

Study on the Effect of Musicians' Deaths on Individuals

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Abstract

This is an exploratory study on the effect of the death of musicians on individuals. Parasocial relationships were identified and uncovered in this study and their implications were discussed. There was an easily identifiable dependence on musicians by the respondents for purposes such as motivation, inspiration and personal well-being. This study highlights the effects of parasocial relationships and interactions with musicians on coping, the reason behind the formation of parasocial relationships with musicians and the effects of the termination of one such relationship. The sample consisted of ten university students who had mourned the death of their favourite musician. It was mostly selected through snowballing since interested participants would find it easier to spread the word of mouth with other like-minded individuals in their friend circle. The ten respondents were interviewed and their responses were systematically coded to extract dimensions and themes. With the emergence of said themes, it was concluded that the death of a musician produced profound changes in the respondents, with many of them owing their identity formation, self-confidence and emotional-regulation to the musician. In the aftermath of the study, therapeutic applications of coping techniques are discussed.

Key words: parasocial relationship, parasocial interaction, bereavement, coping, well-being.

The present research will explore the the phenomenon and implications of Parasocial Influence and Parasocial Relationships of Musician's Death on Adolescents. Within the purview of this broad heading, the draft covers the wide array of effects that the death of a musician has on individuals. This link sheds light on the existence of a unique relationship between individuals and popular figures, known as a parasocial relationship. There exists a dichotomy between parasocial relationships (termed PSR) and parasocial interaction (termed PSI) as pointed out by Horton and Strauss in 1957. The distinction became better-defined as research conducted by pioneering scholars at the advent of the 21st century claim. PSI constitutes the interpersonal domains of interaction between mass media consumers and the celebrities/media personnel (termed personae) that appeal to them. The definition of PSR entails the cross-situational relationship a user and the corresponding persona share, along affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. PSI is only observed within the purview of media exposure. PSR, on the other hand, can be equated to a friendship, which exists despite face-to-face exposure or interaction and beyond a one-time exposure.

The study will address the connection people have with music and musicians and I doing so, uncovering the processes of change which the respondents go through when they experience the death of their favorite musician. With these changes, coping strategies are also explored, which enhance the scope of therapeutic application.

Parasocial interactions and relationships (PSI/PSR) are symbolic, one-sided social ties that individuals imagine with media figures and celebrities (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

Research on these parasocial processes has primarily focused on their explanatory power vis a vis individual differences in media use and consumption. While much of the research in this area has focused on undergraduate samples, and a growing body of work is examining these processes in children (e.g., Rosaen and Dibble, 2008; Bond and Calvert, 2014; Calvert et al.,

2014; Brunick et al., 2016) the nature of these processes in adolescence is of particular interest for two reasons. First, adolescents demonstrate greater attention to and preoccupation with media figures and celebrities relative to other age groups (Giles, 2002; Giles & Maltby, 2004; Maltby et al., 2005), and adolescent PSI tends to be intense (Cohen, 2003; Klimmt et al., 2006). Second, theoretically, parasocial processes might play a role in helping adolescents address the tasks of this developmental period, such as identity formation and the development of autonomy from parents (Giles & Maltby, 2004). Combined with the fact that parasocial processes appear to follow similar patterns of formation and maintenance as real interactions and relationships (see, in particular, Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Schiappa et al., 2007), these findings suggest that the nature of adolescent parasocial processes might be of interest in their own right, not just in relation to media consumption but as a reflection of the social concerns of this developmental period. Consequently, the goal of the current study was to examine adolescent parasocial processes from a developmental relationships perspective.

Research showing the effects of musicians' deaths specifically are scant. While death of other celebrity figures such as politicians, actors, sportspersons and television figures has been shown scientifically to cause psychological distress in some degree or another, musicians' deaths have not been ventured into. According to some figures, 49.2% of Indian adolescents suffer from depression (Jha, K. K., Singh, S. K., Nirala, S. K., Kumar, C., Kumar, P., & Aggrawal, N., 2017). With the intent to prove that one of the contributing factors to this psychological crisis is the death of a musician, the paper shall proceed with a review of related literature to back and link the intricate concepts that explain the phenomena under study.

The questions that this research seeks to answer are:

- What are the precursors to parasocial relationships?

- What is the range of effects of the termination of such parasocial relationships?
- How does another parasocial relationship form upon the termination of a significant one?
- What is the range of steps of coping with the termination of a parasocial relationship?

Review of Literature

The literature pertaining to said topic is quite readily available, although not specifically linking such parasocial interactions and relationships to suicidal ideation and depression rates. There are articles which address the effect of PSI and PSR on one of the most crucial determinants of depression and suicide-self-esteem. In 2008, Derrick, Gabriel and Tippin investigated that PSR are employed as a coping mechanism by people who have poor interpersonal relationships in real life, by simplifying the challenge of having to deal with rejection. Their article quotes studies on self-discrepancies and the ideal self, which refer to a set of various goals that we all strive to attain in our lifetime. A series of 3 studies conducted by the researchers focuses on what the sample perceived of their favourite celebrity (persona). In the first study, a sample of 53 men and 47 women pursuing an undergraduate degree in psychology was taken. Individuals with low self-esteem reported a greater liking and empathy to a same-sex celebrity who was similar to their ideal self.

A second study was conducted by the researchers to examine whether PSR could actually reduce self-discrepancy. For the purpose of testing this hypothesis, a sample of 78 men and 90 women was selected. It was found that participants with low self-esteem actually relied on their connection to the persona to gradually reach up to their ideal self.

