Independent music-making during Covid-19 and mental health

Erin Lewis

Abstract
In 2020, when the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic surfaced in the United States, physical distancing and quarantine practices terminated group music rehearsals, such as choirs and bands. This study explores the experiences of individuals who created music independently during the pandemic using a phenomenological approach. Using the qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews, 14 participants who sang or played instruments independently during Covid-19 shared their experiences on music creation’s impact on their mental health. Two themes emerged from the data: music creation for comfort and mood management. It is important to understand how music creation can affect the mental health of individuals.

Keywords
music, mental health, Covid-19

Online birthday parties. Online social hours. Online concerts? With coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) presenting challenges of quarantining, physical distancing, masks, and business shut-downs, many people have turned to hosting virtual music shows, creating videos to share on social media, or simply entertaining themselves at home by making music (Ndibisi, 2020). The impact of physical distancing has led to more reports of anxiety and depression numbers, causing individuals to seek out ways to cope with social disconnection and new environmental stressors (Kwong et al., 2021). Creating provides a sense of order and control, along with a way for people who feel more confined to their homes to seek the comfort and creative outlet the arts can provide (Langley & Coutts, 2020). While technology has been a supportive alternative to being physically present, Saltzman et al. (2020) reported individuals who struggled with anxiety and depression found technology as a helpful solution. However, technology did not replace being physically present with people.
Music is known for helping individuals to build and maintain a sense of community. During the pandemic, people have participated in apartment sing-alongs, created, and watched YouTube parody videos, and others decided to learn a new instrument (Langley & Coutts, 2020). Corvo and De Caro (2020) note that singing is an effective coping strategy for stress and loneliness and provides a source of social connection. The proposed study explores the role of independent music-making in supporting mental health and well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic. Unfortunately for individuals who participate in performance-based group ensembles, such as choirs or bands, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020a) recommended suspending in-person music performances of singing or playing wind instruments. While some performance groups utilized online video chat as a rehearsal facilitation method, many groups stopped meeting, leaving group members to make music at home on their own (Crimmins, 2020).

The connections between the love of music and personal well-being are many and complex. While the experience of listening to music for pleasure may be sufficient for some, the art of creating music is where others find the most enjoyment. People who need to express themselves creatively found new ways during the pandemic.

Public health emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, present many challenges to society regarding the health and well-being of individuals and communities. Mental health has been a substantial concern during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kwong et al., 2021). This article explores the impact of creating music during Covid-19 on individuals’ mental health. The effect of stress on health and well-being varies for everyone. In addition, how individuals react to stressors differs depending on the person’s ability to cope with stress and other environmental factors. With group ensembles missing the opportunity to meet and rehearse, the stopping of public music performances, and a pandemic leaving society removed from work, friends, and family, people have had to find ways to address symptoms of depression and anxiety resulting from the pandemic stressors.

**Literature review**

**Mental health during Covid-19**

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a significant cause of many mental health concerns, particularly depression and anxiety. According to the World Health Organization, (2022) good mental health is a “state of well-being in which every individual can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to her or his community” (para. 1). In a longitudinal study examining mental health before and during Covid-19, researchers found that by April 2020, mental health had worsened compared with pre-Covid results (Pierce et al., 2020).

Kwong et al. (2021) found that depression rates during the pandemic were comparable with pre-pandemic data, and anxiety levels in study participants nearly doubled from 13% to 24%. In addition, accidental drug overdoses increased beginning May of 2020, yet suicide rates decreased (CDC, 2020b; Nissen, 2021). Nissen (2021) notes that the decrease in suicide rates could be related to delayed death investigations in addition to not knowing if an overdose is accidental or intentional. Referrals for mental health services were lower during the pandemic, likely due to a reduction in healthcare staff (Niedzwiedz et al., 2021). Covid-19 has exemplified mental health concerns for those with pre-existing conditions, anxiety, depression, stress, and other mental health conditions, but there is also a concern for the general population (Salari et al., 2020).
Creating music can occur in a variety of ways. Independent music-making can be defined as an everyday person (not represented on a music label) actively engaging in the music creation process, including singing, playing an instrument, and dancing (Turino, 2008). Engaging in creating music provides individuals with an outlet for emotional connection, expression, management, and release, in addition to evoking positive emotions and providing a way to relax (Perkins et al., 2020). Koehler and Neubauer (2020) found that participants who actively engaged in making music on a given day felt greater satisfaction and happier than on days they did not. However, there is limited information about the effect of active participation in music-making on well-being.

