

“Taking Center Stage: Exploring Mental Health Issues in Musical Theatre”

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by

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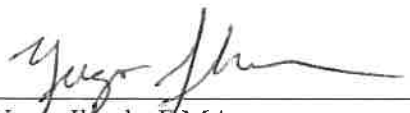
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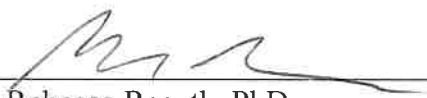
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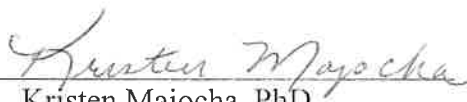
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Taking Center Stage:

Exploring Mental Health Issues in Musical Theatre

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Author Note

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Abstract

The current project explores the influence of mental health in musical theatre. The prevalence of mental health in musical theatre is crucial to the development of an imperfect character that is relatable and circumstantial situations in which the audience can see the character living and dealing with these different mental health issues. One of the greatest accomplishments of musical theatre has been creating a platform to raise awareness for mental health issues and disorders of any size or degree. Utilizing seven different Broadway songs sung by female characters that each deal with a different mental health issue or illness, each one is analyzed through lyrical content, performance, characterization, musical significance and mental health inquiry. Each song choice and character showcase a different mental health issue and how the character copes with the challenges. The results showed limited research but contribute to a field that is beginning to emerge as a staple in American society and culture. Musical theatre shows that mental health issues and disorders are prominent in society and normalizes the stigma, illustrating the concept that people struggle together. Different characters are portraying different issues and conveying the message that everything will be okay.

Taking Center Stage:

Exploring Mental Health Issues in Musical Theatre

In terms of previous exploration in mental health and musical theatre, research is pretty limited in this combined area due to it being a new and emerging concept. The turn of the twentieth century saw an increase toward mental health awareness in society, however musical theatre is one of many outlets that has been featuring mental health as a critical component since the twentieth century (Shevenock, 2018). Musicals utilizing a mental health component in a main character is unique because the mental health storyline is often used to raise the stakes or explain a character's behavior. Other musicals showcase how the mental health component affects the main character, and the audience can see how the character's perspective and how he or she behaves with a mental health issue (Schiller, 2017). Musical theatre as a medium has been phenomenally successful in addressing these themes and elements.

Characters who sing about their feelings are often displaying heightened emotion, and songs play an important role in the fact that they can either move the plot or reveal a character's thoughts, obstacles, and triumphs, proving that musical theatre can easily handle these significant topics (Schiller, 2017). What is unique and powerful to the audience is that these characters are doing the extraordinary by fighting internal battles onstage and exposed in front of everyone. The musical element of musical theatre provides depth and dimension to emotions that may exist outside of people's everyday boundaries. These artists work out their own neuroses through their art. Mental health and illness might be a stealthy enemy, but musical theatre has sparked a conversation that is happening loud and onstage (Cindric, 2016).

The stigma surrounding mental illness is a very controversial topic although it has grown to be more accepted in modern society. Once a very taboo topic that could not be discussed, mental illness has broken into the media and are becoming normalized in society (cite this source). According to the National Institute of Mental Health, nearly one in five adults in the United States lives with a mental illness. Mental illnesses include many different conditions that vary in degree of severity, and the classifications range from mild to moderate to severe. Mental illness is labeled into two categories: Any Mental Illness (AMI) and Serious Mental Illness (SMI). AMI encompasses all recognized mental illnesses, and SMI is a smaller, specific subset of AMI that encompasses the more severe mental illnesses (World Health Organization, 2019).

Mental health was first explored on Broadway in 1941 through the facet of mental illness with the musical “Lady in the Dark.” “Lady in the Dark” tells the story of Liza Elliot, a successful businesswoman who is the founder and editor of *Allure*, a popular fashion magazine. She begins having panic attacks and experiencing long bouts of depression which leads her to consult Doctor Brooks to receive psychoanalysis. Through psychoanalysis, she realizes that she is not as happy as she thinks in any aspect of her life, particularly in her significant romantic relationship and in her profession. Liza discovers her repressed memories and dreams from childhood in which her parents told her how she was never to be as beautiful as her mother, and this led to relentless teasing from other children. Upon realizing that these bad memories are the source of her problems, Liza is able to become content with her life as imperfect (Wolf, 1997).