A third study was conducted by the researchers for the purpose of examining whether the positive influence of celebrities on the lives of participants with low self-esteem was

unique to parasocial relationships. The sample selected for this final study consisted of 29 men and 51 women. Participants were grouped into three categories- celebrity-primed, close partner-primed and control. It was uncovered that the shift from actual self to ideal self was unique to the celebrity-primed participants: the other two categories did not the same effect on participants with low self-esteem. Moreover, these participants inculcated greater empathy, identification and liking to celebrities they perceived as being closer to their ideal selves than their actual selves.

The researchers conclude by extrapolating that PSR might be beneficial for individuals with low self-esteem by helping perceive themselves as more creative, talented and successful. They can experience progressive personal development which is possible through real, close relationships but without the fear of rejection. Hence, it can be rationally declared that this article convincingly succeeds in reaching its objectives and brings to the forefront the impact of PSI and PSR on individuals' measures of self-esteem. This article lacks any significant gaps in reaching its objective. This has implications for the research title in that low self-esteem is often seen as a precursor to depression and suicide.

In a 2008 article published by authors Schramm and Hartmann, PSI scales are developed and implemented to test the intensity and impact of PSI induced by exposure to the persona through television viewing singularly. As quoted previously, this article explores PSI via three components- cognitive, affective and behavioural. The first component focuses entirely on the perceptual and evaluative procedures that the individual puts their persona through with respect to oneself, which also entails examining one's own life experiences. The affective component refers to the emotional component, including positive and negative feelings which the persona induces in an individual. The behavioural component covers the non-verbal, verbal and paraverbal behaviour patterns that are often reminiscent of the



persona's traits.

An article written by South Korean researchers Y.M Baek, Y. Bae and H. Jang in 2013 explores some of the social repercussions of developing parasocial relationships through social networking sites, such as isolation, addiction and gradual loss of social cohesion.

Social networking sites are platforms of mutual social relationships and also one-sided parasocial relationships. The study implied a positive correlation between participation in parasocial relationships and loneliness, whereas with interpersonal distrust, a negative correlation was seen. Moreover, there was a positive correlation implied between social relationships and trust, and a negative correlation between social relationships and loneliness.

Since depression is positively related to loneliness and isolation, it is safe to conclude that this article has no research gaps with respect to the title of the research proposal.

A 2012 study titled “Grief, commiseration, and consumption following the death of a celebrity” by American authors Peter H. Bloch and Scott K. Radford is aimed at understanding the reactions of individuals to the death of their persona figure. It considers at the foremost the notion that even though celebrities are distant from their fans, the only means of connection that fans have with their persona is through consumption of celebrity-products- be it movies, TV shows, music albums and tracks- to name just a few. One way to investigate these is by examining grief related emotions on online message boards operated by fans. The processes of introjection and incorporation help these fans to construct an everlasting narrative which encapsulates the gist of the persona’s most durable characteristics. Furthermore, this narrative serves as a guide for fans to piece together their own self of identity and integrity post the persona’s death. This study bears relevance to the research process in that it provides an explanation to a fan’s perception of one’s own identity and integrity, following the footsteps of the departed persona, while additionally highlighting

any pathologies in the formation of identity which may lead to both positive and negative effects on fans.

A pioneering study conducted in 2013 by researchers Young, Gabriel and Hollar measures the effects of parasocial relationships in negative body-image in men. It was determined that the intensity of PSR is the precursor to the development of body-image issues in men. The study implied that when men were exposed to a muscular superheroes in the absence of PSR, they experienced lower self-esteem. Consequently, with the existence of PSR, the participants showed no adverse changes in self-esteem when exposed to a muscular superhero. Body-image issues and low self-esteem are directly related, and may be linked to depression and suicidal ideation in individuals.

This study is being conducted to understand the wide range and implications of the death of musicians. According to news sources, the death of popular figures, including musicians, causes many heartbroken fans to commit suicide. Facilitating the detailed understanding of what the musician and music in itself mean to individuals is the first step to understanding the reasons behind these suicides.

Methods

Objective

The objective of this study will be to study the effects of the death of musicians on individuals, covering topics such as meaning of music and role of musicians, initial and later reactions to death and coping. It focuses on Indian students- both male and female and heterosexual and bisexual.

Philosophical Roots

Ontology. This study will use an ontological position of relativism because the basic assumption is that each individual has their own lived reality which is extremely unique to the individual and to their collection of experiences. Special importance is given to the way each and every respondents divulges their own narrative of how they reacted to the death of their favourite musician and what they meant to them.

Epistemology. This study will use an epistemological position of interpretivism because it is an approach that focuses on the differences between people and on the individual experiences of people, which is what the researcher aims to study through this research. It will be necessary to directly interpret the data collected from the subjects, which also is a strength of the interpretivist approach.

Research Design

This research will be conducted from a phenomenological point of view, as this is a research design which focuses on those aspects of human experience which are deeply unique to the individual and are not easy to communicate to others due to the fact that the subjects themselves may have difficulty understanding it.

Concepts and Dimensions

The major concept in play here is the connection that the respondents have with music and musicians. It is demonstrated how this deep emotional connection has helped respondents in overcoming difficulties in their lives and given them something to be grateful to. With the death of their favourite musicians, to whom they were indebted, came varying degrees of positive and negative reactions, with positive and negative coping strategies. The detailed effects are categorised under the following domains: meaning attributed to music, role of



musician, connection with musicians, initial reaction to death, later reaction to death, steps to

cope with musicians' death, effect on mood or behavior, presently lingering effects of death and probable reaction to future musician deaths.

Sample

Sample size. The sample for this study will number around 10 people.

Sample description. The sample for this study will comprise of 10 undergraduate college students who are of Indian origin and are currently studying in an Indian institution.

Sampling techniques. Snowball sampling will be used for the purpose of this study.

