicting emotions, including feelings of worthlessness, shame, and fear within congregations. The emotional potency of music is emphasized, as it is seen as a tool for both authentic emotional expression and potential manipulation. Participants note that music can be strategically used to intensify emotional responses and reinforce theological messages. Furthermore, the influence of the group dynamic is highlighted, with questions raised about whether these experiences would have been as powerful without the collective influence of the congregation.

5.3. Hindsight

I chose to have hindsight as a main theme in this study because there was an obvious break and change of direction in every interview after I asked about my participant’s experiences

and feelings of being in the church. Their reflections on being a part of the community and what it offered their lives at that time was very positive. However, afterwards when I asked about why they left and their reflections on having lived apart from their faith for many years, the majority of the interviews were used to explain to me a lot of the damage they feel had been done as a result of their involvement in these faith communities.

Adverse reactions

I asked all of my participants what their relationship to music is now, as opposed to earlier in their lives when they were still involved in their religious communities:

Frederick:

I have used music to express my emotions that maybe I wasn't able to express in words. And I have gravitated a lot towards sad music in my life, in my early life. And it wasn't until my 20's and post coming out that I really started engaging with music that brought me happiness and joy.

Elle:

The stuff that reminds me of the churches that I went to and those intense emotional experiences around spirituality, I avoid.

Oliver:

It took a lot of years to listen to music with confidence, not feeling like you're sinning...

There have been many associations to worship music and the manipulative influence my participants felt it had over their lives. There have been various responses when I asked how they feel when they happen to hear worship music now:

Elle:

Sometimes on TikTok or Instagram when I am just scrolling, somebody will parody that kind of thing, and I'm like NOPE! That slow like, "we're trying to get you to feel something very specific" is too close to the bone.

Oliver:

It makes me a little uncomfortable, because I think it's often a way of brainwashing people in a sense... (pause)...cause when someone says something, you can listen and go "oh yeah, amen!", but when you sing it and the music and everything, it kind of soaks into your system even deeper...? And also, when I hear all of these Christian songs, the texts just give me goosebumps, cause it's just this phrase giving glory and thanks and appreciation for anything done towards this one person, you know? I don't believe it is like that... I think we have to give ourselves some credit too.

Frederick:

I am a sucker for melody and there are a lot of worship songs that the hook is still running through my brain. I am able to engage with it in just a music sense most of the time. To the point where people around me who have similar experiences in the church and leaving the church – I might sing a snippet of a song and they'll cringe and be like "Why the fuck?! Why are you singing that?", and I'm like "Oh, whatever! It's a part of my history, it's such a huge part of who I was" ... but I think one big thing now is that I am fully aware of the manipulative nature of it. There is no situation where I hear a worship song and I'm brought back to that place of "Oh, maybe I do love God...", it's always like "Oh yeah, this song is catchy, but fuck the words!" haha.

One of the participants in my study found that she missed the sense of community from her church and since leaving has found an online church who accepts all people, regardless of their religious or political beliefs, gender identities, or sexual orientation. The church sets up their services similarly to the kinds of church services she has been used to and explains to me how she can sometimes be triggered by the music they sing together:

Elle:

The church I go to now, we always sing one non-religious song (like a Tracy Chapman song or Johnny Cash or whatever), and I always sing along with those ones. But they do feel churchy sometimes. It is a little bit uncomfortable sometimes... a little bit like my guard is up, or my system is activated, so I am watching for danger, you know? So, I think that's why I choose to disengage most of the time. But when I

do try to engage, I sometimes will change the words. I'll sing the words that make sense to me, and I won't sing the ones that don't. It's becoming almost like exposure therapy, less scary to hear some of those songs that remind me of some of the experiences I had in the church.

Connection/belonging/healing

Each of my participants has described a complicated relationship with music, especially in connection to music with a message. However, I wanted to know if they were able to have positive and trusting experiences in music after feeling manipulated and broken down from those experiences in their churches.

Elle:

The two most important things in my life are music and poetry. They are how I express myself, how I process my emotions, how I connect with others on a deep level. Music is healing to me; it is not traumatic... I found a way to engage with music without it having to be religious. For so long when I was in the church that was the only way I knew how to participate in music was to be part of worship. When I have been involved in non-religious musical experiences like drumming and stuff, my experience is that love and belonging and connection are the things that are being put in my heart when I let it be open by music.

Frederick:

I didn't often engage with positive or happy emotions before – in my Christian life. I would gravitate towards singer-songwriters with an acoustic guitar singing a sad poetic song. I still like that, but a huge difference is allowing music to be a source of happiness and dancing as well... that's a big part of music for me now – having the joy to dance.

The experience of being in a group of people who are showing signs of being emotionally effected by the music could possibly be triggering, and I wanted to know what my participant's experiences of that are now. One of my participants told me about being in a crowd watching a concert of one of his favourite artists:

Frederick:

There is something very very powerful, psychologically, being in a group of people where music is at the center – in a sense you're all pointed in the same direction.

There's a togetherness. You can let go... and it was one of those moments where you can relate it to worship music where like at the bridge, you're crescendoing and in a crowd of people screaming "We will be all right!"... it made me cry. I felt that peak emotion and it felt like an affirmation for me that I was going to be ok, and that it's ok if I don't know what's going to happen. I think that experience allowed me to be honest with myself about missing that part of worship music – what it had represented in my life, when I was a Christian.

