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Message in the Music: Do Lyrics Influence Well-Being?

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Abstract

Music has long been an effective way to communicate to the masses, and lyrics have played a massive role in delivering this communication. Yet the opportunity for research on the role lyrics play in well-being is vastly underutilized. This paper is an exploration of the relationship between lyrics and positive psychology. I will discuss a brief origin of lyrics, examine the body of literature on lyrics as well as its gaps, and finally suggest potential application of lyrics to increasing various aspects of well-being. We are only beginning to have the language to discuss the positive and negative effects of lyrics. The results of this exploration indicate that lyrics have the potential to increase two of the five elements of well-being in the PERMA model, positive emotions and meaning. It is suggested that you can increase well-being by mindfully listening to meaning-filled lyrics bolstered by music's ability to influence emotion. Considering music's accessibility and commonality, the relationship between lyrics and positive psychology has the potential for a broad impact that can contribute to Martin Seligman's goal of 51% of the population flourishing by 2051.

Keywords

Positive Psychology, Arts and Humanities, Music, Lyrics, Well-Being, Meaning, Songwriting

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Other Music | Other Psychology

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Advisor: Judy Saltzberg & Daniel Lerner

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Abstract

Music has long been an effective way to communicate to the masses, and lyrics have played a massive role in delivering this communication. Yet the opportunity for research on the role lyrics play in well-being is vastly underutilized. This paper is an exploration of the relationship between lyrics and positive psychology. I will discuss a brief origin of lyrics, examine the body of literature on lyrics as well as its gaps, and finally suggest potential application of lyrics to increasing various aspects of well-being. We are only beginning to have the language to discuss the positive and negative effects of lyrics. The results of this exploration indicate that lyrics have the potential to increase two of the five elements of well-being in the PERMA model, positive emotions and meaning. It is suggested that you can increase well-being by mindfully listening to meaning-filled lyrics bolstered by music's ability to influence emotion. Considering music's accessibility and commonality, the relationship between lyrics and positive psychology has the potential for a broad impact that can contribute to Martin Seligman's goal of 51% of the population flourishing by 2051.

Try to imagine a world with no music - no first dances at weddings, no stereo or iPod to accompany your commute to work, no music partnering the movie, no stadium concerts or coffee shop serenades, and definitely no singing. If it seems impossible to imagine that is because we have never, in the documented history of humanity, been without music (Levitin, 2006). Music is ubiquitous; in any society imaginable music is most likely present (MacDonald et al., 2012), including every human gathering from celebration to grief and sporting events to weddings. Music accompanies (pun intended) events across cultures.

Music's dynamic ability to influence emotion has been well studied (Bharucha et al., 2006; Clark, 2013; Juslin, 2001; Juslin, 2003; Levitin, 2007, & Västjäll et al., 2012). From mood regulation (Bharucha et al., 2006) to rumination (Zullo, 1991) to self-expression (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001). "Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and cannot remain silent." – Victor Hugo. But what if the music has words?

Lyrics are not as often studied as music, although they are often partners (Juslin, 2005). Music preference and engagement differs from person to person and most likely from season to season or perhaps from day to day. But it is undeniable that the majority of songs on popular radio, nominated for Grammy's, and the average music collection have words that accompany the music. These words, or lyrics, add something powerful to the songs we listen to and the field is rich with possibility for research on lyrics. Yip Harburg, a popular American song lyricist most known known for "Somewhere over the rainbow" and "It's only a Paper Moon" described his view on lyrics, "Words make you think... music makes you feel...but a song make you feel thoughts" (Alonso, 2012, Preface section, para. 12).

As a scholar of positive psychology, singer-songwriter, and facilitator of songwriting for young people in difficult times, I resonate deeply with Harburg's sentiments. Not only have I been able to find catharsis, understanding, and self-expression of emotion through my own lyrics, but I've helped children find and express their own emotions through songwriting with Purple Songs Can Fly a non-profit that strives to positively affect the lives of pediatric cancer patients and their families through the writing and recording of their original songs. My experience shows that songwriting has a healing impact and can serve as a balm for the hardship of human experience or a vessel for expressing profound joy. Music therapy has researched and found benefit in songwriting (Edgerton, 1990; Gallagher & Steele, 2002; O'Callaghan, 1996) but what about the impact of songs that have already been written? This paper is an exploration of the relationship between lyrics and positive psychology. I will discuss a brief origin of lyrics, examine the body of literature on lyrics as well as its gaps, and finally suggest potential application of lyrics and well-being.

