Seligman's PERMA model and hero's journey in music therapy

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Abstract: *The paper presents an application of Campbell's exploration of "monomyth" or hero's journey in music therapy, strongly connected with holistic perspective on the therapeutic pursuit of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment, as presented in Seligman's model. The method combines the Music to facilitate the alignment with the hero's profound introspection and reconnection with a higher purpose, highlighting the role of positive and meaningful relationships, offering a sense of engagement. The hero experiences are translated in music, with the help of markers, guided by the therapist: the call, entering the unknown, challenges, confrontation, rebirth. The method uses graphical and musical elements, proposed by the therapist, and developed by the client, accompanied and encouraged to identify the stages of his/ her journey. This intervention encourages active participation, allowing the client to fully immerse themselves in each stage of the Hero's Journey, using sound as both an expressive and healing tool.*

Key-words: *Hero's Journey, PERMA model, music therapy, integrative therapy*

1. Introduction

In music therapy, hope, anticipation and curiosity are the brain's basic mechanisms to stimulate and maintain awareness and create a sense of stability, while rewarding with specific neurotransmitters, associated with positive emotions (Daikin, 2022). This is used to create a physiological background for the ease and healing of psycho-somatic conditions (Cottler 2010). Hero's journey narrative predicts and enhances individuals' experience but needs awareness and decoding, under a therapist supervision (Campbell 2008). The path to healing is paved with musical elements, created during the session, facilitating the confrontation with deeper aspects of oneself, as a mean of expression of repressed emotions (Bruscia 2014). The hero who experiences a change of setting metaphor is translated in music

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In music, this journey can be seen in the composition's structure, themes, and emotions (Wigram, Inge 2002).

The following examples illustrate how musical elements such as melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and leitmotifs can be used to convey the narrative structure of the Hero's Journey:

1. Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67: The "Call to Adventure" is represented by the iconic four-note motif, which is repeated and varied throughout the piece to create tension and anticipation. The "Challenges and Victories" are depicted through the development and resolution of musical themes, with the use of dynamics (loud and soft) and harmony (consonance and dissonance) to create conflict and resolution. The final movement brings a triumphant resolution, symbolizing the "Return with the Elixir."

2. Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring": The piece starts with a peaceful scene, represented by soft, lyrical melodies and gentle rhythms. This corresponds to the "Departure" stage. As the piece progresses, the tension gradually builds up with the use of complex rhythms, dissonant harmonies, and loud dynamics, representing the "Approach to the Inmost Cave" stage. The climax, the sacrificial dance, can be seen as the "Ordeal" stage, characterized by intense rhythms, dissonant harmonies, and loud dynamics. The piece ends with a resolution, symbolizing the "Return".

3. Wagner's "The Ring Cycle": The entire cycle of four operas can be seen as a musical representation of the Hero's Journey.

2. Integration of Hero's Journey in music therapy

Integrating the Hero's Journey into music therapy can be a powerful and structured way to facilitate personal growth, healing, and transformation. The Hero's Journey, a narrative structure developed by Joseph Campbell, follows a protagonist through a cycle of challenges, transformation, and return. This structure mirrors many people's experiences with mental health, trauma, personal development, and recovery, making it a valuable tool for therapeutic work.

2.1. Campbell's Hero's Journey in one-to one music therapy

In a one-to-one music therapy session structured around Joseph Campbell's „Hero's Journey" as a therapeutic tool, each stage of the Hero's Journey narrative arc is used to help the client explore personal challenges, strengths, and emotional

growth (Hillman 1997). By embedding the client's personal experiences within this archetypal story framework, the therapist can foster emotional insight, resilience, and self-discovery (Meade 2010). The session includes a selection of musical instruments and guided interventions to bring each stage to life. Here's how a typical setup, progression, and interaction might look:

2.1.1. Session setup and instruments

Setting: The space is private, comfortable, and designed to inspire reflection, perhaps dimly lit, with comfortable seating and soft floor cushions. Key symbols of the Hero's Journey, like images or artifacts representing key stages (departure, struggle, return), could be placed around the room to visually cue the client's journey through each stage. Instruments that can be used are:

- Drums (frame drums, djembe): Represent grounding and courage.
- Chimes or Singing Bowls: Represent shifts in awareness, transition points.
- Guitar or Keyboard: Used by the therapist to create atmospheric music, establishing themes for each stage.
- Flute or Wind Instrument: Represents guidance or calling.
- Shakers, Rattles: For grounding and movement.
- Lyric Book or Journal: For the client to write lyrics, reflections, or insights as they progress.