Inclusion criteria. Undergraduate college students who are of Indian origin, are currently studying in an Indian institution, have an interest in music and have been affected by the death of a favourite musician shall be included in the study.

Exclusion criteria. Students who are not undergraduate college students, or not of Indian origin, or not currently studying in an Indian institution, or have not been affected the death of a favourite musician shall not be included in this study.

Procedure

The data collection method to be used in this study will be that of a semi-structured interview. The importance of interviewing is highlighted by the fact that this method ensures a personal description of an episode in the lives of the respondents that was pivotal in their transformation into the people they are at present. It also gives them more freedom in expressing themselves and leaves a flexible ground for questioning as the conversation goes. It is also beneficial for the respondents to be able to address something that they might not have got the opportunity to speak about with someone else.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Utmost effort has been expended in providing respondents with the safe space that they require to talk about a phase of their life that was momentarily turbulent and in which they went to significant emotional distress. Interviews were only conducted when the respondent reassured the researcher that they were comfortable with the proceedings of the interview. Informed consent was acquired from each respondent before the commencement of the interview.

Their responses were assured to be kept unconditionally confidential. They were also notified that they could conclude the interview at any time they pleased, an option which none of the respondents were compelled to take. Furthermore, the respondents were informed that they were entitled to the results of the study. They were guaranteed no harm and their responses were only used for research purposes.

Trustworthiness/Credibility

In order to understand the different responses from each respondent and extrapolate themes from them, it is important to understand what exactly the respondent was pinpointing. To ensure trustworthiness, member-checking was done with some respondents, who confirmed that their responses were consistent with the understanding of the researcher. The themes drawn from these responses can, therefore, be considered trustworthy. Any biases that the researcher himself had were dismissed and the ground rule of tolerance was set.

Everything that a respondent said was accepted without judgment and there was no ground

for discrimination, ridicule, rejection, disagreement or bias from the researcher's side.

Results and Discussion

Qualitative data collected to measure the effects of death of musicians on individuals brought to the forefront several interesting findings. There is a relationship between musicians and their listeners, the specifics of which are discussed in this transcript. This relationship is called a parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, (1956). Capturing the vivid perspectives of ten different individuals on different domains of the event of their favourite musician's death led to the delineation of similar patterns of reaction within each individual. These patterns could be traced along resemblant lines with the stages of grief (Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2005).

The entirety of the data is presented in different tables below which show the varied range of domains, themes and sub-themes that could be extrapolated after thorough analysis of the transcripts. Broader findings come under domains, specific data from the transcripts is precipitated in the form of sub-themes. Similar sub-themes are grouped under themes to form a quintessential tabular representation of qualitative data.

Table 1.

Visual Representation of the Domains of Meaning Attributed to Music and Role of Musicians and the corresponding Themes and Sub-Themes.

| <i>Domains</i> | <i>Themes and sub-themes</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Meaning attributed to music | Identity formation Passion Self-expression Source of confidence Emotional well-being Venting out anger Venting out frustration Mood regulator Escape Hobby Comfort |
| Role attributed to musician | Companion Helped overcome hardships Provided comfort Mentor Source of motivation Taught perseverance Showed hope Deep felt purpose Moderator Helped bond with sibling |

From the way the topic of conversation went between the interviewer and the respondent, domains such as the meaning attributed to music emerged. All the respondents had a special place for music in their lives, each attributing a particular purpose to music. For some respondents who had merely entered the avenue of adolescence, the music that they listened to helped them shape their identity. It helped them find what their own identity was worth as they were learning to step out of their parents' shadow and expressing themselves appropriately (Giles & Maltby, 2004).



(...it's always a place I have gone to to put words into what I am feeling) (A.D./20/ F/ Hindu)

(...They don't even know me but yeah, it feels like today, I'm making music; today, I'm singing or today, you know, I'm, you know, I'm feeling a bit comfortable just in this surrounding...) (R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...it made me more of who I am today...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

It not only became a part of who they would become in their later lives, but also their passion. It became something they would regard as important as anything, or even everything, else in their lives. Relying on music for expression made them take it up as a passionate activity that they could pursue throughout their lives out of their sheer interest in it.

(...with it being an escape and a passion and a hobby and something that's a big part of my life at this point.) (A.S./19/ M/ Hindu)

Knowing that this was a way the respondents could effectively express themselves, it gave them confidence in their ability to do so. Music was seen as something that the respondents could attribute the development of a very important aspect of their personality-self-confidence- to. It helped them view themselves as being capable of taking on challenges and overcoming difficulties in life.

(...it gave me a lot of confidence growing up...) (A.P.V/ 18/ M/ Hindu)

With the onset of adolescence come the disturbances in mood and conflict between what the individual expects from themselves and what those around them expect from them. Constructing a new identity for themselves among all this frustration, anger and emotional doldrums (commonly labelled “teen angst”) drove them to view music as a source of mood regulation which could complement or contradict their mood and help it stay optimal. This particular theme is consistent with pre-existing research (Saarikallio, S., & Erkkilä, J. (2007).

(...if I'm happy, I can listen to some song which makes me happy; if I'm sad, I listen to a song, you know, which can motivate me or, you know, which can lift me up...) (R. H. K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(It is something that has helped me when I was not at my best. I reach out to music when I am depressed...) (S.M.V / 18/ F/ Hindu)

Being emotionally adjusted entails more than merely prioritizing the experience of positive emotions while minimizing negative emotions. Negative emotions such as anger, frustration and sadness need to be properly addressed and music helped the respondents by presenting the possibility of the process of sublimation. It served as an outlet for negative emotions such as anger and frustration, and a safe space where the respondents could go for respite and comfort when life got irksome. This summarized the meaning that music had in their lives.