The connections of music to the well-being of humans are multiple, complex, and subjective. In a study of nursing home patients who participated in making music, patients experienced a reduction in antipsychotic medications compared with those who did not make music (Daykin et al., 2018). Music is associated with therapeutic benefits for individuals enduring pain, depression, and loneliness by providing a source of comfort. Bilgiç and Acaroğlu (2017) found that chemotherapy patients who listened to music during treatment not only experienced less pain, but their overall comfort level improved. A meta-analysis conducted by Tang et al. (2020) found that patients who experienced symptoms of depression and listened to music noted a substantial reduction in symptoms. In the Tang et al. (2020) study, the patients were not creating music; music was an external stimulus.

In addition to providing comfort to patients, music can also help with managing mood. Listening to music from various genres and styles evoked different emotions in study participants, including empowerment, peace, enjoyment, comfort, relaxation, and joy (Saarikallio et al., 2021). Music can also serve as a replacement for social interaction, thus reducing loneliness and helping to regulate an individual’s mood (Schäfer et al., 2020). Chang et al. (2021) studied the effect of music listening on undergraduate music majors and non-music majors. They found both groups of students experienced a positive impact on mood, although the music majors’ change in mood was more significant than that for the non-music majors.

Covid-19 restrictions have affected how individuals use music in their daily lives. Sachs et al. (2021) studied individuals from four different countries who used music during the Covid-19 lockdown to regulate their mood, including individuals experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. The social isolation caused by Covid-19 stay-at-home orders also altered how individuals engaged with music. Ziv and Hollander-Shabtai (2022) studied how Israeli individuals related to music during the Covid-19 lockdown, finding a strong positive correlation between individuals listening to music and their emotional response.

Despite the negative impact of Covid-19 on music-making practices and opportunities, a gap remains in the literature regarding how individuals used music to cope during this pandemic. Many studies focus on the benefits of music related to mental health, but none focus on the lived experiences of the people who are creating music, especially during a crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Bacior, 2020; Batt-Rawden & Tellnes, 2011; Cain et al., 2020; Juslin et al., 2014; Juslin & Sloboda, 2011). Using the phenomenological approach to explore and understand the narrated experiences of participants, we can better understand what it means to use music to cope with the pandemic. Van Manen (2016) writes that our knowledge becomes
limited based on our understanding of a subject when we study a phenomenon. Phenomenology theory is also concerned with how the participants’ lived experiences are communicated (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). This study posits using a phenomenological approach to explore the research question: What are the experiences of individuals who independently create music to cope with the challenges of Covid-19?

Method

The objective of this research was to explore the experiences of individuals who created music during the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact on mental health. A qualitative approach helped explore the phenomenon of individuals creating music during Covid-19 and understand what it means to use music creation as a coping strategy during a global pandemic. Because the pandemic is unique, a phenomenological approach helped explore individuals' perceptions of who created music during the pandemic. Therefore, this study will examine the experiences of people who made music at home. The term “experience,” according to Lindlof and Taylor (2019), is concerned with the participants’ “meaningful reflection and interpretation” (pp. 51–52). These experiences are reflective of the people who are living through the Covid-19 pandemic.

A Human Subjects Approval Board granted ethical permission to conduct this study. Participant recruitment occurred using convenience and snowball sampling based on the researcher’s network as a music educator. Snowball sampling was a critical strategy to move beyond the researcher’s network and avoid bias affecting the study. Individuals were required to be at least 18 years of age and were pre-screened to ensure they had created music during Covid-19.

