

Making Culture-Centered Music Therapists: Resources for Working with Young Adults in Latinx Communities

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Honors Thesis

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Description of Music Therapy

- Use of music to improve quality of life and meet an individual's or a community's musical and non-musical needs
- Four main methods (Bruscia, 2014):
 - Receptive
 - Re-creative
 - Composition
 - Improvisation

*“I hate being told,
‘go back to your country.’
Latin America is still America.
They forget me. I’m still here.”*

— A., 2020

Thesis Overview

- Aim: provide more culturally relevant music therapy
- Help address trauma of immigration and forced assimilation
- Methods:
 - Read music therapy, counseling, social work, and linguistics literature
 - Identified AMTA competencies that could be adapted to be more culturally relevant
 - Conducted interviews with young adult Latinx university students
 - Wrote hypothetical music therapy clinical case studies and identified possible solutions with various Latin American musical genres

Thesis Outline

- Introduction
- Literature review
- “Be Humble”
- AMTA Competencies relating to cultural awareness/respect
- Hypothetical case studies with 3 Latin American genres
 - Reggaetón, bachata, and corrido
 - Possible solutions
 - Examples of music experiences & musical resources
- Conclusion

Be Ready to Dance: Reggaetón with Latinx Young Adults

- Reggaetón - a musical form born out of the mix of Latin American rap, hip-hop, and Caribbean reggae that rose to popularity in the 1990s (Molina, 2014)
- Mentioned to me by interviewees
- Emerged from the spread of reggae to Panama and Puerto Rico, combined with Puerto Rican style of rap in New York City
 - Became known as the “Underground” style - spoke of social justice issues and government corruption



A group of college students from a Latinx Pride Club at a local college comes to you for music therapy for self-care and stress reduction. They disclose feelings of isolation on campus, as they are a group of Latinx-identifying individuals attending a predominantly white institution (PWI). They express homesickness, the difficulty of limited opportunities to speak with peers in Spanish, and anxiety about their friends and family who may be at risk of deportation. After you explain to them what music therapy is, they communicate interest in using movement to help them cope with their difficult feelings. They say they would like to dance to reggaetón. All you know about it is that the lyrical content often contains language about sex and drugs. You are unsure how to lead them in a dance and if it is even an appropriate genre to use given the lyrical content. What do you do?

Be Ready to Dance: Reggaetón with Latinx Young Adults

- Client-preferred music improves perceptions of music therapy (Selle, 2019)
- Receptive method: Movement to music/dance
- Let the client lead
 - Provide the space and verbal processing, but may not be the MT's role to lead a song and/or dance
- Bringing music therapy outside of the clinical space (Stige, 2002)
 - Clients go to a local Latinx dance club and process with the therapist later in music therapy
- If clients are uncomfortable going to a club, teach clients to create reggaetón

Processing Heartbreak Through Bachata

- Key musical features:
 - Instruments: lead acoustic guitar, bongos, rhythm guitar, bass guitar, and güira
 - African diasporic drumming
 - Bolero roots displayed through lead guitar's riffs and syncopated rhythms in the bass guitar
 - Begin on root minor chord and descent chromatically to end on the dominant of the key