(...the music itself speaks for the band and it's more of venting out your anger, venting out your frustration in a way that is both passionate and beautiful at the same time.) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...music is like a way of escaping...) (S.S./18/ M/ Hindu)

(...music was like an outlet, you know. When I didn't feel like talking to people, I would just listen to music.) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

Music, in its own capacity as an abstract concept, holds so many different individual utilities but it is also impossible to attribute certain meanings to music separately from the artists who produced it. The significant relevance that music holds in an individual's life is shared by musicians who play important roles in individuals' lives. Some respondents reported the musician as taking the role of a companion who would walk the same path as them, experiencing hardships, trials and tribulations in the some form of another, like the



respondents. Musicians made them feel like they were not alone, there is another person out

there who is also going through problems and who would stay by their side, motivating and comforting them.

(...it made me feel like they were also going through things in their life and it gives me a closer feeling to know that I am also going through, like, stuff that I find hard in my life and they are making music for me...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...I used to listen to Linkin Park to make myself feel better, knowing that there is someone out there who is going through worse things in life...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...that was who I went to for comfort...) (T.L.T./ 18/F/ Christian)

The role of musicians in respondents' lives branches out to take the form of more than just a companion, but also a mentor or guide of sorts. Musicians have been providing them direction in life since their "angsty" teenage years and have been there for them till the time they were young adults, i.e, present day. Whenever life got them down, they would seek motivation and perseverance to get back on track and tackle their problems, making them more wholesome individuals. Psychologically, motivation is a product of the individual's own psyche but it can also be sought from external sources. Seeking motivation and resilience from musicians' content and lifestyle made the respondents capable of being functional individuals.

(...I used his music to overcome the hardships that I faced...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...he made music to tell us that whatever cards that you've been dealt with, you can deal with it; just, you have to get through it.) (V.S.K./ 20/ M/ Hindu)

(I had a lot of issues going on at that time and Linkin Park helped me get through it...)

(V.S.K./ 20/ M/ Hindu)

(...it got me out of bed so many days before...) (A.S../ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(... he made music to show people that there is hope...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...they give you a-something to believe in and they represent music...) (S.M.V./ 18/ F/

Hindu)

Musicians also acted as a moderator and brought siblings together because they evoked similar reactions from them and they represented a similar phenomenon for them. Respondents claim that due to their shared interest in a particular musician with their sibling, their relationship was strengthened and they gave the musicians their due credit.

(...it helped me bond with him even though there was this feud between siblings as there is and it helped us get closer...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

Table 2.

Visual Representation of the Domains of Connection with Musicians and Initial Reaction to Death and the corresponding Themes and Sub-Themes.

| <i>Domains</i> | <i>Themes and Sub-Themes</i> |
|---------------------------|---|
| Connection with musicians | Idolization Curiosity Awe Obsession Inspiration Envy Emotional connection Empathy Individualized content Relatability through lyrics |
| Initial reaction to death | Disbelief Denial Verification Sentimental Overwhelming sadness Shock Bewilderment Physical Restlessness |



In the pursuit of uncovering a parasocial relationship between the respondents and musicians, the questions were posed to bring out what kind of connection they had with their favourite musicians, specifically. Some of them felt a strong sense of inspiration coming from the musicians. They viewed them as idols- becoming musicians themselves or trying to emulate any other personality trait or even the lifestyle of their favourite musicians. They viewed the musician as someone prodigious, almost superhuman. They were enamored by the awe-inspiring persona of the musicians with an obsession towards knowing what this particular person was all about. This was a mixed feeling, which also bordered with envy of their musical ability/ showmanship. This helped them connect with the musician in a different way.

(...it inspires so much awe in me...) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(I was just swept up in that phenomenon and I was so obsessed with him, like, I knew everything about his life at that time) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(... I try to follow their lifestyles and try to make the same kind of music ...) (R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...the musician that I am today is all because of my idols and my musician idols.. I look up to them and I learn from them) (V.S.K./ 20/ M/ Hindu)

(.. It's always been a source of great envy for me because I never learnt a musical instrument..) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(I idolise them and want to be able to sing like them) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

Apart from attachment through awe, curiosity and sheer inspiration, some respondents stated having an emotional connection with their favourite musicians. This has tremendous significance in the explanation of parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships are marked by empathy felt by a layman towards an individual who is considered a worldwide



phenomenon.

(...you start to empathize with them...) (S.S./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(...even if you don't feel the things yourself, you can feel the impact of those things as the person would have felt them...) (S.S./20/ F/ Hindu)

Lyrics used by these musicians were perceived by respondents as content that struck a deep personal chord with each of them and addressed them as they were going through life. It opened up a new avenue of emotional connection between the respondents and the musicians, the former believing that the musicians' content was targeted towards them and helped them in self enhancement.

(... the lyrics they use, they are very relatable sometimes...the lyrics do have a place in my heart...) (S.S./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(I didn't think of them as someone making music for the entire world but just, like, for me...)

(T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

Now that the connection between the respondents and the musicians was established by analysing the emergent themes, the study focuses on what the respondents felt when they heard that their favourite musician had passed away, marking the abrupt termination of their parasocial relationship. The first and most common reaction was disbelief. They had heard the news of the passing but could not accept it. Some responded voluntary denial because they did not want to experience a reality which was marked by the absence of their favourite musician with whom they shared an emotional connection and who had played such a formative role in their lives.

(...I couldn't really get past the fact that the person who pretty much had me so passionate about something that I loved to do was gone...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...that pretty much shattered me because when I first saw it, I didn't want to accept it...)