I asked one of my participants if she has emotional associations to worship music when she performs the music she does now:

Hannah:

No, because the emotionally huge things I have experienced outside of the church in music have been HEALTHY. There is some darkness attached to the spiritual experiences in music in the church, I don't know what it is but I have not had... this dark thing, this manipulation, I have no idea what it is. Going outside my boundaries or something. I don't go outside my boundaries when I am enjoying music now! It is not similar. But I can be filled with great enthusiasm and joy in music now, but it feels healthy, so it is not the same. I don't associate it.

In sum, participants expressed adverse reactions to worship music in their current lives, with varied associations and emotional responses. Some mention using music as a means to express emotions they couldn't articulate in words, while others avoid music reminiscent of their religious experiences. There is a shared recognition of music's manipulative influence during their time in the church, leading to discomfort when hearing worship music in the present. This discomfort stems from the perception that worship songs were designed to elicit specific emotional responses and reinforce theological messages. Despite the complexities surrounding their relationship with music, some participants have found healing and positive experiences in music, using it for emotional expression and connection, representing a shift from what they experienced as manipulative worship music.

6. Discussion

In this section I will give some phenomenological reflections on the results from my interviews, and then address some theoretical implications of music used in religious and inspirational settings, which, could provide a framework for music therapists and church leaders to consider the experiences of these worship services on both current and thriving church attenders, as well as religious trauma survivors. In a broader sense, I would call for the consideration of how music is being used in groups of people where there is an obvious leader, or where a specific purpose is being pursued.

6.1. Reflections on religious trauma in the context of worship services

There are few references to the negative impact of religion, even less to religious trauma, and an online search for “religious trauma” provides results for studies that use religion to heal from trauma, rather than being a contributor of it (Stone, 2013). In 2019, Richard Schiffman wrote an article for The New York Times, called “When Religion Leads to Trauma”, and since that time it seems to have started drawing more attention and discussion around the phenomenon (Parker, 2020). Although my search online for scientific articles about religious trauma provided few results, and no results at all about negative experiences in praise and worship settings, there is an abundance of search results of people sharing the negative impacts of religious fundamentalism on their lives in personal blogs and social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

There are various reasons why some people choose to leave their religions, and they are often reasons which have culminated slowly over many years. For those who have experienced multiple adverse religious experiences, the result seems to frequently end in extreme confusion, feelings of betrayal, anxiety, disassociation, and some even trauma. Many people, including my participants, feel their whole foundation of life has been broken, as they have grown up with an “all-encompassing worldview” where their entire childhoods and adolescent years have been shaped by these beliefs (in essence their identities), including their understanding of human relationships and how the world works (Anderson & Peck, 2019). This has all been through the lens of these religious indoctrinations, and when a

person leaves this “family” they are oftentimes confused about where to go in life, how to think of and for themselves, asking what is right and wrong, and very often full of rage because of their feelings of injustices done to them. Members of these charismatic Christian communities did not have the option to participate in many areas of society and what it had to offer, especially in regard to culture where most secular music, movies and books were considered too immoral and of having a bad influence. As some of my participants mentioned in their interviews, some faith communities went as far as convincing their members that satan was behind this media and that consuming secular culture would weaken them to demonic attacks.

There is a very strong sense of connection and belonging in these types of Christian communities and it has offered many of its members safety and security. As I have written earlier, the potential for social bonding through group experiences and activities under the influence of music is significant (Pearce et al., 2015, Dunbar et al., 2012, Ruud, 2011) and it allows for deep connections and feelings of unity, especially in the context of group ceremonies (Bispham, 2006, Bruscia, 2014). In the charismatic Christian worship service, it is all within a specific context of strict stipulations of behaviour where it seems that certain types of emotional expression were expected and accepted as more spiritual. This group influence to display certain types of expected emotional responses in the praise and worship sessions caused confusion and insecurity in the participants of my study; speaking in tongues, raising your hands, using your musical talents for God (expected of you, but must be done humbly), et cetera. One of my participants mentioned how aware she is now of the powerful influence and potential music has to open up people’s hearts and emotions. She expressed that it can be a wonderful thing, however, it puts people in emotionally vulnerable positions that can be experienced as traumatic when certain messages are added. Another participant mentioned that the messages in many of these worship songs express profoundly the worthlessness of humanity, and the perfectness of God.

Worship songs have a purpose – to teach and communicate theology, and to praise God and encourage an experience with him. While a group of people is being led into extreme emotional states, while at the same time being told very specific messages, many people can feel pressured to exhibit certain types of behaviour to prove to the others and themselves that they too are worthy and belong - perhaps even leading them to go outside of their boundaries to be accepted. One participant explained that the theology taught is one that first breaks you

down so that you are open for new messages, and combined with being in the context of a highly emotional and vulnerable setting of music+messages+group, it is likely you are receiving what you think you need as a result. Another participant expressed how much more powerful messages become when you sing them. All of the informants explained multiple times the emotional manipulation they felt in these contexts, both by the church leaders, and also by members of the congregation. On the one hand, being a part of a larger group of people singing and playing music together for God seemed to offer that sense of purpose, unity and togetherness; yet there was also a fear of not doing it correctly, not feeling what everyone else seemed to be feeling, and wondering why everyone else seemed to be experiencing God but not them, et cetera. The fear is not just about not fitting in, there is often shaming involved and the threat of ostracization. My participants regularly experienced confusion within themselves, and in hindsight, wonder if these intense emotional experiences were as a result of group pressure and influence, or if they had actually encountered God.