What is well-being? Introduction to Positive Psychology

In 1999 American Psychological Association president, Martin Seligman, asserted that after World War II the field of psychology had left behind two of the original intentions of the field: to study and nurture high talent and to help make lives of all people more fulfilling (Seligman, 2000). Research on the good life was harder to conduct when people were suffering, the economy was suffering, and major psychological disorders were in obvious need of research. As a result, psychology took on a disease model of human nature (Seligman, 2000). This approach has indeed helped discover treatments or cures for over 14 mental disorders (Seligman, 2000). Yet as a consequence this model also created an imbalanced view of human nature.

Seligman assembled leaders in the field and together they proposed to change this imbalance. Positive psychology was officially introduced as a field (Peterson, 2006).

A common misunderstanding about positive psychology is if there is a “positive” psychology there must be a “negative” psychology; that the field only focuses on the positive and disregards a healthy dose of negative emotions. Yet accidents happen, loneliness happens, bills happen, and most of these things are unavoidable: Life isn’t always pleasant. The introduction of the field made it clear that there is a place for a healing model of psychology and states that a flourishing model is equally important to well-being (Seligman, 1999).

The focus on what makes life worth living isn’t a new concept. Great philosophers and spiritual leaders have searched for answers to the same questions that positive psychologists seek to answer (Peterson, 2006). Aristotle explored the idea that that a “good life” is one in which an individual can achieve full human potential (Steger, 2009). William James (1899) argued that a person must act the way they want to feel versus act on what they feel and this will determine their happiness. The phrase positive psychology even appeared by humanistic psychologist, Abraham Maslow before Seligman’s reintroduction in 2000 (as cited by Peterson, 2006).

Researchers in positive psychology have empirically measured well-being for over a decade, gaining significant insight and research into character strengths, positive emotions, meaning, purpose, grit, engagement and resilience and many other topics (Seligman, Steen, & Peterson, 2005). It is important to measure these concepts – they bolster the scientific intentions of the field. We can now look at a person’s life and measure many of these areas as well as look at culture as a whole to measure well-being. For example, it is now possible to measure subjective well-being through assessments like PANAS, which measures positive and negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Some other assessments of well-being and human

flourishing are General Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), Grit Survey (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), Gratitude Scale (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 2010), Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), and Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire (Fordyce, 1988).

Seligman (2002) found five elements of well-being; positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, enhanced meaning, and achievement, or PERMA. There are three qualifying characteristics of each element. The first is that it contributes to well-being. The second is that it is pursued for its own sake. And the third is that the element can be measured independently from the other elements of well-being.

The first of the elements is positive emotion. When people think of positive emotions they might think of words like happiness and joy or emotions that are experienced as a result of good things that happen to them. In some aspects they would be right but the field of Positive Psychology argues that happiness does not provide a complete picture of well-being. Positive emotions are a group or range of emotions that contribute to subjective well-being, which is how a person evaluates his or her life (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). There are ten most commonly experienced positive emotions that have been a target of scientific research; joy, grateful, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love (Fredrickson, 2009). For example, having hope that something will happen is not the same thing as being happy that something has happened; yet that experience of hope contributes to well-being.

Researchers in positive psychology have worked to cultivate interventions designed to increase positive emotions. An example is the three blessings exercise which involves writing down three things at the end of the day that made you feel grateful and why you felt grateful for

them (Seligman, 2011). Fredrickson has also explored techniques for mindfulness and relaxation that lead to positive emotions like serenity and awe (Fredrickson, 1998, 2000).

The next element of PERMA is engagement. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) uses the word “flow” to describe the type of engagement experienced when time becomes obsolete. As a musician, I often enter a state of flow when I’m in a rehearsal, three hours on one piece goes by without my noticing. An athlete might experience this during training or a nature enthusiast while on a hike.