Trying to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness has been a priority for those who struggle with the diseases and mental health professionals who provide

effective treatment. A playwright and actress who lives with bipolar disorder developed a staged performance entitled “That’s Just Crazy Talk,” which targets stigmatizing attitudes towards bipolar disorder. Prospective, longitudinal, and sequential mixed methods were used to assess the impact of the performance on people with bipolar disorder (n=80) and healthcare providers (n=84). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 33 participants (14 people with bipolar disorders and 19 healthcare providers). Quantitatively, healthcare providers showed significantly improved attitudes immediately post-performance, but this change was not maintained over time, and people with bipolar disorder showed little quantitative change. Qualitatively, both people with bipolar disorder and bipolar disorder healthcare providers showed enduring and broadly positive changes. A theatrical presentation designed to reduce stigma produced immediate impact on healthcare providers quantitatively and significant qualitative impact on people with bipolar disorder and healthcare providers (Michalak et al., 2014).

Music therapy has also been previously identified as a way to foster processes of mental health recovery. Sometimes, characters and people alike use music to speak what words cannot. Twenty-three people participated in interviews for a project that aimed to address the gap between group singing and mental health recovery by exploring the conditional and contextual factors involved in group singing which may promote recovery for people with mental illness. The findings of this study were presented as a grounded theory of group singing which describes how participants experienced triggering encounters with music and used the supportive conditions of the group singing context to regain a sense of health. A new term, musical recovery, was developed which

depicts a process of regaining healthy relationships with music to promote mental health recovery (Bibb & McFerran, 2018).

As musical theatre keeps growing and expanding, so does the desire to participate in it. Participation in activities perceived to be meaningful is of importance in recovery process among people with mental health issues and mental illness. A qualitative study explored experiences in participation of music and theatre among people with long-term mental illness. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with eleven participants in a music and theatre workshops set in a Norwegian mental health hospital context. The findings indicated that participation in music and theatre provided an opportunity to focus on enjoyable mundane activities and demonstrate how the arts have the potential to bring meaning and small positive moments into participants' lives. Despite being small, these moments appeared to add pleasure and meaning to the lives of those experiencing them, and raised professionals' awareness of how small moments carry meaning, power, and how to facilitate arenas which can provide such moments for people with long-term mental health issues or illness (Orjasater, Davidson, Hedlund, Bjerkeset, & Ness, 2018).

One of Broadway's most successful and current-running musicals is "Dear Evan Hansen," which tells the story of a teenager named Evan Hansen. Evan struggles with social anxiety, and his challenges are only heightened by modern society's reliance on social media. A close classmate named Connor dies, and a letter Evan wrote addressed to him is found which causes Evan to spiral, questioning his sense of belonging and connection to Connor. This show has garnered immense success and has prompted families, schools, and community organizations to start talking about mental illness and taking the topic seriously. Seeing the achievement of "Dear Evan Hansen," other

composers and producers have been moving forward with more original works focused on mental health issues. Critics and artists have been realizing that audiences are ready to see pieces of theatre that reflect the struggles they face in their own lives (Shevenock, 2018).

The current research project aims to look at mental health representation in musical theatre from different eras of the American musical. The specific method of research involves vocal performance of a highlighting song from a main character who is struggling with a mental health issue or illness and is coupled with analysis through lyrics, musical content, characterization, and mental health inquiry. The song excerpts showcase the mental health issues of anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, the stages of grief/grieving process, delusional disorder, self-esteem/self-image, trauma, and bipolar disorder. Each song selection portrays a character struggling with some kind of issue and projecting their struggles to the audience. The audience can relate to the characters, identifying with the battle of mental health and normalizing the stigma of mental health, illustrating the concept that we struggle together.