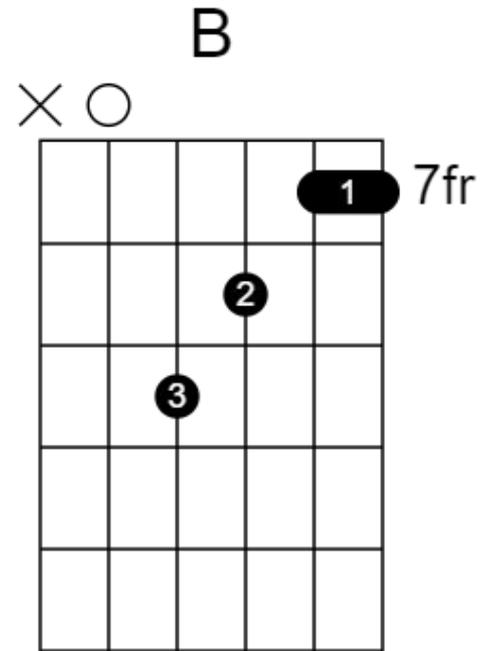
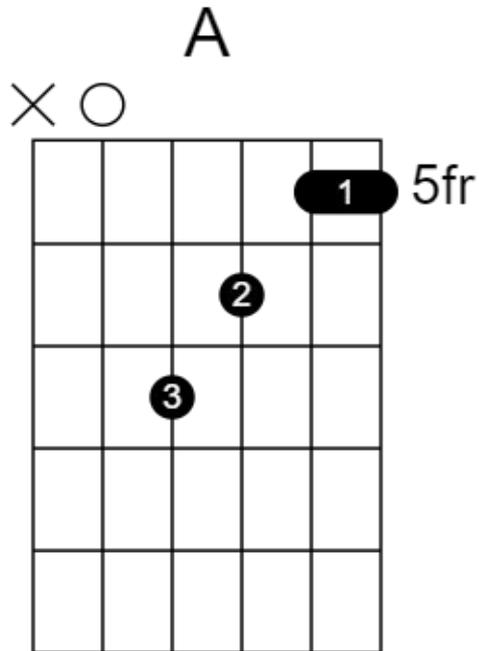
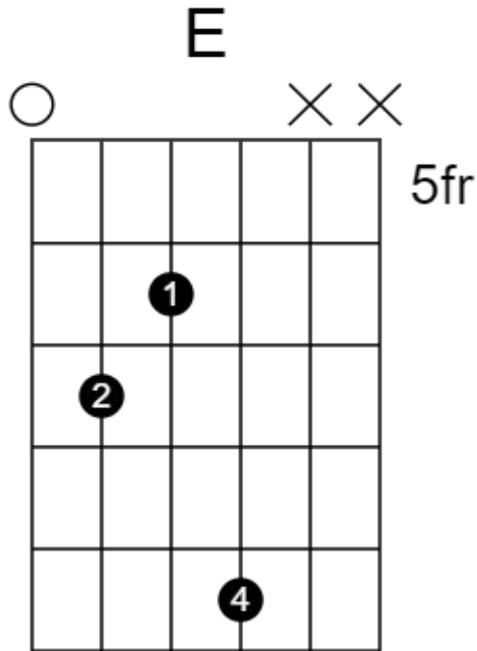
Processing Heartbreak Through Bachata

- “Emo” music of the Latin American world
- Emerged in the Dominican Republic in the 1970s
- First considered “poor people’s music,” looked down upon from the upper class
- Symbol of Dominicanness in NYC for Dominican immigrants
- Hypothetical Case Study:
 - Camila, attends a PWI and feels lonely and sadness due to homesickness, culture shock, and a break-up
 - Music therapist offers a Song Discussion to “El Amor Que Perdimos”

Songwriting About Identity: How to Use Corrido in Music Therapy

- Musical characteristics:
 - Root to fifth movement
 - 3/4, 4/4, 2/4, or 6/8 time
 - Major keys with a span of less than an octave
 - I, IV, V, V7 chords played in alternate voicings
 - Transition between chords with the major scale of the key of the song
 - Four eight-syllable lines sung without interruption

Alternate Guitar Voicings



Songwriting About Identity: How to Use Corrido in Music Therapy

- Mexican genre made popular in 1914 during the Mexican American War
- Mestizo genre, born out of Indigenous and Spanish roots
- Served as a news source and for political activism
- Hypothetical Case Study:
 - Mateo, a DACA recipient about to graduate, does not feel comfortable as an American or as a Mexican
 - Grew up in America, but is still seen as “other”
 - Agrees to Songwriting in the corrido style to express his dual identities, especially since he has a musical background in corrido

Let's Try It!

- 1.) Ask for permission from the audience to tell them a story.
- 2.) Introduce the characters (protagonist and antagonist).
- 3.) Present a warning for the story.
- 4.) Describe the challenge.
- 5.) Build the confrontation.
- 6.) Unfold the tragedy.
- 7.) (Musical Interlude)
- 8.) Identify and define the moral of the story.
- 9.) Sing goodbye.

(Sones de Mexico Ensemble, 2018)

Future Applications & Thoughts

- Music therapy for community health and healing
- Humanistic orientation
 - Appreciating the full person means acknowledging culture
- Music therapy outside of clinical space
 - Using community resources
- Music therapists acting as advocates for their clients
 - Feminist music therapy model (Hadley, 2006)
- Addressing immigration and assimilation trauma
- Further research: spirituality, Spanish-language resources for MTs, curricula changes

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