The researcher developed an interview guide to investigate the research question of what are the experiences of individuals who independently make music to cope with the challenges of Covid-19. The interview guide contained nine questions and allowed participants to tell the researcher about their experiences with music. Additional questions included exploring what kind of music participants created, sharing their feelings while they created music, describing their music creation process from start to finish, and how it may have adapted from before the pandemic. The interview guide also encouraged participants to share the benefit of creating music on their mental health, what they do with the music they make, and additional information they wanted to share to help the researcher better understand their experiences. Time was provided for participants to ask the researcher questions. The first version of the interview guide was piloted with a class of doctoral students and five musicians who were the researcher’s colleagues. Upon receiving feedback from pilot participants, the interview guide was revised by omitting three questions, rewording two of the questions, and adding a question regarding if or how their creative process may differ from before the pandemic.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom to accommodate for Covid-19 social distancing guidelines. Interviews conducted by the researcher ranged in time from 30 to 45 min. Before the interview, the researcher emailed participants informed consent, which included information on the study participants were asked to sign, scan, and email the document back to the researcher before or during the scheduled Zoom meeting. During the interviews, the researcher clarified this was research exploring the relationship between music created during the pandemic and mental health. In addition, the researcher informed participants their information would remain confidential, along with their names and other identifying characteristics excluded from the transcript of interviews.

The researcher transcribed the interview data word-for-word, then performed line-by-line coding of the data and used axial coding to identify themes. The researcher read transcripts multiple times making thorough notes during the interview process.
Results

For this exploratory qualitative study, 14 interviews were conducted in March 2021. The researcher, former music educator, relied on her network to establish initial interviews. Using this network resulted in three female participants and 11 males ranging in age from 18 to 62, with participants residing in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Virginia, and New Jersey in the United States. Due to the pandemic, many individuals who typically attended school in Pennsylvania were in other locations. This study looked to explore experiences of individuals who created music during Covid-19; therefore, five possible participants who did not create music independently were excluded, resulting in more male than female participants. Many female musicians referred the researcher to a male relative, usually their spouse.

The participants represent a variety of backgrounds. One participant is a former music educator, another member of the US Army Reserves Band, and another participant holds a music technology degree. Three participants are undergraduate students who usually participate in choir or band. In addition, three participants are adults who participate in community choir or band; two participants are members of rock bands. Three participants shared they have played an instrument for enjoyment since childhood. The participants were all amateur musicians with a history of creating music before the pandemic.

Data collection ended upon the point of saturation. The saturation point occurred once the researcher identified similar properties in the data, new themes did not emerge from additional interviews, and the established themes were thoroughly developed (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Thematic analysis was performed by organizing the data into similar patterns to help focus meaning using a common theme (Nowell et al., 2017). Each piece of data was coded individually, and codes were revisited before coding further transcripts to help make meaning of the data. The data collection, transcription, coding, and thematic analysis revealed two themes: music creation for comfort and the use of music creation for mood regulation. To maintain confidentiality, the researcher randomly assigned participants a number.

Music creation for comfort

Each participant in this study reported creating music during the pandemic, and the experience was different for each participant. The pandemic offered several participants more time to learn a new instrument, invest financially in music creation, and refine songwriting skills. However, for Participant 10, who has been playing guitar since he was a young child, the pandemic altered the work–life balance; thus, created less time for the creation of music and increased the value of the time spent playing guitar, piano, singing, or recording:

It does give you a little bit of an escape from the day-to-day . . . It’s something you, um, you can kind of set your directions. You know, some nights I will sit down and say, I’m going to do this [meaning a task related to their work], and five minutes into it, it’s like, no, this [making music] is more fun. I’m gonna do something else. Uh, so you do have that degree of flexibility to kind of pursue what you like. (Participant 10)

Each of the 14 participants shared the Covid-19 lockdown altered how they or their children attended school, participated in work, or engaged with family commitments. These changes added an element of stress to their day. Each participant shared this complexity was challenging to deal with sometimes, especially when disconnected from loved ones or friends. For many, music filled in a gap and provided a sense of anticipation, as stated by Participant 5, an undergraduate college student who had enjoyed band and playing trombone:
It [music] almost can give you something to look forward to during the day. Like, you can be doing schoolwork, work-work, or anything, really, then you’re like, okay, once I’m done, I can go play music. I can have fun, and it just really gives you a sense of joy. (Participant 5)