Breathe

“Breathe” is a popular song from one of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s famous musicals *In the Heights*. “Breathe” tells the story of Nina, a Latina college freshman, who is coming back to her neighborhood after her first year of college at Stanford. Always a good girl and an overachiever, Nina is ashamed to come back and tell everyone who looks to her as an inspiration that she has flunked out of college, losing her scholarship. “Breathe” highlights the mental health issue of anxiety and how the pressure of perfection and achievement puts immense strain on the mind and body.

Over 40 million adults worldwide suffer from anxiety, which is one of the most common mental health issues that people struggle with. Anxiety can be manifested in the form of general anxiety or can be very severe and be diagnosed with an accompanying disorder. Symptoms of anxiety include excessive sweating, chest pains, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, sleeping issues, and general panic, fear, and uneasiness. Anxiety and anxiety disorders manifest from a combination of factors, such as environmental stressors and genetics and often come about during heightened life events, such as pursuing school or buying a home (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

When performing this song, I focused on trying to convey the physical and emotional dimensions of a character who is trying to summon all of her courage as she is preparing to explain to everyone who believed in her and her abilities that she failed them. This is a very nerve-wracking action that she is about to perform, and her emotions are running at an all-time high, bursting with anxiousness. The character is having a hard time controlling her physical reaction. She is trying to stay calm but is unable to, and at times she is hyperventilating because she is breathing too much (Hendrix, 2016).

There are many significant lyrics in the song that speak to the overwhelming theme of anxiety. “They’re not worried about me” and “They’re all counting on me to succeed” show that Nina’s feeling the pressure to achieve very well, as it is not just a reflection of her success but of her family, friends, and her culture. “The biggest disappointment you know” and “I know that I’m letting you down” express Nina’s feelings of failure and shame because she has not lived up to the expectations everyone has set for her.

The music plays a pivotal role in understanding and connecting with the issue of anxiety. The beginning of the song is setting the folk-like community with guitar and flute. The lyrics are sung as if they were being spoken, following the natural rhythmic inflection of Nina's speech patterns. The syllabic system of one note per syllable represents the quick, small value of each note. The quickening tempo showcases her anxiety through fast breathing, rapid heart rate, etc. The only contrasting point of this is when Nina is singing the "Breathe" section, which is very drawn out and produces a calming effect/coping tool to deal with her anxiety. Nina's coping mechanism, the "Breathe" section, is sung three times throughout the entire song. The high point in the song is when Nina is singing with the most passion, and the music operates in stop time with no accompaniment. This section is rhythmically driven and features faster accompaniment as well with a higher range of vocals and volume. Lyrically, this section is the most intense following her extreme anxiety (Hendrix, 2016).

I Never Knew His Name

"I Never Knew His Name" is a featured song from a lesser-known musical *The Civil War: An American Musical*. "I Never Knew His Name" is sung from the point of view of a nurse during the Civil War outbreak. The vast number of soldiers she sees coming in with life-threatening injuries is so overwhelming to comprehend, and she ponders the cost of what all the fighting is over as she witnesses Union and Confederate soldiers traumatized by what they have endured and barely hanging onto life. "I Never Knew His Name" presents the mental health issue of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and how the trauma experienced by these individuals in high-pressure situations can affect them for the rest of their lives. This song also alludes to the possible effect of

what seeing the sheer volume of atrocities has brought the nurses who are exposed to seeing these wounded soldiers day after day.

Approximately 8 million adults have PTSD during a given year, which is only a small portion of the population who have gone through a trauma and are struggling with the outcome. About six out of every ten men and five out of every ten women will experience at least one trauma in their lives, ranging from sexual assault, child abuse, car accidents, witnessing death, etc. PTSD is common for those who have served in the military and affects these individuals throughout their lives as well. PTSD from military affairs can include combat fighting, sexual assault, sexual harassment, etc. Some common symptoms of PTSD include panic attacks and a stress reaction that can last for long periods of time (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

When performing this song, I focused on trying to portray the extent to which the war has taken over the lives of people in this era and how the horrors of warfare have left the soldiers beaten and battered and the caretakers helpless. The song is primarily meant to serve as a medium for awareness of PTSD in military personnel. The nurse is tending to countless soldiers who are pleading for help but trying to remain strong for their causes. The character is overcome with emotion upon seeing these heroes on their deathbeds as she sees them transform from boys to men. She realizes that regardless of the uniform, each soldier who passes through and passes on is missing out on the same life offerings, like family and happiness (Bey, 2019).