2.1.2. Therapeutic session structure and flow

The session is divided into segments corresponding to stages of the Hero's Journey. Each stage involves a musical and experiential component, with specific client actions and therapist interventions.

2.1.2.1. The Call to Adventure

Objective: Initiate a theme of curiosity and openness to change.

Client Action: The client explores instruments and is encouraged to select one that resonates as their "instrument of calling." They play intuitively, creating sounds that symbolize the start of their journey.

Therapist Intervention: The therapist supports by playing a steady, low accompaniment on the guitar or keyboard, perhaps interjecting with gentle melodies to guide the client's improvisation. They ask reflective questions, like, "What does this sound or feeling call one toward in oner life?"

2.1.2.2. Crossing the Threshold

Objective: Help the client step into the unknown, facing any fears.

Client Action: With the drum, the client plays a steady rhythm, symbolizing commitment to the journey. They may increase intensity as they imagine stepping into unknown parts of themselves (Austin, 2008).

Therapist Intervention: The therapist joins on another drum or shaker, creating a rhythmic dialogue. They validate any emotions that arise, remarking on the power in the rhythm and encouraging the client to express hesitations, fears, or expectations in the form of music.

2.1.2.3.The Trials and Challenges

Objective: Identify personal obstacles, fears, and "monsters" the client might be facing.

Client Action: The client chooses an instrument or even makes vocal sounds that represent their "challenges." This could be a harsh drumbeat, erratic shaker sounds, or a discordant keyboard riff.

Therapist Intervention: The therapist joins in with supportive sounds, counterbalancing the client's "struggle" music by playing calming tones on the flute or singing bowls. They encourage the client to explore the emotions behind each "challenge" sound, prompting reflection with questions like, "What is this sound telling one about the challenge?"

2.1.2.4.Finding Allies

Objective: Recognize sources of inner strength and external support.

Client Action: The client selects or layers in sounds that represent supportive forces, which might be a soothing chime or steady drum rhythm.

Therapist Intervention: The therapist may introduce a harmonic melody on the guitar or keyboard, encouraging the client to synchronize their "support" sounds with it. They guide the client to identify real-life "allies" or personal strengths, saying, "Who or what in oner life sounds like this?"

2.1.2.5.The Ordeal (Facing the Shadow)

Objective: Face and process a core inner conflict.

Client Action: The client creates a musical narrative of a specific inner conflict using instruments and voice, perhaps contrasting two sounds that represent conflicting emotions. For instance, a client might drum intensely and then pause, illustrating moments of uncertainty or fear.

Therapist Intervention: The therapist actively listens, providing empathetic responses in the form of music, perhaps playing a grounding bassline or soft humming to guide the client back to self-compassion. They encourage the client to confront the intensity, asking, "What would it sound like if one moved through this shadow?"

2.1.2.6. The Reward (Self-Realization)

Objective: Celebrate moments of insight and strength.

Client Action: The client composes a short melody or rhythm, embodying the sense of triumph or understanding gained. This might be a repeating phrase on the flute or a simple, hopeful chord progression.

Therapist Intervention: The therapist harmonizes with the client's music, reinforcing the moment of self-realization. They encourage the client to describe the qualities of this sound, asking questions like, "How does this sound feel different from where we began?"

2.1.2.7. The Return (Integration and Closure)

Objective: Reinforce the integration of insights gained from the journey.

Client Action: The client may journal or write lyrics based on the session, while playing a background rhythm on a drum or chime. They reflect on how they might carry these lessons into their daily life.