In these types of faith communities where music is used on a regular basis for connection and communication with God, music can feel threatening as a concept in life outside of the church. Music in the church has led its members to experience intense emotional encounters, out-of-body experiences, and feel a connection to God. Many of these musical worship times, as described by a couple of my participants, involved altar calls where people who felt convicted of sin in their lives walked up to the altar in front of the congregation and confessed their sins to God, the pastor, and the other church members. They were exposed, but then forgiven, and all while the music continued to play. The public shame adds to this trauma. One participant remembered that the music was always playing throughout the service in the background regardless of what was happening. Another informant told me that it was hard for her to separate music from the prayer because someone was always accompanying the prayer and following/imitating the emotion of it. As a result, when hearing music that was either played in those church services, or that has similar qualities to the worship music (which many secular pop songs do), or to music they find intensely emotional, many religious trauma survivors can be triggered. These feelings can be extremely debilitating and in turn conjure up strong memories of being in a vulnerable position. These kinds of experiences lead some people to have feelings of not being able to trust themselves, their intuition, or even their own memories. These feelings are deep and complicated, and the music mixed with unexplainable feelings can be overwhelming.

For a religious trauma survivor, discovering peak experiences outside the confines of an organized religion's beliefs may provide the opportunity to elicit a renewed sense of awe and wonder – a sense that could be a powerful way to connect and communicate with themselves. Previously, experiences of such intensity would have only been associated with communication with God. As mentioned earlier, one of the main ways people have peak experiences is through music (Maslow, 1970) and it is often through these praise and worship times that music is used to evoke strong emotions and beliefs. These encounters with God that many charismatic Christians claim to have and use as evidence that their religion is true, can be seen as somewhat dangerous, considering the considerable weight they carry in many of these charismatic faiths.

Dogmatic religions often cover up mental health issues through spiritual beliefs, which has led many believers and ex-believers to deny the existence of problems in their lives and an avoidance of knowing more about oneself (Stone, 2013). These religious beliefs do not provide an acceptable way of expressing half of our natural human emotions, and as a result, members of these religions “may be prone to using a variety of defensive coping strategies” (Stone, 2013, p. 325), where they seek to comply to these legalistic religious standards out of the fear of hell or rejection from the religious community (Stone, 2013). It is not only emotions that are taught to be problematic, but also teachings about the physical body not being able to be trusted. Peck (2021) describes that “evangelicalism encourages folks to exist primarily in their minds in a world of thoughts, beliefs, and mental constructs” and that “thought control is often viewed as the solution rather than its own source of suffering” (para. 24). If trauma is embodied, then engaging in activities that have been taught to be sinful and deemed worthy of damnation are likely to cause trauma responses in some people (Anderson, 2021), and this is important to recognize when trying to understand why some of the participants in my study describe having *adverse reactions* when listening to secular music after having left their faith. One informant explained to me that it took her many years to be able to listen to secular music without feeling like she was sinning. Sinning is not just having feelings for doing something bad, but as Anderson (2021) explained, sinning is worthy of damnation and people can experience panic attacks and other trauma reactions as a result.

Many of my participants explained feeling triggered and have experienced negative associations to music that reminds them of the worship music they experienced in their churches - especially music that is used in a way that seems like it is trying to make the

listener feel or experience something specific. One participant mentioned her need to avoid intense emotional experiences in music, as the association to the praise and worship sessions in her churches made her feel triggered, start to disassociate, and feel that she was physically unsafe. Social contexts outside of the church where people have joined together for an event have sometimes resulted both in trauma reactions for some of my participants, as well as making them critical to and question the purposes and responsibilities of those leading the groups. It seems true in light of the associations my informants have to worship music, “the more music is used in a context the more the music means that context” (Best, 1993, p. 54).

For a religious trauma survivor to learn to be self-reliant and experience freedom and hope in trusting their own intuition and desires, they need time to feel safe outside of the church walls, and outside of the strict mental constructs many of them grow up with. There needs to be a safe space to experience the full spectrum of natural human thoughts and feelings, both in their minds and in their bodies (Stone, 2013). The opportunity to experience life and responsibility, relationships outside of spirituality, and art and culture in all its forms without fearing dire consequences is a task that could take years of therapy and healing. As previously mentioned, being able to listen to secular music that has been taught to be sinful and possibly exposing the person to demonic attacks, trying to find freedom in strong emotional experiences through music, trying to feel safe and not manipulated in a group of people with a leader where music is playing, and being critical to the use of music in social settings are all areas in which the participants of my study have been effected in their current uses and experiences of music. And yet, years after having left their faiths many of them are still struggling with the complex and far-reaching effects of indoctrination. Various coping strategies for some of them have been individual talk therapy, finding new “family” outside of their churches and experiencing music and culture in positive and inclusive ways outside of the church environment. Attending secular concerts where everyone is welcome and included and the messages being given contribute to a sense of autonomy and worthiness have been helpful, as well as joining music groups and starting bands where new associations to positive experiences in music have been beneficial in embracing strong emotional experiences that often come with musical encounters.

6.2. Reflections on group influence, responsibility, and the effects of music

When I asked the participants of my interviews to describe the music and worship sessions in their churches, the immediate responses were all very positive. Across the board, their responses expressed feelings of belonging and connection, as well as the telling me that the praise and worship times often provided a meaningful and powerful means of emotional expression. The experiences of being a part of the praise and worship times have undoubtedly made an impact and left lasting impressions on every single one of them. However, as the interviews went on and I started asking more questions about their experiences and what they thought the role of music was in the church, all of the conversations had a change of direction. It did not seem that my participants had considered the potential negative impacts of the musical experiences at church, however, throughout our conversations they began to make connections. Perhaps this is as a result of them thinking I was looking for connections, but it could also be that in the complexity of their religious trauma experiences as a whole this aspect had not yet been considered. Regardless, each person, without knowledge of the other participants, began mentioning feeling manipulated, going outside of their boundaries, group pressure to comply, feeling emotionally taken advantage of, confused, and unstable in many of the musical situations. It made sense to them that felt this way when the theological messages stating the innate sinfulness and unworthiness of humanity were being powerfully sung with hundreds of others backed by a large band and influential leader.