There are many significant lyrics in the song that contribute to the awareness of PTSD and its message toward the intended audience of war veterans. "Pleading with his eyes, suddenly so wise, trying not to cry" is painstakingly accounting for the soldier's

strength depleting as the trauma overtakes him. “The true cost of honor is suddenly too clear” illustrates that in the present condition, the realization that being a hero for our country in the fight is not worth the suffering endured. “Whispering goodbye, thanking God that I never knew his name” conveys the nurse’s relief in not knowing the names of soldiers and getting emotionally attached to them, only to have their lives be cut short by their warfare endeavors.

The music pays homage to the issue of PTSD and connects us lyrically and rhythmically through the secondary source of a Civil War nurse. Throughout the song, the accompaniment appears to be very intimate and folk-like with instruments such as the flute, guitar, and the strings. With relatively simple accompaniment, the audience is given more of a chance to focus on the lyrics and their connection to PTSD, but the instrumental break in the middle of the piece builds up the powerful intensity that the final verse possesses. “I Never Knew His Name” features noticeably short melodic phrases that are smooth and sustained fully for emphasis packed with profound emotional execution (Schiller, 2017).

On My Own

“On My Own” is one of the most memorable songs from one of the most popular musicals of all time: *Les Misérables*. Based on the popular novel by Victor Hugo, the success of *Les Misérables* has been worldwide and spawned several musical productions as well as an award-winning movie. “On My Own” is sung from the point of view of Eponine, a lowly thief during the French Revolution era. She is in love with Marius, a lead revolutionary, but his feelings lie with another woman. She sings of her unrequited love for him through experiencing visions of the two of them together in love. “On My

Own” presents the mental health issue of delusional disorder and how when people adamantly believe something, their minds can conjure up wild yet untrue fantasies. Eponine is experiencing delusions/delusional states of her and Marius in love despite knowing full well that he is in love with another woman.

Delusional disorder is generally classified as a rare mental illness in which a patient is struck with delusions but previously had no known diagnosis of a psychological symptom or disorder. According to German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin, people who possess delusional disorder remain “coherent, sensible, and reasonable.” People with delusional disorder continue to socialize and function normally in terms of behavior, but over time, these delusional ideas tend to overtake and disrupt lives. The DSM breaks delusional disorder up into six different classifications: erotomanic, grandiose, jealous, persecutory, somatic, and mixed when they combine more than one. Delusions often accompany different forms of schizophrenia, and many times, people who suffer from schizophrenia can experience these manic delusions more frequently (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

When performing this song, I channeled my focus into the portrayal of Eponine as misunderstood based on these delusions. This song speaks very powerfully to the mental issue of delusional disorder, specifically its specialization in erotomanic delusions which are delusions that another person, often a prominent figure, is in love with the individual. Eponine fantasizes that Marius, an important French revolutionary, is in love with her. “On my own, pretending he’s beside me” and “Without him, I feel his arms around me” illustrates simple accounts of her delusions and how Marius is with her and makes her feel safe. “And I know it’s only in my mind that I’m talking to myself and not to him”

shows the extent to which her delusions have affected her. She knows what the truth of the situation is, but her mind pulls her back in with the delusion that they will be together. “I love him but every day I’m learning” and “All my life I’ve only been pretending” are explaining Eponine’s journey back to reality from her delusions. She has refocused on what is truly occurring and is coming to terms with it (Ørjasæter et al., 2018).

The musical execution throughout the song bridges the missing gaps and connects the audience to the mental health issue of delusional disorder through the brilliance of the music. The strings throughout the song create the illusion or impression of rain. The soft, controlled moments reflect gentle rainfall, and the intense, commanding moments are indicative of torrential downpours, which are all reflective of Eponine’s mental and emotional state as she is experiencing these delusions. The first half of the song is engaged in happier times, when Eponine’s delusions overtake her and provide a sense of comfort and safety. This is replicated in the instrumentation as well with soft and controlled strings and slow, legato phrasing. The second half of the song is when Eponine finds herself faced with reality. Marius is not in love with her, and the world is not her safe haven. In this section, the strings pick up strength and volume, extending her vocal range and focusing on her suspensions. The final motif of the song brings Eponine to understand that she is “on her own” despite her love for him, imitative in the resumption of the soft string plucks, which are emulative of gentle rainfall (Shevenock, 2018).

Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again

“Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” is a featured song from the longest-running Broadway musical of all time: *Phantom of the Opera*. Inspired by historical

events and the success of movies and stage adaptations, *Phantom of the Opera* has turned into a worldwide phenomenon that has left a monumental impact on the world of musical theatre with its memorable characters and award-winning music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” is sung by the lead female protagonist Christine Daae who is the muse for the Paris Opera House phantom. She sings a lament dedicated to her father, the pain that she has endured because of his death and the sadness she feels as he is no longer with her. “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” presents the mental health issue of grief, the stages of the process that people experience, and the progression of these emotions. Christine is going through the grief process due to her father’s death and is experiencing the accompanying emotions with it.

Grief is a multifaceted response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone that has died, to which there was a profound emotional bond, but people can grieve a variety of losses in their lives. Grief is a natural response to death, and everyone’s grief experience is different and individualized. The Kubler-Ross model, developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and commonly known as the five stages of grief, identifies five distinct stages on how people process the grief they are feeling: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This theory emphasizes the stage each as essential parts of the framework that helps people to learn to live despite their losses (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2019)

When performing this song, I worked toward conveying each stage that Christine passes through purposefully and deliberately, highlighting the different emotions she is feeling. This song is monumental in highlighting the stages of grief and each stage’s

specialization in feelings and actions. Particularly in this song, Christine experiences denial, anger, and acceptance as she comes to terms with her father's death. "Sometimes it seemed if I just dreamed, somehow you would be here" and "Wishing I could hear your voice again" are indicative of the denial stage where she still believes that her father is present with her. "Too many years fighting back tears, why can't the past just die?" represents the anger stage when she is ashamed for letting the grief consume her life and her desire to move on from the past and what she cannot change. "Try to forgive, teach me to live. Give me the strength to try" and "Help me say goodbye" are emulative of Christine experiencing the acceptance stage where she is trying to let go of her grief and move on with her life (Bey, 2019).

The brilliance of the music in "Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again" uses the stages of grief in conjunction with the music to propel the themes of grief and acceptance even further. As Christine is passing through each stage, the music is reflective of this and adjusts accordingly to each one. Christine's denial stage music is melancholy and angelic with the prominent role of the gentle violin that emphasizes the legato line, coupled with the yearning and sincerity in her tone. This musical idea continues through until Christine reaches the anger stage where the music picks up in volume and intensity along with the instrumentation of the strings, signaling Christine's descent into fury and anguish. Toward the end of the song, Christine enters the last stage of grief which is acceptance, and this is the climatic point where the power of the orchestra and her vocal strength and control are in sync and produce a passionate display of grief that subsides into acceptance of the situation. This musical section is so

controlled in the instrumental execution, vocal control, and dynamic shift as the intensity slowly decreases back to the origin of the music in the beginning of the song.

“Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” predominantly features two sections throughout the song and are split by major key and minor key. The minor key highlights the melancholy, slower section in G minor. This key emphasizes the depression Christine is feeling in the denial and isolation stages as she is alone in a cemetery, grieving over her father’s headstone. The transition between sections is indicated by total stoppage. The major key draws attention to Christine’s reminiscence and the faster section in G major. As the song builds up strength, the intensity grows in volume and pitch. At the focal point of volume and register, Christine’s anger dissipates into acceptance of her father’s death, and she returns to a soft, low register. It is important that each key is connected to and effectively highlights each stage of grief that she is passing through (Palidofsky, 2010).