(A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)



(...It was just disbelief for two days. Just literal disbelief...) (S.S./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

In an attempt to salvage some hope that this devastating news would be false, respondents double-checked the sources of this news. Only after they had verified the news of the death from credible sources did they let the reality of the situation settle in and this led to further reactions of strong sentimental value. After the denial stage, strong emotions started operating and the respondents stated crying for extended periods of time. Some even reported feeling guilty that they could not do anything to help their idol, even though they themselves later acknowledged the impracticality of the same.

(I started tearing up a little and then I did actually shed a few tears...) (S.A./ 20/ F/ Christian)

(...I was really heart broken for a few days...) (S.S./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...I used to cry for weeks after that...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...part of me feels guilty about having used his music to feel good whereas I couldn't do anything to help him no matter how much I did, you know, love listening to him and loved him as a person...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...Chester Bennington, his voice, saved millions of lives but we couldn't save him...) (R.H.K./ 19/M/ Hindu)

The tragedy had taken them by surprise and they hovered between the emotions of sadness, shock and even bewilderment- when the musicians had been perceived as hale and hearty by the respondents and the fact that they would meet with their demise so suddenly aroused confusion and curiosity in them.

(...I think it was very confusing for me when I was that young to have this sort of, like, idealistic role model suddenly die...) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

For others, still, there was a unique response. It took the form of physical restlessness and agitation. Apart from crying, this particular respondent expressed himself by jumping and having physically aggressive reactions.

(I was like jumping, I was getting aggressive and...I don't know, it was super weird, I cannot explain that reaction to anyone) (R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

Table 3.

Visual Representation of the Domains of Later Reaction to Death and Steps to Cope with Musicians' Death and the corresponding Themes and Sub-Themes.

| <i>Domains</i> | <i>Themes and Sub-Themes</i> |
|---|--|
| <p>Later reaction to death</p> <p>potential</p> <p>blood relative</p> | <p>Epiphanies regarding world view</p> <p>Realisation of mortality</p> <p>Realizing the importance of mental health</p> <p>Reality check</p> <p>Realization of the musician's</p> <p>Feeling of injustice</p> <p>Feelings of personal loss</p> <p>Loss of a role model</p> <p>Physical absence</p> <p>More intense than the death of a</p> |
| <p>Steps to cope with musicians' death</p> | <p>Remembering the artist</p> <p>Repeatedly revisiting artist's songs</p> <p>Browsing content online</p> <p>Writing articles</p> <p>Drawing sketches</p> <p>Self- enhancement</p> <p>Learning music</p> <p>Seeking peace of mind</p> <p>Educating self about musician</p> <p>Level-headed problem solving</p> |

As the tragedy dimmed out slowly with the passage of time, it led to various gradual realizations and intellectual implications. Since this was the first experience some respondents had with the death of someone so important in their life, it made them realize the permanence and imminence of death and what significance it holds for the bereaved and the



deceased alike. The realization that everybody, no matter how talented or sensational they

are, is doomed to be mortal and has to die one day and their death has to be accepted, dawned on them. It was a much needed reality check.

(...I am still trying to come to terms with the fact that, you know, it's the reality and I have to be okay with it and I really don't have any other choice but to be okay with it...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...it was like coming to the realisation that all these greats have to die one day...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M)

(...I started thinking about death, you know, what that means in the great, grand scheme of things...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...I don't know when someone close to me is going to go away and I won't be able to listen, slash, speak to them, slash, experience them...) (V.S.K./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

Six out of ten respondents stated that they were affected by the death of one particular musician named Chester Bennington, who was the lead singer of heavy metal band Linkin Park. The cause of his death was suicide, culminating from deteriorating mental health issues. Some of the band's content that the respondents deeply related to revolved around dealing with mental health issues and other problems of life, to which Bennington lent his voice.

(...he was trying to talk about his depression, his darkness and everything to me and that was the first time I started- I thought like, yeah, I should make my own band...) (R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

His own struggles with mental health problems and his determination to tackle them was one of the reasons why the respondents felt such intense emotional connection with him and his death by suicide was perceived ironic. Since their idol lost his life to mental health issues, respondents truly started perceiving the need for good mental health. This assisted them in opening up and accepting some problems that they themselves faced and this, they attributed solely to Bennington.

(...after his death, I realised the importance of mental health...) (R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...since 20th July 2017, I've been very open about my depression and that's kinda helped me...) (R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...even though he inspired me and he inspired a lot of other people, I am sure, even though people can do things like that, you never know what they are going through in their everyday life...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

While some respondents reported that it was a tragedy, few specified how it was more than that-how it was a loss of genuine human talent. They viewed the musician as having tremendous potential and possessing the capability to achieve much more had they not met with their demise.

(...I felt that there was a lot that this man could have still done had he been here...) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

The passing of such a great individual made the respondent perceive the musician as being the victim of unjust circumstances, and label the world at large unjust.

(...this man who did such great things and had such incredible potential and it almost feels like... the world around him corrupted him...) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(...I just felt that it was very unfair that he had to pass away...) (S.M.V./ 18/ F/ Hindu)

It also felt like a personal loss to the respondents, with many of them reporting that they reacted the same way as they would have reacted when a person they personally know died. Even though most had never had the chance to meet their idols, they still hoped that they would but with their death, that possibility ceased to exist simultaneously. Furthermore, some respondents claimed that the death of their favourite musician affected them more than the death of blood relatives. This proves the depth of their relationship with their idol.