As mentioned previously, it seemed that for some of my participants, certain emotional responses were more praised and accepted in these musical worship times, and as Juslin & Västfjäll (2008) have studied, emotions felt as a result of music, rather than the music itself, have a higher value for most people, which can make it difficult to psychologically detach these responses. Confirmations of the emotions felt in these worship experiences, as confirmed by my participants, could be for example, singing with your eyes closed, crying, raising hands, speaking in tongues, jumping, falling on the floor, et cetera. From the worship leaders' point of view, steadily increasing the volume, the number of times a chorus is repeated, initiating physical movements, adding prayer, connecting the themes of the sermon to the themes of the messages in the songs, all contributed to seeing a result in the congregation's resulting emotional responses. It is encouraged in charismatic Christian

worship services to seek God and expect spiritual connection. If there is an expectancy to experience God through these musical worship times, the chance of interpreting the situation as impregnated by the voice of God is much greater. When listening to music, certain emotions can be evoked when there is an expectation to be influenced (Oatley, 1992), and depending on what the music is used for, emotional responses will differ. The particular context that the music is being used in needs to be considered (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008), and in a worship-setting, the music's function is to communicate with and glorify God.

As well as mood being affected by specific emotional responses evoked from music (Thompson et al., 2001), our moral judgments can also be influenced (Seidel & Prinz, 2013). Some of my participants mentioned acting in certain ways as to appear more spiritual or more affected by God. Some of them felt uncertain if they were actually experiencing God, and perhaps an aspect to consider in this particular context is, "the more spiritually inclined a person is, the more he or she will perceive (...) music to have religious or spiritual qualities" (Lowis, 2010, p. 83). The potential music has to create transpersonal experiences for people is powerful, and in the church, these experiences are often interpreted as the voice of God. One of my participants explained that in reflecting on their experiences of praise and worship in the church, without a critical eye on what is happening you often assume that the experience is spiritual and supernatural when indeed those encounters could have been peak or transcendental experiences. Meyer (1956), writing about ways in which music induces emotions, explained *mood contagion* as people "catching" the emotions of others (Hatfield et al., 1994). In a congregation of people singing loudly, or clapping or raising their hands in worship, there is clearly an influence felt and maybe even a sense of group pressure to do the same. Sloboda (1999) coined the term "hot spots" in music, which he explained as "teasing" the listener's expectation with deviations from the music's form. These "hot spots" affect the intensity of the listener's emotional responses and worship leaders (including the two in my study) know how to build these moments and make use of musical tactics regularly to lead people through different themes in the church services.

The experiences of the holy... tend to happen... of one kind of structure only, under certain triggering circumstances only, to rest heavily on the presence of certain traditional, powerful, but intrinsically irrelevant, stimuli, e.g., organ music, incense, chanting of a particular kind, certain regalia, and other arbitrary triggers (Maslow, 1964, p. 40).

Meyer (1956), through what he called “referential meaning”, said that certain songs could come to represent a connection with God, even if the song itself is not religious in nature, as the music is referring to something outside the music. Atkins and Schubert (2014) explained that music “can trigger images or thoughts of people, places and experiences that are spiritual in nature, especially in the religious context... as well as being able to convey moods that are spiritual” (p. 78). Harvey (1999) claimed that the nature of music is spiritual, which “makes it an effective vehicle for the expression of an ultimate reality that we can call spirituality” (Atkins & Schubert, 2014). Being emotionally aroused in worship seems to be how believers measure their sincerity, which can be a positive and meaningful experience, but also contingent, narrow, and more often sought than found (Adnams, 2013). Worship leaders in this charismatic Christian tradition “are often under great pressure to generate the environment that will foster really worshipping” (Adnams, 2013, p. 199). It was mentioned multiple times in a couple of my interviews that leaders in the church need to be aware of the power they hold in their positions. The way in which the music is used, and especially in combination with the theological messages being told is a powerful tool that has great potential to influence and even manipulate. All of my participants mentioned that in hindsight they recognize the feeling of being manipulated in these powerful worship experiences. The question could be asked if these reactions are sincere or if they have been carefully manufactured to create a specific response in order to ensure a “spiritual” connection, to make people believe they experienced God? The intentions of these leaders are undoubtedly sincere, however, their awareness around this issue may be lacking.

Perhaps the question needs to be asked about the responsibility of bringing groups of people into such heightened states of emotion that includes a specific message, without any control of emotional regulation either in the midst of the experience or afterwards. One of my informants expressed how taxing it was on her with the cycles of extreme emotional highs and lows in the worship services. She explained that the oscillating back and forth of those intense emotions was confusing for her; feelings of connectedness and love and experiencing what she thought at the time was the Holy Spirit, while within the same service being brought into deep states of shame, guilt, and fear. Another person mentioned feeling frustrated and resentful to these experiences now as she feels that she was never taught how to regulate her emotions. Whether intentionally or not, it seems that the church often uses music to encourage deep emotional experiences which equate sincerity and contact with the Holy

Spirit. As many of my participants also mentioned, the music and pressure for an emotional experience combined with a theology that was often mixed messages, instilled beliefs in them and asserted a degree of control that was experienced as manipulative and often negative. McFerran and Saarikallio (2013), have questioned who is responsible (if it is not the music itself or musicians performing it) for the interrelationship between music and health.