The shift from in-person work and school to virtual work and school was a complex task each participant mentioned. Learning how to navigate the daily changes in this transition was also time-consuming, and for many participants, it resulted in greater feelings of stress and anxiety. Taking time from their daily tasks to create music was a tool that provided a welcome break from the daily grind, as mentioned by Participant 1:

I don’t have a lot of . . . free time to be doing things. So, I, I’ll have a kind of off day, or I’ll have a little bit of time, and I’ll think, all right, I kind of want to do something for just maybe a half an hour to take a break. So, it’s always something for when I have a little bit of time. It’s kind of the first thing I think of— I go grab my ukulele.

Eleven of the participants mentioned how difficult isolation was, as they usually enjoyed creating music with performing ensembles. No ensembles meant giving up weekly rehearsals that provided an opportunity to create music with peers and provided social and emotional connection to others. A few individuals mentioned this loss amplified feelings of sadness and depression during the pandemic and creating music delivered a sense of connection. One participant, a rock band drummer, noted they found comfort in creating music, as it was an essential piece of making connections:

I know I need other people. That’s just my vibe. I’m a drummer, and I need the rest of my band to be complete. It’s like you imagine, you have the coolest song ever that you started and then not be able to go anywhere with it. That has sucked during Covid, but I know when we can all play together again, it will be epic. That is comforting to think about, so I just keep working and practicing to be ready. (Participant 8)

Similarly, one male individual shared using free time was not something he did well, and playing his guitar provided a way to use downtime as comfort:

I, I, um, I would say creating music kind of levels me out. I mean, we have a lot of things going on at work, so it gives my brain a chance to not think about those things. I mean, if I’m really focused on what I’m doing, then everything else kind of gets pushed aside. And I guess maybe I feel a sense of relief when I when I’m playing, just because it gives me a mental break from everything else. (Participant 12)

Creating music is also a comforting way to be reflective, either through playing an instrument, singing, or writing song lyrics. One individual shared their experiences of how satisfying the opportunity of reflection was:

Therapeutic. I mean, in a, in a sense that sometimes it’s, it’s nice to kind of take some of the issues that are presented in my life for some of the personal challenges that I’ve, that I’ve faced in my past years, or even currently, and try to put them down into maybe not like a literal sense in terms of the lyrics, but almost, you know, more metaphorical. Um, and sometimes it’s, it’s nice to kind of revisit some of your old experiences, whether good or bad, and try to present them through your songwriting. And I think that, that, um, like I used the word therapeutic because it is for me, I think it’s just, it’s, it’s kind of a way to, to cope with some bad situations in the past or reflect, um, in a positive light on, on your better situations and emotions. (Participant 11)
The Covid-19 pandemic restrictions left many individuals limited on how they could spend time. One participant found themselves needing an enjoyable yet constructive way to spend their time:

... whenever I was just sitting at home, like, I was able to pick up the guitar and just play, and it really gave me something to kind of occupy my brain whenever I was just, like, sitting alone. I can only watch YouTube so much. I can only browse the internet so much, um, only video games so much. So, it’s like, you know, it, it gives you a nice kind of change of environment. It kind of can challenge, you know, it doesn’t make you feel like a couch potato. (Participant 11)

Ultimately, the participants each shared creating music served to fill in gaps of downtime, provided a way to feel less lonely during the lockdown, aided in stress relief, and provided joy during a challenging period. Participants 1 and 14 represented a consensus of what others said regarding music as a source of comfort:

... music is a big comfort for me, and I think it also, it just makes me happy to be able to, you know, like still be able to do some things with music. (Participant 1)

It’s [creating music] definitely an outlet. I know it’s definitely a way to relieve my stress, even just listening to music. (Participant 14)

Music creation for mood regulation

The participants in this study shared creating music provided an outlet for emotions and served as an opportunity to feel a sense of normalcy during abnormal times. Music serving as an outlet was especially true of individuals dealing with any sort of trauma, as shared by Participant 4:

... trauma and music are soulmates. Um, it is a way for people to express their traumas, and it’s also a way for, um, parts of the brain to be, in a sense, lit up. Um, we have a limbic system, which essentially is, is where memories are stored, and it’s nonverbal. It is where our emotions come from. And it is that, that very area, that music helps to kind of turn the light bulb on. And so when we can get that to become engaged and, and by helping a person talk about it while they’re experiencing mirror music, um, it helps to basically formulate thoughts and reasoning and processing with the person’s trauma. So that’s what I use it for. I mean, it is so helpful.

In addition, several participants noted with limited opportunity to engage in their usual fun activities, creating music became a priority to alleviate boredom and provide a sense of enjoyment or calm in their daily life. One individual shared their experiences creating music and the role it played regarding her mental health:

It (creating music) is more of an unwind at the end of the day, especially working a job that has nothing to do with music. Um, it can be stressful. So, I actually look forward to go practice, and it’s like part of my evening routine. I go practice for a couple hours. Um, so it’s definitely, I think it’s better for mental health during the pandemic. (Participant 2)

Participant 3 explained music is such an integral part of their life that going without creating music can negatively affect their mood:
I don’t know what I’d do without it. I mean, I can tell, uh, when I’ve gone without music . . . Today there are periods where I will go days without any music because my life’s moving so fast. I just don’t get to it. I don’t think about it. And I can tell, emotionally, that I’ve gone too long. Um, and all it takes is one song to help me feel better. (Participant 3)

Creating music can involve writing, singing, or playing, and listening to music, depending on the individual. Each participant shared listening to music was a part of the music creation experience. Participant 4 shared, “I find something that just hits me a certain way emotionally . . . then I might think a little bit about it after it resonates with me.” Participant 14 also shared listening to music was an important part of the creation process “I would have music playing in my ear during class just because it helped to regulate my mood.”

All the participants shared creating music elicited positive feelings and emotions, which is why they chose to do so. As previously noted, some participants turned to music creation as a fun activity. However, for others, it was more of an emotional experience:

It’s [creating music] very much a catharsis type of feeling. Um, you know. I mean, it’s kind of hard to explain, but . . . when you’re really sitting there, and an idea is kind of flowing . . . I feel like I have a great idea, so I better get my guitar out and plug it into my interface and hit record and see what happens . . . it’s very much, like I said, kind of a cathartic, in the moment, uh, type of feeling that, of course, it overall makes you feel good, but in a lot of ways it might be taking the feeling or the emotion that I’m feeling in that moment and really encapsulating it. (Participant 12)

The process of singing or playing an instrument also helped to regulate mood by sharing the emotions and feelings one may be experiencing, as expressed by one individual:

Creating music helps me, um, put my thoughts and feelings out there without necessarily sharing them, but just being able to get them outside of me is super helpful to my mental health . . . I mean, it’s, you know, it’s the same principle as, um, you know, talking to a therapist or, you know, just talking to someone if you’ve got something going on in, you know, not holding those things. (Participant 13)

Participant 6 explained prior to the pandemic, performing in public was a regular occurrence for most musicians. This type of performing often creates a sense of pressure to meet certain audience expectations. The pandemic provided a chance to slow down and focus on the process of creating music and sense of relaxation and enjoyment it provides rather than focusing on meeting performance expectations. Participant 6 shared:

Music specifically, um, it releases various chemicals, you know, that can create relaxation. I mean, and that’s probably what I am finding the most is relaxation. It’s just a good way to mellow out, um, non-chemically induced way to mellow out, I should say. Um, but I mean, it’s, it’s just, it’s just something that I am able to do that doesn’t require a tremendous amount of thought. Um, and I, I say that lightly, but I mean, we’re going to work from the idea that I’m not taking any of this overly seriously when I’m practicing because I don’t have anything to perform for either. So, I’m not really hanging myself out there, reputation-wise. (Participant 6)

**Discussion and conclusion**

This study demonstrates how music creation affected feelings of comfort and mood management during Covid-19. According to Juslin and Sloboda (2011), music affects the behavior of individuals, mainly through an emotional effect. Participants shared personal experiences of how music added a sense of calm to their day and served as a source of comfort. Participant 14
shared music was a way to deal with trauma by engaging the limbic system, and Participant 6 mentioned their understanding of brain chemicals being responsible for relaxation.