Therapist Intervention: The therapist facilitates closure by leading a calming, grounding melody, helping the client wind down. They discuss any insights or commitments the client wishes to make moving forward and celebrate the "journey" they completed.

2.1.2.8. Post-Session Reflection

After the music ends, the client and therapist discuss the emotional experiences, insights, and symbolic representations that emerged. The therapist encourages the client to reflect on how they can apply the Hero's Journey to their real-life challenges, marking the session as a meaningful exploration and return to self. This conversation cements the narrative and emotional journey, helping the client feel empowered to embody this growth in daily life.

This structured use of Campbell's Hero's Journey in music therapy offers a transformative way to process life's challenges by symbolically journeying through inner landscapes, guided by sound, rhythm, and supportive therapeutic presence, as indicated by Valencia (Valencia 2016).

2.2. Musical elements for the emphasis of the therapeutic stages

This section outlines how different musical elements can facilitate the stages of Campbell's Hero's Journey in music therapy. Each stage is matched with rhythmic, modal, melodic, and other musical elements that can help express the emotional and psychological journey of the hero.

1. Call to Adventure: The adventurous feel of this stage is evoked by regular but tentative rhythms, bright timbres, and major or mixolydian modes to signify the start of the journey with a sense of optimism and curiosity (Kramer, 2019).
2. Refusal of the Call: Irregular rhythms and minor or dorian modes reflect hesitation and inner conflict, with lower pitches and darker timbres signifying resistance or fear of the unknown.
3. Meeting the Mentor: Stable, grounding elements like major or lydian modes, flowing melodies, and warm harmonies symbolize support, wisdom, and encouragement from the mentor figure.
4. Crossing the Threshold: Syncopated, adventurous rhythms and bold timbres reflect the hero's first major step into the unknown, with ascending melodies representing growth and boldness.
5. Tests, Allies, and Enemies: Shifting rhythms and complex melodies symbolize uncertainty and challenge, while contrasting timbres and sharp dynamics represent the unpredictable nature of this stage.
6. Approach to the Inmost Cave: Slow, pulsating rhythms and deep, resonant timbres create a sense of introspection and foreboding as the hero prepares for the ultimate challenge, with unresolved harmonies building tension.
7. Ordeal: Driving, intense rhythms, harsh timbres, and dissonant harmonies evoke the fear and intensity of the ordeal, as the hero faces their greatest trial.
8. Reward (Seizing the Sword): Steady, confident musical elements with bright timbres and ascending melodies capture the triumph and empowerment the hero feels after overcoming the ordeal.
9. The Road Back: Syncopated, driving rhythms and suspended harmonies represent the hero's journey home, with mixed timbres and determined melodies symbolizing resolve and reflection on the journey.
10. Resurrection: Powerful rhythms and uplifting harmonies represent the hero's final transformation, with triumphant melodies and bright timbres reflecting rebirth and empowerment.
11. Return with the Elixir: Flowing, resolved rhythms and peaceful, descending melodies signal the hero's completion of the journey and return with newfound wisdom, using warm timbres and consonant harmonies to evoke peace and fulfillment.

3. The PERMA model in music therapy

The Hero's Journey and the PERMA model can be integrated in music therapy to create a comprehensive and engaging therapeutic process. The PERMA model, developed by psychologist Martin Seligman as a framework for well-being, is widely applied in positive psychology and can be effectively integrated into music therapy to enhance a client's emotional, cognitive, and social well-being. Each element of PERMA—Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—can be targeted and cultivated through music-based interventions, creating a therapeutic experience that nurtures holistic well-being (Seligman 2004).

A music therapy session with a PERMA focus might begin with listening to or playing music that evokes Positive Emotion (like an upbeat or nostalgic song). The therapist could then guide the client into Engagement by encouraging them to play along or improvise on a chosen instrument (Rickard, 2022). Next, the therapist might engage in musical interaction to build Relationships, such as creating a "musical dialogue" through a call-and-response drumming exercise. To connect with Meaning, the client might choose a meaningful song or create lyrics that represent something valuable in their life. The session could conclude by celebrating a musical Accomplishment, such as the client performing a short, improvised piece they created during the session.

