

CI

Chapter 1

Crystallizing the relationship between adolescents, music, and emotions

Katrina McFerran

CI.S1 Introduction

CI.P1 The topic of music, adolescents, and emotions is one that excites many researchers, practitioners, and lay persons. We all relate to the connection between these three complex and interwoven facets of life. The point at which they intersect is almost unbearably interesting and an increasing amount of scholarship has been focused there. In the following chapters, we offer six different perspectives on this intersection with contributions from music therapists and music psychologists. These views are not easy to integrate, since music psychologists typically focus on the influence of music on emotions, while music therapists tend to prioritize the emotional experience of individuals in various musical conditions. Therefore, in this chapter I will attempt to honour these diverse perspectives using the lens of crystallization, which illuminates the topic from different angles in a way that hopefully highlights points of connection as well as divergence.

CI.S2 What is crystallization?

CI.P2 The scholarship on adolescents, music, and emotions demands an openness to different perspectives on the relationship between music and emotions, since the creators of knowledge draw variously on music practices, laboratory-based research, and theorizing about what they claim to know. I have chosen to employ the notion of ‘crystallization’ as a frame for this endeavour, inspired by how it has been used in qualitative research to capture the multiple and slippery ways in which knowledge is constructed from a variety of angles (Ellingson, 2017). Crystallization emphasizes the varied perspectives of writers and researchers who use different methods and allow for multiple meanings rather than seeking to integrate different ideas into simplistic and singular truths. According to Laurel Richardson (2000), who originally coined the term, ‘the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach’ (p. 234). This seems very appropriate for representing the infinite variety of ways we can understand adolescents, music, and emotions.

Cl.S3 **Why crystallization?**

Cl.P3 The notion of crystallization allows me to explore the rich world of adolescents and their emotions without trying to simplify or generalize from one teenager's experience to another's. In my own experience of working with young people, the unique and complex circumstances in which each is embedded has an enormous influence on the ways they are willing and able to use music. Whether they are living at home, or in foster care; whether they are older adolescents about to become independent, or younger teenagers who still have years in their family home; whether they have high- or low-level intellectual abilities; their gender; their sexual identifications—all of these things interact with how each chooses to use music in relation to their emotions. From my perspective, young people's musical preferences and uses in relation to emotions can only be understood at the intersection of all these 'variables'. In the following six chapters, each author presents a particular perspective on this relationship, and my role is to propose a way of seeing that allows for them all. As Richardson (2000) says, 'Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know' (p. 934).

Cl.S4 **What do we think we know about music, adolescents, and emotions?**

Cl.P4 When asked, many adolescents will passionately describe the ways they use music to match and meet their emotions to make them feel better (McFerran and Saarikallio, 2013). A range of studies have also shown that this connection is intensified when young people are struggling emotionally (McFerran et al., 2016) and, indeed, the same has been shown for adults (Saarikallio, 2011). These adolescent accounts affirm what appears obvious to most of us who have experienced adolescence and who observe adolescents. However, what we mean by emotions is vast and diverse, as the six chapters show, since authors variously describe dealing with complex emotions related to aggression (Chapter 2), violence (Chapter 7), and depression (Chapter 5), both in music therapy and independently, as well as using strategies such as immersing in music (Chapter 3) and regulating affect with music (Chapter 6). As Chin describes in Chapter 4, this vast terrain leads to the need for complex and clearly rationalized research approaches and Chin's elegant and systematic suggestions canvas many possibilities that bear consideration by researchers in the future.