In the next section I will continue to discuss the results of my interviews through some reflections in implications for music therapy.

6.3. Reflections on implications for music therapy

Trauma-informed music therapy has shown potential in helping trauma victims to navigate through their vulnerable and fragmented states to find wholeness, experience agency and autonomy, and discover that trust and safety in others is possible (Sokira et al., 2023, Langdon, 2023). Music therapy is often referenced as being a positive and helpful treatment in the trauma context, however, considering that some of the participants in my study experience PTSD symptoms from music that brings associations to musical experiences in the church, as well as the group dynamics of these situations, special attention and care is required by music therapists. How can music therapy feel safe when music has been experienced as emotionally manipulative? How can music therapists be aware of the specific context and experiences of religious trauma survivors and not contribute to an experience that feels like an emotional exploitation? In what ways can music therapists help religious trauma survivors in pursuing a healthier relationship with music?

The participants in my study have all mentioned the effects of group dynamics and collective emotions when being involved in music with a purpose. There have been questions about people doing and believing things they may not have otherwise while in a heightened emotional state in the presence of a powerful and motivational leader. Religious trauma survivors have often experienced feeling pressured, manipulated, repressed, and taken advantage of by these religious systems of power they have been involved in. The participants in my study mentioned the sense of belonging and connection felt in these contexts, but that has come with a price – the price of needing to conform and respond in

certain ways to fit in, gain acceptance, and prove that you are a good Christian who experiences God. The power that spiritual experiences in music can have to change people and society is great, and also has the potential to “consciously or unconsciously threaten those in power” (Trondalen, 2016, p. 135). Therefore, in the context of a music therapy situation, the power dynamic between therapist and client, especially in the context of groups, could be an added layer of complication as there can be associations to the roles of pastor and congregation, or church leader and church member where there has been an obvious power dynamic of influence and persuasion.

In referring to the power and responsibility dynamics in music therapeutic work, Trondalen (2016) discusses positions of power, authority, and freedom, and that personal and social constraints need to be recognized in these various contexts. She explains that in a music therapy relationship, there is a mutuality of influence where both therapist and client have free will and power over themselves, which is important for the religious trauma survivor to be aware of, as that is not what is taught in the church. Another layer to this is how the church strategically uses music when certain rituals take place, and for religious trauma survivors, it is possible that the therapeutic use of music with a purpose could be perceived with suspicion and possibly even experienced as unsafe. In a music therapeutic context, the kinds of activities and conversation offered to the client need to be evaluated in relation to the client, taking into account their backgrounds, values, attitudes, context (Rolvjord, 2010), and power dynamics (Trondalen, 2016). The religious context is unique and therefore special awareness of religious trauma survivors' experiences is both helpful and needed. Perhaps in exposing these power structures, “the influence of negative power may be reduced” (Trondalen, 2016, p. 135).

Psychologist Alyson Stone, who has worked regularly with religious trauma survivors, explains that “few defenses are as ironclad as religious-based prohibitions, and clients may require years of individual therapy before religious wounds are fully available for exploration” (2013, p. 328). Further considerations in the context of group therapy seem to often be necessary as clients may experience religious-based transference; for example, the group members being perceived as members of their religious communities or places of worship, and the group leaders perceived as God or Satan, which has at times resulted in group sessions proving to be difficult and perhaps only considered after safety has been established in individual therapy (Stone, 2013).

In Alyson Stone's work with religious trauma survivors, issues of separating thoughts and feelings from action have been complicated, as the Bible teaches, they are the same and must be controlled (2013). Although a person may no longer subscribe to these beliefs, they have lived their lives believing that many of their thoughts, feelings and fantasies have been not just sinful, but dangerous (Stone, 2013). Learning how to accept the full range of human emotion and expression can then be a complicated process for a religious trauma survivor (Winell, 1993). Music therapy is regularly used to help clients safely and creatively express emotion, as musical interactions often lead to positive feelings and experiences (Rolvsjord, 2008, Bruscia, 2014). Activities that help to decrease the impacts of the uncertainties of time, body, and identity seem to help in dealing with, for example, feelings of terror and finality (Wiener & Dodd, 1993). In referring not only to music, Malchiodi (2020) explains that the use of expressive arts "not only forms the foundation for reparation, but also makes it possible for individuals to actively change their relationship to the body's memories of traumatic events" (p. 23). Bruscia (1998), wrote that human beings use songs to explore emotions, and that songs "articulate our beliefs and values" (p. 10). Through music therapy this can happen through listening, writing (both text and melody), and improvisation – which can lead to songwriting. Songs could possibly offer a way to re-write the trauma story and give music a new function.

There has been a lot of enthusiasm and hype around the ways the use of music, and rhythm-based activities specifically, can access primitive and undamaged parts of the brain, however, McFerran et al. (2020) have questioned if there has been enough systematic evaluation performed to ensure the effectiveness of these theories and methods. Further research is needed in this area.

A belief often held in charismatic Christian circles is that mental health issues are a sign of weak faith or an attack of satan (Stone, 2013, Winell, 1993, Anderson & Peck, 2019), which could further complicate the music therapist's work. How could music therapy with its focus both on music and health be a safe and viable option? In order to build trust and experience openness and intimacy, there needs to be mutual self-disclosure between the therapist and client, and the therapist needs to be presented and seen as a person first, not only a counselor and helper (Rolvsjord, 2010). Very specifically in the context of a religious trauma survivor, the therapist should not be seen as an authoritative figure.