She Used to Be Mine

“She Used to Be Mine” is one of the title songs from one of the newer Broadway musicals gaining success: *Waitress*. The music and lyrics of *Waitress* was written by widespread pop singer-songwriter Sara Bareilles and is based on the 2007 movie of the same name that achieved commercial success when it was released. “She Used to Be Mine” is sung by the lead female protagonist Jenna who is a waitress and expert pie baker and is experiencing unhappiness in her marriage with her husband. She unexpectedly becomes pregnant and begins an affair with her gynecologist. Looking for a way to get out of her unsatisfying lifestyle, she plans to enter a pie-baking contest and use the winnings to create a new life for herself and her baby, away from the chaos her current

life provides her. “She Used to Be Mine” is performed after Jenna’s abusive husband runs off with all of her savings and presents the mental health issue of identity and the crisis of truly figuring out and distinguishing who someone is. Jenna is experiencing an identity struggle as she does not recognize the woman she has turned into and is trying to remember who she once was.

Struggling with identity is something that can take place at any point in life, particularly at stages with transitions or high levels of stress which can take place in teenage years, adulthood, or the elderly years. Developing a sense of self or a distinct identity is an essential part of every individual becoming mature and satisfying specific stages of development. Experiencing an identity crisis is through a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person’s sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society. Erik Erikson addresses identity crisis in his theory of psychosocial development. Successful resolution of an identity crisis is attributed to stable identity and self-image throughout adulthood, but failure to resolve an identity crisis can lead to unstable identity patterns and poor self-image (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

When performing this song, I worked toward my portrayal of Jenna as someone who is experiencing the peak of an identity crisis. All of the misfortunes that she has endured in her life has left her feeling unsatisfied, knowing that this is not truly the person she set out to become. The meaningful lyricism coupled with the array of intensity show Jenna admitting her shortcomings in life and striving to move forward as the person she genuinely wants to be. “It’s not simple to say, most days I don’t recognize me” illustrates how far Jenna has strayed from her identity to the point of being unable to

distinguish herself. “It’s not easy to know I’m not anything like I used to be” conveys her poor self-image and belief that her insecurities and other’s perceptions leave her amounting to nothing. “She is messy but she’s kind. She is lonely most of the time. She’s all of this mixed up and baked in a beautiful pie, she is gone but she used to be mine” is Jenna describing the girl she once was and who is she trying to reclaim, her true identity (Schiller, 2017).

The music utilized in this piece propels the issue of struggling with identity to the forefront, and the issue’s importance is heightened in this way. It is interesting that Jenna addresses the song in third person, which can take the blame off of her or hide her shame in who she has become. Much of the singing is very speechlike. Most of the accompaniment consists of chords, and the use of these chords is varied throughout the songs to display different significance and meaning to the section it is addressing. In the beginning of the song with the first verse and chorus, the chords are soft and sustained for the whole measure, allowing the lyrics to be featured and highlighting Jenna’s vulnerability and disappointment with the development of her identity. Transitioning to the second verse and bridge, the chords are now singular and punctuated for heavy emphasis at Jenna’s anger over the situation and desire to rewrite the past. The intensity of the passage increases as she imagines a new version of herself, a girl who is reckless, tough, and fight for the things she wants. The volume of the vocal line and the pitch both increase. The original chord structure reappears at the end of the song, coupled with the original soft tone and affirmations as Jenna is working toward reclaiming her identity. The song undeniably highlights the lyrics, while the chords are pseudo recitatives, serving as the bare minimum. The singing follows the natural inflection of the speech in

the low register with a very syllabic tone to allow the audience to focus on the words.

She takes great care to overenunciate the words with meaning. The chorus is higher and held out longer to signify its importance, and the accompaniment is absolutely subservient to the words.

As Long as He Needs Me

“As Long as He Needs Me” is a powerful ballad from the famous Broadway musical *Oliver!*. Inspired by Charles Dickens’ classic book *Oliver Twist*, *Oliver!* tells the story of a poor orphan named Oliver who is searching for a home and family while simultaneously navigating the London underworld of theft and violence. Oliver is welcomed by a group of pick-pocketers but gets more than he bargained for when he is accused of a crime he did not commit. He is rescued by a kind and wealthy gentleman but must work to clear his name. The main female protagonist Nancy is desperate to help Oliver but is controlled through the trauma that her abuser, Bill Sikes, has put her through since joining the gang. Nancy sings “As Long as He Needs Me” as a romantic expression of her love for her criminal boyfriend Bill despite his mistreatment of her and the pain he has inflicted on her. “As Long as He Needs Me” presents the mental health issue of trauma, how people mistake negative emotions for positive ones, and how they convince themselves to stay through the horrific ordeal. Nancy is going through trauma because despite the suffering she is enduring from being with her abusive partner, she convinces herself that he truly loves her and needs her in his life.