Cl.S5 **Resisting dichotomies: continuums of understanding**

Cl.P5 The use of a continuum can be valuable for resisting dichotomous understandings (Ellingson, 2011) and the continuum of wellbeing used in Table 1.1 attempts to illuminate a territory that we all traverse over the course of our lives, many times. It moves beyond boxing young people into being healthy or unhealthy, mentally well or mentally ill; this is an avoidance that is particularly important to young people who often fear that one stage

Cl.T1

Table 1.1. Emotional uses of music described in the literature presented across a wellbeing continuum

Distressed	Pessimistic	Optimistic	Flourishing
Isolating	Conforming	Rebelling	Connecting
Alienating	Withdrawing	Modelling	Inspiring
Triggering	Negatively comparing	Diverting	Entertaining
Ruminating	Escaping	Improving	Enhancing
Intensifying	Avoiding	Modifying	Sensation-seeking
Worsening	Immersing	Reappraising	Relaxing
Venting	Maintaining	Regulating	Energizing
	Comforting	Calming	
		Reviving	

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of their life will somehow define how they will be forever. I have learned from experience that binary notions restrict ways of seeing and describing, as in my previous depiction of healthy and unhealthy ways of using music (Saarikallio et al., 2015). Although we used this framework as a way of drawing attention to the potentially harmful ways that young people sometimes use music, this strategy was ultimately unsatisfying because readers would tend to focus on one or the other. In addition, a binary does not adequately convey the multifaceted ways that young people use the same music for different emotional purposes and outcomes on different days and in different states. I hope that continuums allow for a more nuanced range of possibilities.

Cl.S6

Emotional states

Cl.P6

In this handbook we ask the reader to accept that the pairing of music and emotions is natural and, to a certain degree, unavoidable. Much has been written about the existence and nature of the relationship (for example Bunt and Pavlicevic, 2001; Juslin, 2009; Pellitteri, 2009; Sloboda and O’Neill, 2001) and a vast range of sources are referenced by the authors in this text. Based on this foundational scholarship, the positive potential inherent in the relationship between music and emotion is assumed by our authors. At our request, they have taken this opportunity to tackle some of the more complex uses of music for emotional purposes, from the perspective of therapists, psychologists, and researchers. It is important to note that our emphasis on depression, aggression, and violence does not suggest that we find this more prevalent than positive uses of music for relaxation, affirmation, and connection. Rather, we are choosing to explore less common uses which need to be better understood in order to ensure that young people are not naïve in their reliance on music for wellbeing, a phenomenon that we have discovered when collaborating with young people (McFerran and Saarikallio, 2013). The power of music can certainly be used in many emotional directions, particularly by those who are



struggling with depression and other challenging life events and conditions, and a review of literature on adolescence, music, and depression shows this has been investigated from a number of angles (McFerran et al., 2016). One way of understanding the variety of ways in which young people use music is across a wellbeing continuum, as young people move between distress, pessimism, optimism, and flourishing. My conceptualization of emotions referenced in the literature linking music and adolescents used this continuum to map no fewer than 31 references to emotional uses in only 23 articles (16 music psychology/7 music therapy), all of which may be experienced by any single adolescent at a different moment in their life, although some may find themselves more frequently in one state of being and using (see Table 1.1).

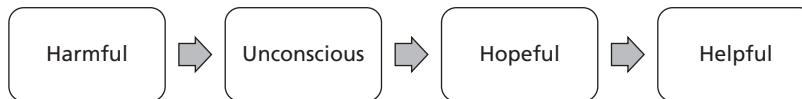
Cl.P7 To illustrate, when discussing helpful and unhelpful uses of music with young people, I have often heard stories that sound like the following.

Cl.P8 *Oh, this is my absolute favourite song. I listen to it all the time. I don't know what I would do without it. It used to be the song my boyfriend and I loved together, but then after we broke up, it really became my tragedy song. I would listen to it and cry and cry. At the same time, I went into a really deep depression that was related to a lot of things that had been going on in my life both then and when I was young. So, I really did listen to it a lot and in lots of ways. I was often using it to bring up my own sadness and keep the connection with that. But since we started talking about helpful ways of using music, I've managed to change up the way this song makes me feel, and it has taken on new meanings, yet again. Now I use it as a way of thinking about how strong I am for having survived that break up and all the sadness at the same time. Now it's become like a survival anthem for me and I listen to it to remind myself that I can handle anything. It doesn't make me cry anymore, but it reminds me that I have cried and survived.*

Cl.P9 This vignette explains why binaries do not work in understanding the intersection between adolescents, music, and emotions. It shows how young people come to rely on music, and how their passionate commitment to certain songs and genres of music can flexibly move from one association (being a love song), to another (a break-up song), and another (a song of triumph). This young woman's experiences challenge a range of simplistic binary understandings, the most common of which is the assumption that certain music (either genre or song) has a predictable effect on the emotions of young people and that the musical qualities of the song reliably elicit a consistent response.