Because music can evoke strong emotions, the limbic system, part of the brain responsible for emotions, feelings, and sensations, is intensely involved (Murray, 1992). How a person responds to music influences which brain region the limbic system engages. This brain engagement leads to a physiological response caused by hormones and neurotransmitters (Murrock, 2005). Dopamine, beta-endorphins, and enkephalins are the hormones responsible for the positive feelings, such as calm, relaxation, and less stress while creating or listening to music (Murrock, 2005).

Pfefferbaum and North (2020) argue Covid-19 significantly affected mental health. With the cancelation of music ensemble rehearsals and in-person performances a thing of the past due to lockdowns, musicians faced changing how they create music. The individuals who shared their experiences in this study highlighted the positive impact of music on their mental health during Covid-19.

Not only did participants share the positive impact of music creation on mental health during the pandemic, but also they provided insight of why music creation was beneficial. The participants indicated the opportunity to create music provided a creative outlet and allowed them to feel the benefits of music as a source of comfort, especially after difficult days. Participants may have experienced increased anxiety due to changing work, home, and school environments (Usher et al., 2020).

The comfort and mood regulation creating music provides is an important finding, as this can be a valuable tool to aid individuals in handling stressors and challenging situations. Music-making is a profoundly personal experience, as these participants’ narratives highlight. In addition, depression and anxiety were so prevalent during the pandemic, having an outlet to feel better may help individuals keep an optimistic mindset. With the understanding music can play an important role in individuals’ lives during such a time as a global pandemic, it is essential music continues being taught in schools and shared in places of worship, and it remains part of community engagement.

The results of this study build on music’s connection to mental health and patient comfort. Music has been a source of comfort and has served as a tool to regulate mood and emotions (Turino, 2008). The work of Bilgiç and Acaroğlu (2017) found patients who listened to music for at least 15 to 30 min shared that they experienced positive therapeutic benefits from doing so. These benefits included less anxiety, decreased stress, feeling less isolated, improved emotional and social well-being, greater self-confidence, and overall improved comfort. Most participants shared experiences of listening to music as part of the music creation process, whether it was listening to their work or listening to others’ work for inspiration or encouragement.

While creating music alone was found to be an important aspect of coping with the stressors and challenges of the pandemic, many participants also shared they missed the comradery of choirs or bands. The nine participants who were in performing ensembles prior to the lockdowns pointed out the groups provided a weekly routine, a reason to practice music, a social support system, and helped them feel joyful. While the participants missed the groups during the lockdown, it is crucial to recognize each person shared creating music on their own was not the same but offered a substitute, which still provided emotional regulations similar to choir or band.

The comfort and mood regulation creating music provides is an important finding, as this can be a valuable tool to aid individuals in handling stressors and challenging situations. Music-making is a profoundly personal experience, as highlighted through these participants’ narratives. In addition, with depression and anxiety being prevalent during the pandemic, having an outlet to feel better may help individuals keep an optimistic mindset. Having an outlet
could also mean these individuals would be more likely to seek professional help for their mental health, if necessary. With the understanding music can play such an important role in an individual’s life during such a time as a global pandemic, it is essential music continues being taught in schools and shared in places of worship and it remains a part of community engagement.

While this study provided an opportunity to explore the lived experiences of musicians during Covid-19, there are, however, limitations, such as access to participants due to the pandemic. As a musician and performer, the researcher also personally knew most of the participants. This study was also conducted 1 year into the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning some individuals were experiencing less of a lockdown situation, some even returning to in-person work or school on a limited basis. Had this study been conducted during the initial stages of lockdown, the results may have revealed a more robust emotional response, based on what the participants shared. It is beyond the scope of this study to generalize the data to a wide-based audience on the small sample size and methodology.