The health effects music can provide depend on the situations in which the musicking is happening (McFerran & Saarikallio, 2013), and by using a trauma-informed approach with its focus on establishing safety and placing the client in the position of an equal in the therapeutic process could provide the basis of a safe and positive starting point. A resource-oriented approach with its focus on empowerment, encouraging the strong sides of a person, and utilizing the client's inner strengths and abilities could help develop new methods for action (Rolsvjord, 2010), that for the religious trauma survivor was either unaware they had, or were previously denied the opportunity to explore. The freedom to explore some of these previously off-limit feelings and fantasies may be experienced by some as frightening, so special awareness of these issues is necessary for the music therapist to work carefully and effectively. Music therapists working from a resource-oriented approach likely have a critical perspective and are aware of the abuse of power that can often exist in public healthcare. This could translate to an understanding of the specific experiences of power dynamics and leader control in the faith communities of religious trauma survivors. Acknowledging the power dynamic and encouraging individuals to be more critical and skeptical to those in authoritative positions could allow a religious trauma survivor to more easily trust the therapeutic process and relationship.

You don't have to look very far in music therapy literature to discover that the use of music is most often enthusiastically hailed as useful, positive, and helpful. This is obviously for very good reason, however, the destructive uses of music and the potential it has to negatively affect us, especially in the context of group settings with a purpose, must not be overlooked, and more research is also needed in this area.

The religious teachings received in these faith communities "may lie dormant for years, and like programming that cannot be deleted from the hard drive, they exert ongoing influence in ways both subtle and startling" (Stone, 2013, p. 332). In a therapeutic setting, not all people will respond positively to the same kinds of methods and support systems, so a variety of approaches is necessary to meet the needs of the individual context to figure out which music-based approach could be of benefit at any given moment (McFerran et al., 2020). Combined with research of the effects of how trauma is physically stored in the body (Levine, 1997, van der Kolk, 2014), we may have a unique opportunity with music, music-

based activities, being creative, and the relationships formed in these safe environments to provide a beneficial and positive trauma-informed treatment method (McFerran, et al., 2020).

6.4. Limitations

The limitations I have experienced throughout this research process lie mainly in the lack of research that has been done on this subject. There is very little literature to draw upon, and due to the qualitative nature of this study I could only include a small number of informants. The results presented in this thesis are therefore based on the subjective experiences of a few individuals and are not generalizable. However, from a phenomenological perspective, these individual experiences can be regarded as mirrors of more extensive human experiences. This reflection highlights the commonality that forms the foundation of our individual lives, revealing the shared essence of human existence.

I could have carried out the research using ethnography and attended various churches myself in this process, however, considering that I myself am a religious trauma survivor, I was not willing to place myself in those situations again. I also wanted the opportunity to talk to others and gain more insight from them, as well as to use the current literature that does exist. The available literature is new, important and foundational in starting the process of this new area of research.

6.5. Conclusion

I have used this research project to explore the question, *“How have music experiences in the church played a role in the lives of ex-fundamentalists who claim to have religious trauma?”* I have explored the experiences of my participants through semi-structured interviews and through my thematic analysis of these interviews found themes of identity, the role of music in the church, and hindsight.

The intention of this paper is not to take away from the experiences which have given a lot of believers much joy and peace, and there is no doubt that musical events can express and

evoke emotions in many different ways (Sloboda & Juslin, 2001). The intention is to bring to light, through an exploration of religious trauma from a music therapist's perspective, the suffering that many religious trauma survivors feel as a result of these same worship encounters.

There is a disconnect with the spiritual and scientific world when trying to understand peak experiences, but I believe there needn't be. Perhaps if these worlds would acknowledge each other, people could find more freedom in their emotions and an openness to the world – acknowledging that there can be both explainable and unexplainable happenings, and that both are fully available and accessible to all. Music seems to convey a universal “spirituality”, and it is unfortunate that music and the powerful emotions it evokes is often attributed to religion and the voice of God. Since music is one of the main sources of inducing peak experiences, it is important, especially as music therapists, to also be aware of the immense power and influence that music can have on people, both positively and negatively. Music is used as a power force in the church to exaggerate emotions and create a sense of “heaven on earth”, therefore, music itself can be a trigger.

I am researching and writing on behalf of a group of disenfranchised people who need to be understood in their unique context and experiences. It requires courage and strength to stand up to a powerful and established institution, and for religious trauma survivors to work through their issues and find healing. This may in part be possible by discovering their own innate goodness and abilities to act and make decisions. It also may be possible in learning how to trust “those in power” and realizing there can be mutuality and equality in those kinds of relationships. There is an innate compassion and genuine care of individuals, with an overarching goal of bettering the quality of life in music therapy; utilizing the concept of empowerment through both realizing inner strengths and resources and learning how to act with them. This foundation of care seems like a suitable and essential starting point for working with those struggling with religious trauma. In regard to how music is used in religious and inspirational settings, care should be taken in the music therapy context when choosing music specifically for creating mood, as well as care taken when using ‘spiritual’ or religious words to describe experiences. Songs with powerful repeating choruses may have the potential to trigger trauma responses, and of course it is important to consider the issues and messages that are being discussed in the therapy room while music is playing – even if the messages are up-lifting. Unfortunately, it seems that even in a positive environment with

positive messages, suspicion and fear may still arise as a result of the manipulation many religious trauma survivors experienced in their praise and worship services.