Cl.S7 **Emotional intentions**

Cl.P10 The assumption that certain types of music have a particular effect has been the basis of many studies about the relationship between adolescents, music, and emotions. Although problematic, it is conveniently well-matched with quality standards in objectivist research that rely on controlling variables. In these models, playing a particular type of music and then analysing young people's reactions to it makes logical sense, based on the assumption that if it is the qualities of the music causing the emotion, it would be the same on a different day. While we may learn a great deal from examining young people's emotional reactions to a piece of music, this approach fails to acknowledge the emotional intentions



Cl.F1 **Fig. 1.1** Continuum of music use.

and agency that young people frequently refer to in describing their reactions of music. I believe this is a critical dimension to understanding the intersection between adolescents, music, and emotions, and without it young people are dangerously relegated to a role as passive recipient rather than active agent. As long as we focus on a passive relationship with music, we fail to encourage the more powerful potential that music can have in relation to emotional wellbeing. Music can be used with intention, and if that intention is brought into consciousness, it can be a source of emotional strength. However, if it is used unconsciously during difficult times, music can equally serve to reinforce negative emotional states rather than be used to regulate them. Another vignette captures this assumption in the words of a young person.

Cl.P11 *My best friend eventually just deleted the song off my phone. I was so angry at him that I didn't talk to him for two days, and if it was anyone else, I would have literally killed them. But he knows me really well, and he's been there for me through all of this crap, and so I had to forgive him. And actually, he was right. I thought that listening to that song over and over was going to make me feel better, but it didn't. It just made me feel worse and worse, but somehow, I didn't notice it. I kept hoping that if I listened enough times, and cathartically expressed my feelings, then I would pass through them and feel better in the end. But it just didn't work like that. I did put the song back on my phone in the end. But now I'm more conscious of what I'm doing with it.*

Cl.P12 Given the interaction between emotional states and emotional intentions, a different continuum might focus on whether music use is helpful, hopeful, unconscious, or harmful (Fig. 1.1).

Cl.P13 Once again, this does not suggest that any particular adolescent should be pigeonholed into only one of these intentions, or even that a particular song might be used to fulfil only one of these emotional functions. Embedded in the proposed continuum is an idea that young people move fluidly between these intentions, and that raising their consciousness about their (often unexpressed) intentions might have benefits for their wellbeing. By acknowledging varying intentions that young people have when using music for emotional work, we might encourage more helpful uses of music and raise the consciousness of young people about how they use music to cope with different experiences in their lives.

Cl.S8 **Emotions in context**

Cl.P14 Both the emotional states we are in and our intentions (conscious or not) for using music occur *in situ*, and sensitivity to that context adds a further layer of depth to the intersection between adolescents, emotions, and music. It is not enough to focus only on intrapersonal

experience and motivations, since these are profoundly influenced by the place where they occur and how much emotion is allowed in that space by the people who control it.

CL.P15 Schools are the sites where many young people spend the greatest amount of their time and in this context the combination of music and emotions can be considered problematic. This might be the case when music teachers are focused on the kinds of neoliberal goals that lead to the development and testing of musical skills, with less attention being paid to the expressive potentials of music (McFerran et al., 2018). When emotions are allowed or encouraged in the school context it can be quite uncomfortable for the adult players, since our emotional worlds can be quite loud when sounded out. Whether it is joyful celebration or cathartic expression of rage, the noise produced is hard to ignore, both within the room and beyond its walls, which can challenge the school establishment.

CL.P16 Emotions have more place in the social lives of young people, but there is no less complexity in the impact of their expression. When alone, uses of music for emotional work are well-enough captured in Table 1.1 and undoubtedly intersect with the expression of identity, as discussed in the following section of this handbook. When connecting with others, the differences between online and face-to-face expression of emotion are significant, as explored in the final section of the handbook. In fact, it is difficult to extract emotions from identity and relationships in the context of everyday life since they are entwined and embedded.