Trauma is psychological damage to the mind that occurs as a result of a distressing event, which can be the result of a singular stressful event or recurring events of being overwhelmed over long periods of time. Trauma is often the result of an

overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with that experience. Trauma differs between individuals, and people react to traumatic events differently. After a traumatic experience, a person may be triggered through re-experiencing the trauma. Other symptoms of trauma include panic attacks, insomnia, flashbacks, nightmares, emotional detachment, and mental exhaustion (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

When performing this song, I worked toward portraying the extent to which Nancy has undergone this traumatic experience, highlighting the different emotions that she is undergoing. Nancy has a range of emotional execution to perform, and it is crucial to her delivery and expression to portray the diverse sentiments of her trauma. "In spite of what you see, I'm sure that he needs me" is indicative of Nancy's adamancy that she is a necessity in Bill's life. "He doesn't say the things he should, He acts the way he thinks he should. But all the same I'll play the game his way," shows that Nancy has essentially been brainwashed to convince herself that verbal and physical abuse along are a normal part of a relationship full of love. "If you are lonely then you will know, when someone needs you, you love them so" illustrates the effect the trauma has had on Nancy's self-esteem, demonstrating that her worth is based on someone's love and approval of her; otherwise, she'll be lonely (R, 2013).

The music of "As Long as He Needs Me" is simple and reflective, truly putting the character's emotions at the forefront of the song. This ballad does well to double as a monologue, and many portrayals begin the song "talk-singing." The same simple musical theme of "As long as he needs me" is echoed throughout the song, and it is kept low to show Nancy's alto register, her heartiness and growl. The "talk-singing"

transitions into a fuller orchestral performance, but the vocal line and quality is designed to be subdued to play more to the emotions than the music. The structure of the music and vocals feature both an interior monologue and a plea to the audience to recognize her dilemma and instead of disapproving, understand her intentions. At the end of the phrasing in each verse, the flatted note sounds which is different from the rest, alerting the audience that not all is well. Nancy sings the whole verse, then alerts the audience with that note. The intensity grows and Nancy displays her tenacity even more in her low register, belting the masochistic sadness of the song. The final verse of the song brings back the familiar musical structure, recognition of Nancy's brokenness and her commitment to her abuser. The big triumphant ending symbolizes Nancy's decision to stay with him to the point of death because she believes her existence is based on his need (R, 2013).

Didn't I See This Movie?

"Didn't I See This Movie?" is a fast-paced feature from one of Broadway's most famous musicals that addresses mental illness: *Next to Normal*. *Next to Normal* is a contemporary family drama about a woman's struggle with bipolar disorder and the effects of this disorder on her family. The main female character, Diana, seems to have an ideal life, but the façade soon shatters. Diana has bipolar disorder, is plagued with anxieties, mood swings, and delusions that trace back to a family tragedy from years earlier, and all of these symptoms are growing worse with times. Throughout the course of the musical, Diana goes through a series of doctors and treatments in response to and sometimes triggering the ups and downs of her illness. "Didn't I See This Movie?" is Diana's reaction to receiving electroconvulsive therapy as treatment for her bipolar

disorder. She references the popular expose addressing mental health institutionalization “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” and famous celebrities who coped with depression like Sylvia Plath and Frances Farmer. “Didn’t I See This Movie?” addresses the mental illness of bipolar disorder, the dangerous treatment options, and the dehumanization of clients as simply crazed lunatics rather than people who are struggling.