(...I felt really sad because: a) I don't think I'll ever see Chester again and there was no



scope of me seeing him ever... (V. S. K./ 20/ M/ Hindu)

(... Avicii stopped doing concerts a year before his death but I still could have met him somehow but now, I cannot...) (S.S./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(... it actually felt like someone I had known my entire life had gone...) (S.S./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(... I haven't cried for some of my relatives' deaths, actually, who were apparently close by blood...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...you idolize someone- you feel like- you look up to this person-you feel like you actually lost someone...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...sort of like a personal loss, you know, I mean, though it wasn't, it felt like that...) (S.S./ 20/F/ Hindu)

Once the respondents had got accustomed to the musicians' death, they started to take steps to cope with their death. They differed in their ways of coping and presented some really insightful methods in which they made themselves feel better about it, accept it and move on. Some respondents reported drawing solace by repeatedly listening to the artist's songs in a way that immortalized the memory of the artist. This gave them a feeling that the deceased musician was still there and that death could not bring an end to his legacy.

(...I know I started listening to his old music a lot...) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(...I listened to his songs on repeat for the next two days...) (S.M.V./ 18/ F/ Hindu)

(...I kept listening to that song and I felt like he knew he was going to die and he left that song, you know, to tell us that, yeah, "I will be reborn in this- I will be reborn in your memories...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...I was very low after their death, like, for at least 2 to 3 weeks, I would listen to only their songs...) (S.S./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

The best way to cope with their favourite musician's death was to keep their memory alive, and most respondents found that viewing the musician in action on Youtube, learning



more about their death, contributing to online tribute initiatives and following any online

developments to their death provided them comfort because they could see their idol in action. Moreover, proactive measures such as writing about the musician and painting their portrait were individualized measures to immortalize their memory. Some respondents reported feeling a connection of grief with other mourners who had come together to put in efforts to keep the memory of their favourite musician alive. This is an interesting find since it involves connection with strangers over grief.

(...I listened to his songs on repeat, I listened to all these-all those YouTube videos of Linkin Park and I just-just saw Chester dance around and have fun and I think, that sort of comforted me...) (V.S.K./ 20/ M/ Hindu)

(...I am in a group called "Make Chester Proud"-a Bangalore group of Linkin Park fans...)
(T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(... I tried writing an article to publish in a paper...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...I also tried to make a sketch of him...) (S.S./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(...reading those stories helped me in a way that I felt that there are other people also who felt the same as me so, that connection of grief...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

Some very productive approaches were adopted by the respondents in time. Many worked towards strengthening their own selves as a means of coping with their favourite musician's death. As a tribute to their favourite musician, they devoted themselves to learning a new musical instrument or singing. This is how they got one step closer to emulating their favourite musicians. As far as psychology goes, this is a very healthy way to cope with death.

(... listening to a lot more of his music, revisiting the songs which I used to listen to when I was a kid and I tried finding similar artists or similar music, practicing by myself, learning how to sing it...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...I finally got the courage to pick up a guitar and it was one of their songs that I actually learnt on the guitar for the first time..) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

Some respondents reported taking baby steps towards undoing the emotional toll that the bereavement took on them by seeking peace of mind and training themselves to be calm and logical, rather than acting out of emotional impulse. This always proves to be helpful in the long run since peace of mind and level-headed thinking are optimal for mental well-being. They also realized their own responsibility in lending a helping hand to others in need, to prevent another tragedy like the one that befell their musical idol.

(..I need to change my things, now I need to help the others. Those people who are depressed- I need to talk to them, I need to make them feel comfortable that, you know, suicide is not the solution ..) (R.H.K./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(..The way he used to, you know, handle the situation or the way my friends handle the situation, it's like, yeah, it's just one day and it's gonna pass..) (R.H.K./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

As a final bid to keep the memory of the musician alive, respondents salvaged whatever information they could about the musician. This could also be said to have been coupled with the sense of curiosity and awe about the life and death of the musician. The respondents took measures to know every detail about the musician and whether there were any tribute initiatives taking place in their memory, which would be a source of comfort and consolation for them.

(...I tried finding every detail about his death and how it happened ..) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(...first thing I searched on Google almost every morning for the longest time was ..his name, you know, what was happening, were they having a tribute concert for him, uhh, was there a burial ..were other artists paying tribute to him, how was the music industry coping after he'd gone and then...listening to his music and, you know, reading very deeply into his music...)



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(S.S./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

Table 4.

Visual Representation of the Domains of Effect on Mood or Behavior and Presently Lingering Effects of Death and the corresponding Themes and Sub-Themes.

| <i>Domains</i> | <i>Themes and Sub-Themes</i> |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Effect on mood or behavior | Negative effects Reduced social interaction Dispirited Suicidal actions Aggressive outlet to depression Moodiness |
| Presently lingering effects of death | Nostalgia Immortalizing musician though |
| media | Greater sadness when revisiting |
| music | |

Despite their best attempts at coping, there were radical effects on the respondents' mood and behavior. Although most reported no disruption of their daily routine, some claimed that they experienced marked changes in their overall mood as an after-effect of their favourite musician's death, which affected their behaviour. The frequently experienced mood pattern was negative. More specifically, this entailed the individual feeling less motivated towards being their usual self and a temporary loss of interest in normally enjoyed hobbies and activities. It also included shutting off social interaction and avenues for communication as well.

(...the amount of time I spent talking to people had reduced a little...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...I wasn't as lively as I was...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...I wasn't interested in day to day activities, I was too hungover on their songs...) (S.S./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...I pretty much closed myself off from performing...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

One particular respondent reported attempting suicide as a result of bereavement. He reported having struggled with depression and social anxiety for a major part of his life and his source of positivity was his favourite musician, whose death exacerbated the respondent's issues.