However, music therapy may indeed prove to be a promising therapeutic method if there is awareness of this specific trauma type, and if special care is taken in how the music is being used by the therapist - perhaps coming up with creative ways to help change associations to music that has been experienced as threatening, and creating safe spaces to experience all types of music with full acceptance and support for the emotional responses that may arise. There could be a potential in music therapy practice to use methods such as music listening, songwriting, improvisation, music creation, and an intertwining of various art forms to treat those struggling with trauma and their fundamentalist religious pasts. It is possible, of course that if music in religious experiences has proven to be challenging for some people, music therapy might not be suitable, however, using music therapy tailored to this kind of treatment could produce significant results and with more research I hope to provide evidence of its validity.

As a future direction, it would be fruitful to examine whether the use of music could help people to create new associations to religious traumas and symbols that trigger them. Could music therapy offer a means to use music as a vehicle to help clients regain agency, and give them a sense of autonomy? Can music be used to help people find a place inside of themselves where they can feel safe? Can it be used to help religious trauma survivors experience beauty and unexplainable joy, perhaps even the world, with no religious associations, baggage or fear? Can music be a new lens? Music therapy has been used in similar ways before, in helping people connect with their emotions, but there has not been a focus on using music therapy specifically in considering the unique struggles and challenges of those who have religious trauma. Especially in the context of praise and worship services where music has played a role in causing harm.

Additional future directions for this research could be to look more closely in collaboration with current worship leaders about the way they use music in their services and how better care and consideration could be taken for the members of the congregation during and after experiencing such intense states of emotion. Special care needs to be taken especially when the themes in the services revolve around the worthlessness and sinfulness of humanity. In general, calling into question how music is used in groups of people who are gathering for a

specific purpose and the responsibility of how people's emotions are so easily manipulated in those contexts; groups of people gathering together where music is being used has great influence on identity, feelings of belonging, providing a means of emotional processing, and creating powerful feelings of purpose. Further awareness and research is needed in this area.

The oppressive practices, inequality, and disempowerment that exist in many religious environments (whether intentionally or not) needs to be exposed and resolved. Seberg (2020) explained that "researchers cannot act neutrally through their works" once oppression has been exposed; "the researchers will either confirm or challenge the already established ideas within the academic institutions. And if the researcher does not look for inequities, the researcher actively maintains potential inequities" (p. 25). Therefore, I believe that taking advantage of my critical ethnographical standpoint has been beneficial, responsible, and necessary.

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Attachments

Attachment #1

Interview Consent Form

Research Project Title: *Religious Trauma and the Role of Music*

Research Investigator: Megan Kovacs

Research participant's name:

I am very thankful for your participation in this project, and part of the process is to inform you of the ethical procedures involved and to ensure that I have explicit consent from you to be interviewed. I will also inform you of how the information from your interview will be used. This form is to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation.

I am providing you with some information that I would like you to read through and sign to certify that you approve.

- The interview will be audio recorded and a written transcript will be produced
- All quotes will be sent to you for approval and accuracy
- The transcript of the interview will be analyzed by myself, as the research investigator
- Access to the interview in all forms will be limited to myself, Megan Kovacs
- Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- The actual recording will be deleted by June 30, 2023.
- Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval
- If you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any time, and all interview data will be immediately deleted

Signature of research participant:

Date:

Signature of researcher:

Date:

Attachment #2**Interview Guide*****Religious Trauma and the Role of Music***

Explain who I am and what I am researching. Provide information about the recording of the interview, how long I will keep it for and what the information will be used for. Ask if they have any questions before we begin.

How did you experience your involvement in your religion?

Are you still involved, and if not can you explain why?

Do you feel different now that you are no longer a part of that religion? And if so, how? What has changed?

What is the role of music in your life? What is your relationship to music?

How did you experience the music in your church?

Do you have any specific feelings or memories attached to the music or the worship sessions that happened there? Could you explain in as much detail as you can some of those experiences?

Have you had peak experiences in any of the worship services? If so, could you try to explain some of the emotional and physical sensations you had?

In your opinion, what is the purpose of music in the church?

How do you feel now when you hear that music?

Do you ever feel that secular music can also make you feel those things?

Have you had peak experiences from listening to non-religious music? And if so, can you explain those?

Did those peak experiences bring associations to the ones you experienced in the worship services, and can you explain?

Can you explain some of the ways in which you experience your religious trauma? And do you ever feel like music can trigger any of those reactions?

My official questions are over now, but is there anything else you would like to discuss or ask about before we finish the interview?

Attachment #3



[Meldeskjema](#) / [Religious Trauma and the Role of Music](#) / Vurdering

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Referansenummer

441355

Vurderingstype

Standard

Dato

11.09.2023

Tittel

Religious Trauma and the Role of Music

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Norges musikkhøgskole / CREMAH - Senter for forskning i musikk og helse

Prosjektansvarlig

Marie Strand Skånland

Student

Megan Kovacs

Prosjektperiode

15.06.2022 - 01.10.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger

Alminnelige

Særlige

Lovlig grunnlag

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Uttrykkelig samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 01.10.2023.

[Meldeskjema](#) 

Kommentar

Data Protection Services has assessed the change to the duration of the project.

The period for processing personal data has been extended until 01.10.2023.

Meldeskjema

Referansenummer

441355

Hvilke personopplysninger skal du behandle?