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, and the ability to carry out daily tasks. There are four basic types of bipolar disorder, and all of them involve clear changes in mood, energy, and activity levels. These moods range from periods of elated and energized behavior (known as manic episodes) to incredibly sad or hopeless periods (known as depressive episodes). Less severe periods are known as hypomanic episodes. The four basic types of bipolar disorder are bipolar I disorder, bipolar II disorder, cyclothymic disorder, and other specified and unspecified bipolar and related disorders. Each vary in range of symptoms and episodes, and there are different treatment and therapy options available. Many people take different types of medications, such as mood stabilizers, and participate in psychotherapy. Other treatment options are electroconvulsive therapy, sleep medications, or supplements (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2019).

When performing the song, I worked toward exploring the protest that Diana has for ECT treatment for her struggles with bipolar disorder. Underneath all of the rage and anger, Diana could very well be experiencing fear of the unknown. “That hospital was heavy, but this cuckoo’s nest is worse” is reflective of Diana’s understanding of being labelled as crazy and losing her role as just a normal woman. “Didn’t I see this movie,

and didn't I cry?" is indicative of Diana's fear and trauma associated with possible dangerous treatment of her bipolar disorder. "What makes you think I'd lose my mind for you? I'm no sociopath. I'm no Sylvia Plath." Illustrates Diana's frustration of not being viewed accurately by the medical personnel, that just because she struggles with mental illness does not mean she is insane. "I know where this is going, and I know what you're about, 'cause I have seen this movie and I walked out." Reveals Diana's knowledge of this procedure and her outright refusal to participate in the dangerous therapy treatment (Hadaegh & Shirazi, 2019).

The music of "Didn't I See This Movie?" is fast-paced and energized, representative of the emotional depth of someone with bipolar disorder and what they would experience. The accompaniment is structured with a regularized pattern and a drive that is almost monotonous. The music hypes the audience up with a fast tempo of eighth notes and frenetic syncopation. The first part of the verse features simple accompaniment to draw attention to the words Diana is singing. The second half of the first verse transitions with intensity and more powerful instrumentation as Diana is reminiscing over the movie "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and how her treatment process is turning into the plot of that movie. Throughout the song, the melody is syncopated, but she sings on the off-beats and does not land on the strong beats, alluding to how she feels living with bipolar disorder. The guitar, bass, and percussion become more prominent and explodes with power as she reaches her peak, vocally and lyrically crying about the move. The doctor then rhythmically speaks the electroconvulsive therapy procedure, and Diana erupts in fury vocally defending her sanity along with the supplementary aggressive accompaniment, particularly percussion and cymbals. She is

asserting her label as not being psychotic or like any others who have publicly struggled with mental illness. The song then takes a transition back into its original rhythmic content, and Diana is outright refusing the ECT treatment, walking out of the conversation. The ending features an unsatisfying deceptive cadence because although the song is in B major, it ends in E major. The entire song captivates the viewer with its fiery passion, blunt delivery, and powerful vocal range complemented with powerful lyrical and instrumental significance (Hadaegh & Shirazi, 2019).

Discussion

The research of the connection between mental health and musical theatre reveals that there is essentially no research. This area of interest has extremely limited research due to it being a new and emerging concept. Mental health expression being utilized in a musical theatre format has been successful thus far and continues to be as playwrights, lyricists, and composers continue to bring mental health issues to the forefront of a beloved character's personality. Utilizing mental health concepts will continue to challenge society on their views of acceptance while simultaneously educating, promoting tolerance and acceptance, and normalizing the stigma.

Further research can absolutely be conducted in this area. Specific mental health disorders or different types of mental illnesses can be analyzed in a musical theatre setting instead of just a general mental health issue. It would be worthwhile to explore this topic and how it affects children by studying children's musicals and conducting behavior analyses. Conducting research on social issues such as racism and LGBTQ rights and their influence on musical theatre would be a logical next step. So many of these types of musicals exist that explore these issues and also have an effect

on audiences that can be observed and analyzed. Mental health exploration in musical theatre can also be evaluated to create different training programs for professional actors and educational seminars for audiences such as talk-backs with the performers. The current project explored mental health issues from the female perspective, but it would be remarkably interesting to also explore mental health representation in musical theatre from the male perspective as well.

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