CL.P17 However, emotions come to the fore in some contexts where we meet young people, particularly when struggling with emotion has become a central focus of their lives. Hospital contexts are one example of this situation, whether the setting is for mental or physical illness. Here, young people may well be *distressed* and *pessimistic*, but are often attempting to use music in *helpful* or *hopeful* ways, accessing it as a resource for coping under difficult circumstances. The best shape for those intentions is perceived quite differently by music therapists and psychologists, according to a critical review of the literature (McFerran, 2016).

CL.P18 Psychologists appear to focus young people's attempts at using music for controlling, regulating, and stabilizing their emotions. The language used in the literature reveals a consistent orientation to cognitively controlled uses of music in order to manage difficult emotions and emphasize positive ones. Music therapists offer a different emphasis, including management but also focusing on expressing and becoming aware of emotions, often by the music therapist holding and containing volatile and intense emotions during shared musical experiences (as seen throughout chapters in this handbook). This difference may be partially mediated by the medium used by these different professionals. While music therapists tend to use music and creative processes as the means of connection, psychologists are more likely to use words and cognitive processes as a way of working with the emotional content. This has a significant impact on the nature of the therapeutic encounter, as the following vignette illustrates.

CL.P19 *Sarah was admitted to an acute mental health unit following a period of severe paranoia and delusion. When the music therapist first met her on the ward she undertook an assessment of Sarah's current uses of music to identify both her preferred music and her ways of using that music to make herself feel better or worse. During this time, Sarah made a number of lavish statements about her love of music and her passionate commitment to it, but was unable to focus on answering questions about whether she often felt worse after listening repeatedly to certain songs, or whether she used music to isolate herself from others, which seemed likely. Having completed the assessment, the music therapist then moved in to a less cognitive and more creative process, inviting Sarah to choose an instrument and to join her in a therapeutic improvisation. Sarah's choice of the xylophone afforded her a number of melodic opportunities to express her emotions, and she began to play timidly on the chime bars, staying within a small number of tones and repeating her initial patterns. The music therapist began to accompany her, matching her small range and offering the containment that she seemed to be seeking. From that basis, Sarah began to attempt a more expressive range of notes and striking patterns, while the music therapist provided the stable base from which she could explore and return. After the improvisation finished, Sarah described what it felt like to be given permission to explore her emotions and how feeling safe and held had allowed her to be more honest about how she was really feeling.*

CL.P20 Different contexts afford different uses of music for emotional work, as do different professionals and adults involved in the lives of young people. While emotional control might be the priority for some, freedom of emotional expression may be more of a focus for others. This reflects not only the professional occupations of those surrounding the young person, but also their own capacity to tolerate and be with difficult emotions. Perhaps most importantly, the context has an enormous influence over what is considered to be acceptable and helpful, with more hierarchical structures tending to emphasize self-control where creative contexts might actually value greater connection with emotions of all kinds. Music therapists sometimes attempt to bridge the potentials of both these approaches, by balancing expressivity with containment, and experience with cognitive processing. Ultimately, however, it is the young person who decides when, where, how much, and how often they will use music for emotional work, and in what ways.

CL.S9 **Forms of musicking**

CL.P21 Christopher Small (1998) introduced the verb 'musicking' into academic music discourse as a way of emphasizing the action qualities of music, rather than focusing on music as an object—be it a recording or a score. This kind of emphasis is relevant to a discussion about adolescents, music, and emotions since different ways of musicking afford different potentials for emotional work. To feel that one's emotions are reflected in the music is not the same as expressing one's emotions through music making. Depending on the young person's emotional state, intentions, and context, the same form of musicking can be experienced very differently, as the following vignette highlights.