(...it was just that I felt like giving up too at that point. That night, when I came back from college, I didn't really want to do anything, I was just in bed the entire evening and I actually didn't even get up in the morning the next day because I honestly didn't wanna go on anymore because this was... it took a physical toll on me and I think it's because of the fact that it got me out of bed so many days before and now that this person wasn't there anymore around or I didn't know if he was going to be around, it was just that I didn't have any motivation to get out of bed anymore...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...I kind of took, uh- overdosed-unprescribed amount of pills hoping that I wouldn't wake up the day after that...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

There were reports of other emotional behaviour, although not as extreme as the former. These respondents claimed that they experienced frequent fluctuations of mood, sometimes bordering on aggression.

(...I was a little more moody...) (V.S.K./ 20/ M/ Hindu)

(...I used to vent out my depression in the way of aggression...) (R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

Despite there being a brief succession of years after the death of their favourite musician, the respondents reported that they still felt the effects of the death at present, in a nostalgic way. They reported feeling sad and reminiscing the days when their idol was alive upon the mention of the musician's name or when they listened to songs by the musician. In order to curb this sadness, they took to online media- watching videos of their musician or listening to their songs.

(...I feel like, I mean, he's still there, he's probably still talking to me or something like that...)

(R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

(...what I am looking at is the memory of a dead person... I am looking at something he has left behind- that he doesn't exist in this place anymore...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...anytime anyone mentions him, I get... I get really sad...) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(...the more I read about him, the more I listened to his music, I felt worse about his passing...) (S.S./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(...I think it will remain with me forever- yeah, I would like to say forever because I would like to keep this memory alive...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...they just wanted to belong somewhere where there is a common platform...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

Table 5.

Visual Representation of the Domains of Probable Reaction to Future Musician Deaths and a Unique Domain and the corresponding Themes and Sub-Themes.

| <i>Domains</i> | <i>Themes and Sub-Themes</i> |
|---|--|
| Probable reaction to future musician deaths | Similar patterns Losing a part of self Devastated Recovering in a couple of days Coping assisted by favourite musicians' content |
| musician | Other patterns Dependent on relationship with Humanizing celebrities |
| Unique | Worse reaction to suicide |

When asked about their reactions to the death of any more of their favourite musicians



in the future, most reported that their reaction would not be the same as the one in question.

This indicates that parasocial relationships are not formed with ease and it takes an effective balance of knowing about the musician, empathizing with them, idolizing them and revering them to establish a relationship meaningful enough to be marked by the reactions described predominantly in the transcript. However, some respondents responded by claiming that they would be severely distressed by the death of another musician and that it would take a considerable, even possibly greater, toll on them. Some respondents connected so deeply with most musicians that they claimed it was like losing a part of themselves when one such musician died.

(...the music that they produced, you relate to it on a very personal level a lot of times and when that goes away, you feel like a little part of you went with it...) (A.P.V./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...that would be really heartbreaking. I don't think I will be able to take one more musician...) (V.S.K./ 20/ M/ Hindu)

(...I would be devastated. It would be a lot more worse but, I mean, eventually, I would have to move on because I can't, you know, sit and sulk for something...) (S.A./ 20/ F/ Christian)

(...pretty much the same thing would happen...) (S.S./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

(...if it does happen again, it will surely be in my heart, it will affect me but it wouldn't take as much of a toll as this one person did...) (A.S./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

Others stated that whatever the degree of reaction they would have upon the death of another musician in the future was, they would rely on music produced by the currently deceased musician. They would rely on this music to lend a voice to their feelings, proving their loyalty to this particular musician.

(...I think my reaction would be the same, I would be really sad for a few days. I would use their music to cope...) (S.S./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

(...they will help me get through that, their songs...) (S.S./ 18/ M/ Hindu)

Future reaction towards a musician's death would depend on the connection with the musician, as stated by a respondent. If there was an emotional connection or, perhaps, a source of inspiration, the reaction would be intense.

(...with another artist, it's just music that is for a road trip or something that I like and if I like the artist for his music and not really as a person, then I probably might not feel that bad...)

(T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...I can't imagine a situation like that because there is no one like that but I guess it will be the same feeling, depending on what the music is...) (T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

An interesting insight broached by a respondent was into the superhuman hype that is usually created around the life of internationally famous musicians. It is perceived as obligatory to cater to the need for forever remaining a flawless, perfect, enigmatic individual so as to maintain the celebrity status. This creates an environment of tremendous pressure for the musician and has detrimental effects on their physical and mental health. As a result of the death of her favourite musician, the respondent learnt that it is vital to treat these musicians as the actual human beings that they are instead of burdening them with our own superhuman ideals.

(...we forget to humanize musicians, if that make sense, because of the celebrity in front of them, right? So... and he was a deeply disturbed individual with a lot of issues that he had since childhood and I think, humanizing him in that way helped me, and I think something now I have learnt to do, like, every celebrity you encounter, because of the very unique and high pressure environment that they are in, sometimes they have a lot of issues...) (A.D./ 20/ F/ Hindu)

A unique connection was drawn between the reaction of some respondents and the nature of death of their favourite musicians. They stated having a more intense reaction



towards death by suicide than death by natural causes. Death by suicide implied that the

musician was going through problems of his own and they culminated in suicide, the knowledge of which invoked guilt in the respondents because they explained how he had helped them through hardships but they could not return the favour.

(...it was a suicide, it hit a lot harder than a natural death...I used his music to overcome the hardships that I faced and it was just sad that none of us among the whole fan following that Linkin Park had could not do anything to help him for all that he had done to help us...)

(T.L.T./ 18/ F/ Christian)

(...I would be sad but, you know, that wouldn't hit me like...the way suicide hits me...)

(R.H.K./ 19/ M/ Hindu)

This transcript was member-checked and it was concluded that the themes and codes were consistent with the responses received from interviewing.