While this study reached saturation at 14 interviews, there is still work to be done exploring how creating music is related to mental health during a pandemic. Ideas for future research include looking at the role of female musicians during the pandemic. Most of the female musicians the researcher contacted were not creating music during the recruitment process. Lack of music creation is an area to explore how the shift from creating music to no longer doing so affected their mental health. Learning more about these perceptions could lead to implications for how we communicate about mental health, music education, and viral outbreaks in the future. In addition, a study experimenting with making music could be beneficial to understand more about how the creation process affects emotions and mood.

The positive feelings of comfort and mood management creating music evokes are significant findings of this study to help us understand the importance of music regarding mental health. With emotions causing a physical response in the human body and music stimulating positive feelings of comfort and mood management, it is understandable how the participants of this study found creating music during the pandemic a valuable activity. Many of the participants experienced substantial environmental changes during the lockdown, and music helped provide a sense of familiarity. Music is a personal experience because no two brains are identical, which leads to different physical responses in the body. This study helps with understanding how meaningful the process of music creation can be for individuals who struggle with mental health challenges. As a result, it is important this topic is continually studied to learn more about the impact of music creation and the role it plays with individuals as society progresses through Covid-19 and beyond. In addition, we should continue encouraging music as a tool for comfort and mood management.

**Author’s Note**

Erin Lewis is also affiliated to Pennsylvania Western University, California, PA, USA.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**ORCID iD**

Erin Lewis [ID](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8780-4559)
Note
1. Creating music, in this case, means singing or playing an instrument independently.

References
Bacior, R. (2020). Creativity under constraint: Making music videos during a pandemic. Spotify for artists. https://artists.spotify.com/blog/creativity-under-constraint-making-music-videos-during-a-pandemic
Batt-Rawden, K., & Tellnes, G. (2011). How music may promote healthy behaviour. Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 39(2), 113–120. https://doi.org/10.1177/1403494810393555
Bilgiç, Ş., & Acaroğlu, R. (2017). Effects of listening to music on the comfort of chemotherapy patients. Western Journal of Nursing Research, 39(6), 745–762. https://doi.org/10.1177/0193945916660527
Cain, M., Istvandity, L., & Lakhani, A. (2020). Participatory music-making and well-being within immigrant cultural practice: Exploratory case studies in South East Queensland, Australia. Leisure Studies, 39(1), 68–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2019.1581248
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020a). Community, work, and school. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/community-based.html
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020b). Overdose deaths accelerating during Covid-19. https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html
Chang, J., Lin, P., & Hoffman, E. (2021). Music major, affects, and positive music listening experience. Psychology of Music, 49(4), 841–854. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735619901151
Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (4th ed.). SAGE.
Corvo, E., & De Caro, W. (2020). Covid-19 and spontaneous singing to decrease loneliness, improve cohesion, and mental well-being: An Italian experience. Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 12(Suppl. 1), S247–S248. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000838
Crimmins, P. (2020, April 2). Choirs make the most of virtual rehearsals during coronavirus pandemic. WHYY. https://whyty.org/articles/choirs-make-the-most-of-virtual-rehearsals-during-coronavirus-pandemic/
Daykin, N., Parry, B., Ball, K., Walters, D., Henry, A., Platten, B., & Hayden, R. (2018). The role of participatory music making in supporting people with dementia in hospital environments. Dementia, 17(6), 686–701. https://doi.org/10.1177/1471301217739722
Juslin, P. N., Harmat, L., & Eerola, T. (2014). What makes music emotionally significant? Exploring the underlying mechanisms. Psychology of Music, 42(4), 599–623. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735613484548
Juslin, P. N., & Sloboda, J. (Eds.). (2011). Handbook of music and emotion: Theory, research, applications. Oxford University Press.
Koehler, F., & Neubauer, A. B. (2020). From music making to affective well-being in everyday life: The mediating role of need satisfaction. Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 14(4), 493–505. https://doi.org/10.1037/ac0000261
Kwong, A. S., Pearson, R. M., Adams, M. J., Northstone, K., Tilling, K., Smith, D., . . . Timpson, N. J. (2021). Mental health before and during COVID-19 in two longitudinal UK population cohorts. The British Journal of Psychiatry, 218(6), 334–343. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2020.242
Langley, M., & Coutts, L. (2020, March 30). Why do we turn to music in times of crisis? World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/coronavirus-music-covid-19-community/
Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2019). Qualitative communication research methods. SAGE.
Murray, G. B. (1992). Limbic music. Psychosomatics: Journal of Consultation and Liaison Psychiatry, 33(1), 16–23. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0033-3182(92)72016-7
Murrock, C. J. (2005). Chapter 8: Music and mood. In A. V. Clark (Ed.), Psychology of moods (pp. 141–155). Nova Science Publishers.
Ndibisi, G. (2020, June 13). How COVID-19 is changing the music industry. The Guardian. https://guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/weekend-beats/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-music-industry-ndibisi-george/
Niedzwiedz, C. L., Green, M. J., Benzeval, M., Campbell, D., Craig, P., Demou, E., . . . Katikireddi, S. V. (2021). Mental health and health behaviours before and during the initial phase of the COVID-19 lockdown: Longitudinal analyses of the UK Household Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 75*(3), 224–231. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2020-215060