The PERMA model in music therapy offers a holistic approach that doesn't merely aim to resolve problems but also builds upon the client's strengths, enhances resilience, and cultivates a sense of joy and fulfillment (Schmid 2022). Through this positive, strengths-based approach, the client experiences the multifaceted benefits of music therapy while also building a sustainable framework for well-being.

1. Positive Emotion (**P**): music that evokes positive emotions to create a safe and welcoming environment. This can help the client feel comfortable and open to the therapeutic process. For example, one can use uplifting songs or soothing instrumental music.

2. Engagement (**E**): the client is engaged in the therapeutic process by encouraging them to express themselves through music. One can ask them to choose a song that represents their journey, or to write their own song about their experiences. This can help them feel more connected to the therapeutic process.

3. Relationships (**R**): One can discuss how certain songs or types of music represent different relationships in their life. This can lead to conversations about the client's own supportive relationships, and how they can strengthen them.

4. Meaning (**M**): Help the client find meaning and purpose in their journey through music. For example, one can discuss the themes and messages of the songs they choose, and how these relate to their own experiences. This can lead to discussions about the client's personal growth and development.

5. Accomplishment (**A**): Celebrate the client's accomplishments and progress through music. One can ask them to perform a song they've written or learned, or to share a song that represents their growth. This can increase their self-efficacy and motivation to continue their journey.

4.   Methods integration

By integrating the Hero's Journey and the PERMA model, one can create a therapeutic process that is engaging, meaningful, and empowering (Tarrasch, 2019).   This can help the client navigate their challenges, find meaning and purpose, and achieve their goals. Effective integration of the Hero's Journey and PERMA Models can offer the important outcomes.

4.1.   Narrative structure with positive outcomes

Each stage of the Hero's Journey can align with specific PERMA components. For instance, Crossing the Threshold (Hero's Journey) often requires facing fears, which ties into building Positive Emotion through resilience. Facing The Ordeal or Shadow in the journey aligns with discovering Meaning and gaining a sense of Accomplishment through overcoming hardships.

Layered Emotional and Cognitive Engagement: The Hero's Journey invites the client to explore deep-seated beliefs, emotions, and conflicts, making it ideal for cultivating Engagement. Accomplishment is reinforced as the client progresses through each Hero's Journey stage, recognizing and celebrating each "victory" or insight they achieve.

Building Relationships through Symbolic Allies: Music therapy further reinforces this relational focus. Group sessions may involve real allies (friends, family) participating musically, while individual sessions use the therapist-client musical interaction to strengthen relational skills.

Meaning and Purpose through Symbolic and Personal Reflection:

The Hero's Journey emphasizes finding purpose, making it a powerful tool for nurturing Meaning. This dual focus on symbolic meaning (Hero's Journey) and personal meaning (PERMA) deepens the therapeutic impact.

4.2. Expected results and benefits of integration

By exploring the Hero's Journey, clients learn to view their life challenges as part of a larger narrative, often developing greater resilience and a more compassionate view of themselves. They come to see challenges not just as setbacks but as part of a transformative process. Using PERMA elements like Positive Emotion and Meaning, clients reinforce these insights, shifting their outlook towards one of optimism and purpose. They learn to find joy and meaning in small victories along the journey. The main outcomes experienced by the clients, after several music therapy sessions, which integrated the both methods are: enhanced self-insight and resilience, empowerment and personal growth, increased emotional flexibility and coping skills, strengthened social connection and self-compassion, long-term well-being and life satisfaction.

5. Conclusion

The integration of the Hero's Journey and PERMA models in music therapy offers a powerful synthesis of narrative healing and positive psychology, guiding clients through a structured yet flexible process of self-discovery and well-being. Clients engage in meaningful music-making that not only supports immediate therapeutic goals but also fosters long-term resilience, optimism, and fulfillment. Together, these models provide a rich, multidimensional experience that can profoundly impact a client's emotional, cognitive, and social well-being, making music therapy a transformative journey of growth and healing.

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