Summary and Conclusion

The presented study covered a multitude of effects, changes and reactions to the death of a favourite musician. Although the study does not primarily focus on the measurement of parasocial relationships and parasocial interaction, they nevertheless form the crux of the patterns that followed as a result of the death. It, however, connects the findings with probable psychological developments that might result in the long-term. A conscious attempt has been made to keep the course of the study exploratory and to not confine any of the results or findings to specific variables.

Findings

A pivotal aspect of the study is that the death of one particular musician, Chester Bennington, was reported to have affected six of the ten respondents. All these respondents showed patterns of parasocial connection with him from adolescence until young adulthood. Previous studies have confirmed that parasocial relationships are formed most readily during adolescence (Giles, 2002; Giles & Maltby, 2004; Maltby et al., 2005), when individuals seek

out their own identity and means of self-expression. Parasocial relationships were explored by tracing the respondents' attachment with their favourite musician back to the meaning they attribute to music itself. They attributed essential psychological factors such as identity formation, mood-regulation, confidence, motivation and role modeling to the music they listened to and their favourite musician. Some respondents felt such a significant sense of empathic connection with their favourite musician that their death elicited a more intense reaction in them than the death of a blood relative. Being the only source of motivation in the lives of some respondents, their favourite musician's death caused them to be dispirited in their daily activities and in one particular case, it led to a suicide attempt. This was one cardinal indicator of a parasocial relationship, the termination of which resulted, in that particular case, in the respondent attempting to end his own life. This was a consequential effect of the death of musicians on that individual. Furthermore, the death of musicians can also bring about positive changes in the individual if they seek healthy ways of coping.

Immortalizing the memory of their idol is a way of continuing to draw inspiration, motivation and emotional connection from them even after they have passed away. Emulating the ideal aspects of their lives and learning new hobbies are healthy ways of coping that the respondents resorted to. It is interesting how the memory of a departed person can still keep someone motivated and guided. The exclusivity of this relationship became clearer when respondents predicted a less intense emotional or behavioral response to the death of another beloved musician.

Indirectly, there might be pressure on the musicians to lead a more idealistic life and make attempts of their own in inspiring and connecting with their fans, since their fans model their identity and behavior around them.

Implications of the Study

One of the deductions from this transcript is that the connection people have with music and musicians during their adolescence majorly determines the way their identity is shaped while laying emphasis on the way they derive inspiration, emotional support, companionship and an idol from their favourite musicians. Here, it becomes clear what an everlasting impact music and musicians have on the holistic development of a listener's psychological development and emotional well-being, which is also implicated by previous research (Saarikallio, S., & Erkkilä, J. (2007).

The study further implies benefits for respondents who were able to get some fresh insights and experience epiphanies following the death of their favourite musicians, which would shape their perception of the world in a prudent manner. On the other hand, it might set into motion a chain of events which could insidiously trigger major psychological crises in the future because of the sheer trauma. Some respondents imbibed lessons in addressing mental health issues and initiating remedial changes in the way they dealt with some of their own, affected by how their idols succumbed to mental health issues. These imply the formative steps to increased awareness about mental health issues, which is of paramount necessity currently. Constructive coping techniques such as learning music, level-headed problem solving and sharing grief were all attributed to the death of a favourite musician, indicating the favourable emergence of healthy coping patterns that can be applied while facing difficulties in the future.

Limitations

There is an acknowledgement of the existence of characteristic patterns of parasocial relationships but the complete manifestation of one has not been put to psychometric tests. Emotional connection and empathy are the most defining characteristics of a parasocial relationship and since they were exhibited by the respondents, there were no more attempts to

investigate the nature of parasocial relationships and interactions. The study focuses more on the effects of the termination of such relationships. Additionally, most of the themes that emerged from the data collected came from the effects of the death of one particular musician, Chester Bennington, although the rest of the data was also voluminous in its own right. The study was conducted in a university setting and the age range was quite small, although the sample contained respondents of two sexual orientations- heterosexual and bisexual.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research can strengthen the connection between music and self-confidence. The transcript's exploration of the theme of mental health also identifies a gap in the existing research that can explore how music can help in promoting optimal mental health. Music can be of immense help in creating awareness about and caring for mental health in the same manner as some of the respondents in the study did. Owing to their emotional attachment and empathy for their favourite musicians, they were able to feel the toll that mental illness takes on a person's life. Further research can consolidate how music can be used to promote good mental health and therapeutic models can be developed for the same. Concrete links can also be established between depression and parasocial relationships. Studies can be done to measure motivation derived from attachment with a death person. Healthy coping strategies that are explored in the transcript can be utilised in different scenarios of bereavement and also have the potential to double up as handy stress-management techniques. Music helps those at the risk of or suffering from mental illnesses in opening up and seeking help.

Conclusion

By understanding the meaning of music and the role of musicians in the lives of the respondents, the ways the respondents' lives were shaped were extrapolated. Musicians



formed the source of the respondents' motivation, inspiration and comfort. This relationship

between them is termed parasocial since there is no reciprocation but it nevertheless contributes to the respondents' identity, confidence and even personality in a favourable way. Musicians helped respondents at times when they could not rely upon anyone else and this further strengthened their bond. At the time of their favourite musician's demise, the respondents showed emotional and even physical reactions which later became more contemplative in nature and unfolded epiphanies. Their knowledge of the fact that this relationship was one-sided and resignation to the same eventually gave rise to despair and guilt about having done nothing to help the struggling musician. They tried to appease their guilt and make up for the loss by coping constructively. Some viewed the person and the relationship so special that they made no attempt to make up for the loss and feel its effects forever. These were the positive, negative and neutral effects of the termination of a parasocial relationship and in conclusion, all of them were unique and interesting in their own rights.

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