Nissen, N. (2021, April 16). Despite increase in depression during pandemic, suicides may have decreased: Studies. *ABC News*. https://abcnews.go.com/Health/increase-depression-pandemic-suicides-decreased-studies/story?id=77039876

Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D., & Moules, N. (2017). Thematic analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Perkins, R., Mason-Bertrand, A., Fancourt, D., Baxter, L., & Williamson, A. (2020). How participatory music engagement supports mental well-being: A meta-ethnography. *Qualitative Health Research, 30*(12), 1924–1940. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732320944142

Pfefferbaum, B., & North, C. S. (2020). Mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic. *New England Journal of Medicine, 383*(6), 510–512. https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp2008017

Pierce, M., Hope, H., Ford, T., Hatch, S., Hotopf, M., John, A., & Abel, K. M. (2020). Mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic: A longitudinal probability sample survey of the UK population. *The Lancet Psychiatry, 7*(10), 883–892. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30308-4

Saarikallio, S., Allari, V., Maksimainen, J., & Toiviainen, P. (2021). Emotions of music listening in Finland and in India: Comparison of an individualistic and a collectivistic culture. *Psychology of Music, 49*(4), 989–1005. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735620917730

Sachs, M., Hennessy, S., Kaplan, J., & Habibi, A. (2021). Music and mood regulation during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. *PLOS ONE, 16*(10), Article e0258027. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0258027

Salari, N., Hosseinian-Far, A., Jalali, R., Vaisi-Raygani, A., Rasoulpoor, S., Mohammadi, M., & Khaledi-Paveh, B. (2020). Prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Globalization and Health, 16*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-020-00589-w

Saltzman, L. Y., Hansel, T. C., & Bordnick, P. S. (2020). Loneliness, isolation, and social support factors in post-COVID-19 mental health. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 12*(Suppl. 1), S55–S57. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000703

Schäfer, K., Saarikallio, S., & Eerola, T. (2020). Music may reduce loneliness and act as social surrogate for a friend: Evidence from an experimental listening study. *Music & Science. Advance online publication*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2059204320935709

Tang, Q., Huang, Z., Zhou, H., & Ye, P. (2020). Effects of music therapy on depression: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *PLOS ONE, 15*(11), Article e0240862. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240862

Turino, T. (2008). *Music as social life: The politics of participation*. University of Chicago Press.

Usher, K., Durkin, J., & Bhullar, N. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and mental health impacts. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 29*(3), 315–318. https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12726

Van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Routledge.

World Health Organization. (2022). Mental health: Strengthening our response. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

Ziv, N., & Hollander-Shabtai, R. (2022). Music and COVID-19: Changes in uses and emotional reaction to music under stay-at-home restrictions. *Psychology of Music, 50*(2), 475–491. https://doi.org/10.1177/03057356211003326