CL.P22 *Stefan had a talent for music and was able to recall and play long pieces of repertoire after hearing them only once. He also had Asperger's Syndrome. When he attended piano lessons, Stefan often spent a lot of time playing and the school staff agreed that it made a difference to his day when he had the opportunity to spend*

some time at the piano; he was calmer and less likely to get over-stimulated in class. Some of the school team began to wonder whether playing the piano could become even more meaningful and questioned whether it might be valuable to try and connect with him during his music making, rather than simply relying on it to make him feel more relaxed. His piano teacher began to participate with Stefan when he was playing the piano, gently interrupting his playing with playful strikes at the opposite end of the keyboard to get his attention. Initially, Stefan was distressed by the interruptions, but over a number of weeks of gentle offers by his teacher, he began to look for them, turning towards his teacher when he was playing, as if to invite him to play. Over time, the two pianists began to improvise quite playfully on the keyboard, sometimes spending more than five minutes throwing ideas back and forth and interacting together. The content and the experience became emotionally meaningful for both of them, whereas previously it had felt void of emotional content and fixated on the structural or performative dimensions. Staff also reported that Stefan seemed more open to communication in the classroom and would now look to be included in some activities, rather than always distancing himself from group work.

Cl.P23 The binary distinction between playing and listening is challenged by this vignette. It illustrates how it is possible to be emotionally distant as well as emotionally engaged when making music. Equally, it is possible to have strong emotional connections with recorded music, and for those emotions to be shared. For example, studies of metal music have consistently shown that listening is a powerful way to connect to intense emotions and that feeling a part of a worldwide community of fans also enhances a sense of connectedness and feeling understood (Snell and Hodgetts, 2007). It is therefore too simple to say that the distinction in emotional affordances is purely related to the different forms of musicking. It is more closely related to young people's abilities to appropriate music, which is impacted by cultural expectations and opportunities (DeNora, 2006).

Cl.P24 However, different forms of musicking can be suggested by adult professionals to encourage young people to discover new ways of using music in relation to their emotions. Listening to music with young people readily promotes reflection on emotional content for example. Writing songs and song lyrics with young people encourages the articulation of different emotions and feelings and gives them a narrative and culturally appropriate context for expression. Improvising on instruments avoids any existing connotations that might be associated with songs or genres and allows for a more pure and novel expression and discovery of emotions that might be difficult to uncover through other forms of musicking. This is equally true in groups as it is in individual work, as the following vignette illustrates.

Cl.P25 *Giovanni struck the bass drum with a huge thump that made some of the other group members jump in their seats. The therapist responded with an accelerating beat on the snare drum and two of the other group members began to strum their electric guitars quickly as they moved their hand up and down the frets, creating wild and intense soundscapes. One of the young women began to call into the microphone in screamo style, perhaps offering words, although they were indecipherable. The improvisation climaxed swiftly and then settled back into a groove, then climaxed again, this time for longer, before settling back down to almost silence. Angela maintained a steady bass guitar ostinato throughout, seemingly untouched by the sounds around her. She then maintained her steady crotchet repeating note for a further minute before ceasing and bringing the improvisation to a close. After some silence, the music therapist asked for reflections from the bereaved young*

people who were members of the group. 'It felt great to express that rage' said one young man. 'You really rocked that drum kit!' said another. 'Yeah, I feel better after that', replied one more group member, which made everyone laugh. 'Better, huh?' the therapist responded, 'What was it that made you feel better—being connected, being heard, expressing a particular emotion?' 'I dunno ... ' they all reply.

Cl.P26 This vignette, and the therapist's response, show how it is possible to share emotions with others through music in ways that are non-specific, even to the person who is playing them. And yet, distressed young people repeatedly report that they appreciate the opportunities for creative expression in a safe context that allows for emotional work without letting it get out of control (McFerran, 2011). This has also been shown to occur when using live singing of people's preferred songs, although this often relates to emotions that could more easily be predicted in advance, because the individual has an association with the song (Bibb and McFerran, 2018). The impact of music on other group members is less predictable though, and a research study of using songs in groups with mental health consumers clearly shows that it is common for participants to be triggered emotionally by other people's choices. This obviously requires careful therapeutic handling, especially within the mental health context, but in many ways provides further opportunities for emotional processing in the hands of a therapist.