- Navn (også ved signatur/samtykke)
- Adresse eller telefonnummer
- E-postadresse, IP-adresse eller annen nettidetifikator
- Lydopptak av personer
- Religion

Prosjektinformasjon

Tittel

Religious Trauma and the Role of Music

Sammendrag

I am researching the definition of religious trauma, the role of music in the church, and if there is a connection for ex-fundamentalists who claim to have trauma as a result of their religious associations.

Begrunn hvorfor det er nødvendig å behandle personopplysningene

I will have their names as they need to sign to give written confirmation that they want to participate. I also need their contact information so we can communicate with each other.

Prosjektbeskrivelse

[Prosjektbeskrivelsen, Master musikkterapi - Megan Kovacs.pdf](#)

Ekstern finansiering

Ikke utfyllt

Type prosjekt

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

Kontaktinformasjon, student

Megan Kovacs, kovacs.megan@gmail.com, tlf: 41392182

Behandlingsansvar

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Norges musikkhøgskole / CREMAH - Senter for forskning i musikk og helse

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Marie Strand Skånland, skanland@ansgarskolen.no, tlf: 92621384

Skal behandlingsansvaret deles med andre institusjoner (felles behandlingsansvarlige)?

Nei

Utvalg 1

Beskriv utvalget

This participant is an ex-fundamentalist Christian

Beskriv hvordan rekruttering eller trekking av utvalget skjer

Strategic recruitment using snowball method

Alder

30 - 70

Personopplysninger for utvalg 1

- Navn (også ved signatur/samtykke)
- Adresse eller telefonnummer
- E-postadresse, IP-adresse eller annen nettidentifikator
- Lydopptak av personer
- Religion

Hvordan samler du inn data fra utvalg 1?

Personlig intervju

Vedlegg

[Interview guide.pdf](#)

Grunnlag for å behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Samtykker pårørende eller verge på vegne av voksne personer som ikke kan samtykke selv?

Ja

Grunnlag for å behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger

Uttrykkelig samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

Redegjør for valget av behandlingsgrunnlag

Informasjon for utvalg 1

Informerer du utvalget om behandlingen av personopplysningene?

Ja

Hvordan?

Skriftlig informasjon (papir eller elektronisk)

Informasjonsskriv

[Consent Form.pdf](#)

Utvalg 2

Beskriv utvalget

This participant is an ex-fundamentalist Christian

Beskriv hvordan rekruttering eller trekking av utvalget skjer

Strategic recruitment using snowball method

Alder

30 - 70

Personopplysninger for utvalg 2

- Navn (også ved signatur/samtykke)
- Adresse eller telefonnummer
- E-postadresse, IP-adresse eller annen nettidifikator
- Lydopptak av personer
- Religion

Hvordan samler du inn data fra utvalg 2?

Personlig intervju

Vedlegg

[Interview guide.pdf](#)

Grunnlag for å behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Grunnlag for å behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger

Uttrykkelig samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

Redegjør for valget av behandlingsgrunnlag

Informasjon for utvalg 2

Informerer du utvalget om behandlingen av personopplysningene?

Ja

Hvordan?

Skriftlig informasjon (papir eller elektronisk)

Informasjonsskriv

[Consent Form.pdf](#)

Utvalg 3

Beskriv utvalget

This participant is an ex-fundamentalist Christian.

Beskriv hvordan rekruttering eller trekking av utvalget skjer

Strategic recruitment using snowball method

Alder

30 - 70

Personopplysninger for utvalg 3

- Navn (også ved signatur/samtykke)
- Adresse eller telefonnummer
- E-postadresse, IP-adresse eller annen nettidifikator
- Lydopptak av personer
- Religion

Hvordan samler du inn data fra utvalg 3?

Personlig intervju

Vedlegg

[Interview guide.pdf](#)

Grunnlag for å behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Grunnlag for å behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger

Uttrykkelig samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

Redegjør for valget av behandlingsgrunnlag

Informasjon for utvalg 3

Informerer du utvalget om behandlingen av personopplysningene?

Ja

Hvordan?

Skriftlig informasjon (papir eller elektronisk)

Informasjonsskriv

[Consent Form.pdf](#)

Tredjepersoner

Skal du behandle personopplysninger om tredjepersoner?

Nei

Dokumentasjon

Hvordan dokumenteres samtykkene?

- Elektronisk (e-post, e-skjema, digital signatur)

Hvordan kan samtykket trekkes tilbake?

They can withdraw it by contacting me.

Hvordan kan de registrerte få innsyn, rettet eller slettet personopplysninger om seg selv?

They can contact me.

Totalt antall registrerte i prosjektet

1-99

Tillatelser

Skal du innhente følgende godkjenninger eller tillatelser for prosjektet?

Ikke utfyllt

Behandling

Hvor behandles personopplysningene?

- Maskinvare tilhørende behandlingsansvarlig institusjon
- Ekstern tjeneste eller nettverk (databehandler)
- Private enheter

Hvem behandler/har tilgang til personopplysningene?

- Student (studentprosjekt)
- Databehandler

Hvilken databehandler har tilgang til personopplysningene?

Nettskjema diktafon

Tilgjengeliggjøres personopplysningene utenfor EU/EØS til en tredjestat eller internasjonal organisasjon?

Nei

Sikkerhet

Oppbevares personopplysningene atskilt fra øvrige data (koblingsnøkkel)?

Ja

Hvilke tekniske og fysiske tiltak sikrer personopplysningene?

- Personopplysningene anonymiseres fortløpende
- Adgangsbegrensning