Cl.S10 **Why is it important?**

Cl.S11 **Increased access to music**

Cl.P27 There has been an extraordinary increase in the amount of access young people have to music since the introduction of the Internet and related music apps and streaming services. Studies have shown that young people are taking full advantage of this opportunity and are frequently listening while multitasking with games, using social media, and while studying (Krause et al., 2015). Although there is reason to be concerned about the impact of new technologies, it is also an opportunity to significantly enhance the ways that young people can use music in their everyday lives to promote emotional wellbeing. Since the interaction between emotions and music is so complex, this is no simple task and both music therapists and music psychologists, along with our health professional colleagues, have a role to play in ensuring that music is used to its full potential.

Cl.P28 Our studies have shown that young people who are the most distressed are the least able to use music to feel better (Garrido et al., 2017; McFerran et al., 2014). Instead, they are more likely to use music to intensify their emotional state and to increase their sense of emotional isolation (Garrido and Schubert, 2015). This is a natural consequence of the understanding that music and emotions intersect at the axes of states, intentions, contexts, and forms of musicking. A distressed state, combined with an unconsciously ruminative intention that occurs in the context of being isolated and bullied might easily deepen a young person's sense of emotional distress. However, a change in any of these conditions can lead readily to a positive change. For example, moving from being distressed to optimistic can lead to a more helpful choice of musicking, where the young

person might choose to participate with others in sharing music rather than isolating themselves with their music. The possibilities are endless, but what is critical is that young people understand the importance of their own agency in benefiting from the emotional power of music, or they will tend to assume that the music will help them with no effort and no positive intention, which is not always the case. This public health message is a critical one for music therapists and others to disseminate.

Cl.S12 **Increased awareness of mental illness**

Cl.P29 Studies continue to suggest that young people are increasingly likely be struggling with mental illness and associated emotional challenges by comparison to previous decades (Rickwood et al., 2014). Whether this is due to increased acknowledgement, increased diagnosis, or increased pressures on young people is a theoretical question. However, the need for preventative and early intervention strategies is clear and music is an obvious strategy for this development.

Cl.P30 More and more online forums and apps are being developed that help young people to use music as a way to work with their emotions when they are struggling. Some of these are mentioned in the Connectedness section of this handbook (see Chapter 21), and many more are emerging around the globe. If developers provide information about how to use music effectively and encourage young people to recognize the emotional affordances of music, the potentials are enormous. On the other hand, if developers reinforce a sense of passive dependence on music as a pill that will fix problems, apps could be problematic and exacerbate uses of music that reduce emotional wellbeing instead of enhancing it.

Cl.S13 **Need for non-pharmaceutical prevention**

Cl.P31 The Recovery movement, which acknowledges the failure of psychotropic drugs to cure mental illness, has resulted in a greater call for non-pharmacological interventions, potentially combined with moderate amounts of medications (Gates et al., 2015). Mental health consumers have expressed a desire to have more control of their own wellness–illness trajectories, and often report that music is an engaging and helpful medium (Solli, 2015). Since emotions are often a barrier and an enabler for more successful personal and social experiences, and pharmaceuticals have not been able to support emotional recovery, it seems likely that music may have a role to play as an accessible and engaging alternative.

Cl.S14 **Conclusion**

Cl.P32 Crystallization seems to be a more useful lens for understanding the intersection between adolescents, music, and emotions than more reductive strategies such as triangulation (Richardson, 2000). Although researchers strive to find simple and elegant solutions to problems, this particular combination of forces may not be amenable. Embracing and celebrating the complexity of the many ways that young people can use music for emotional wellbeing may be the most graceful solution. It is certainly true that avoiding binary assumptions about how music works, when it works, what kind of musicking works, and

where it works will be critical to the achievement of positive outcomes by individuals and groups.

CL.P33 Despite this complexity, it is an exciting time for posing musical solutions to the pressing challenges facing our youth and our society who are experiencing increasing levels of depression and anxiety. Never before has it been possible to access such diverse forms of music and to communicate so widely with young people about the potentials of music via online and technological mediums. Music has potential to be used for personal and public health outcomes where emotional dimensions are implicated, and the chapters in this handbook speak to many solutions, as well as raising still further questions for researchers to pursue.

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