The “R” in PERMA stands for positive relationships. Chris Peterson (2006) one of the founders of positive psychology summed up the field in three words, “other people matter.” Your community, one-on-one relationship, mentors, family, and friends have the ability to enhance your well-being, as you do theirs. High-quality connections, or short-term interactions that are positive in nature for both sides, can occur whether it is with a stranger on the street, your significant other, or your boss (Dutton, 2003). From offering to hold open a door for a stranger or asking how a co-workers sick pet is doing, each interaction can build connection and as a result enhance well-being.

Many human beings want to feel connected to something bigger in this world, but is that desire more than a want, do we actually need meaning in our life in order to achieve well-being? Meaning is characterized as a connection of the self to something larger and the idea that what you do in that context matters (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Yet as an increasing number of fields, like philosophy psychology, and literature, that focus their research on meaning, the complexity has grown richer (Proulx, Markman, & Lindberg, 2013). There are two components of meaning. One is the cognitive component- how we comprehend and make sense of our lives. The other is the motivational component- what motivates us as well as how we set goals and make decisions

(Heine, Proulz, & Vohs, 2006). There are also numerous ways to measure meaning in life, including the Life Regard Index (LRI), the Spiritual Meaning Scale (SMS), and The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ-10) (Battista & Almond, 1973, Mascaro et al., 2004, Steger 2009).

The final element of well-being in Seligman's five element model is achievement. This was not added until a few years ago (Seligman, 2011). Achievement is something that some people naturally strive for. It is a thrill to be the best, to test the limits, and to accomplish goals. Athletes often set goals that strive for personal bests in a race they have run 20 times, chefs spend countless hours perfecting recipes, presentation, and technique so they might gain a Michelin star. But achievement doesn't have to be a large or lofty goal, for people with chronic pain, going out to dinner is an achievement.

Though the five elements in PERMA are meant to stand on their own each can have an active role in the other categories (Seligman, 2011). For example, having meaning in life has also been linked with positive emotions (King et al., 2006). When we feel connected to something bigger than ourselves we can feel interest, hope, awe and many of the other positive emotions. Similarly, after achieving a goal we often feel positive emotion or meaning (Seligman, 2011).

One of the most important aspects of positive psychology is not only exploring aspects of well-being, but also researching ways in which well-being can be increased (Seligman, 2011). Proving that we can enhance well-being is just one part of the equation, another part of the equation is developing interventions and applications that put this science to work in a real life context. Martin Seligman has taken this goal to a tangible level. It is his goal to have 51% of the world flourishing by the year 2051 (Seligman, 2011). One way I see this goal coming to fruition is through the humanities.

Humanities and Positive Psychology

Once thought of as separate fields that will not benefit from interaction, the humanities have played a role in health and science for a while now. Fields like art therapy, music therapy, and narrative medicine have all contributed to relieving, and in some cases healing, mental and physical illness. De Button and Armstrong's book *Art As Therapy* (2013) discusses seven ways in which art can be used to enhance well-being by guiding participants of art to "become better versions of themselves" through; remembering, hope, sorrow, rebalancing, self-understanding, growth, and appreciation (2013).

The ability for literature to enhance well-being is not exclusive to intake of outside sources. Robert Rebele (2010) points out that three of the most successful positive interventions include writing for the self. Delivering a gratitude letter, writing down three good things that happened each day, and writing about a time when you were your best self all lead to enhanced well being (Rebele, 2010.) While it could be suggested that it is the *topic* at hand that enhances well-being, it is undeniable that writing can play a role. The research of expressive writing has shown that basic writing for just 15 minutes a day can produce significant improvement in well-being by supporting and enhancing motivation, self-efficacy, flow, and self-regulation (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999).

Music can be used in similar ways. As early as 4000 BC, there have been documented cases of the social, mental, and physical effects of music (MacDonald et al., 2012.) Emotional response to music – both positive and negative- affects a large enough portion of the population that it might be harnessed as a public health intervention (Västfjäll et al., 2012.) Science and music have long been studied together in music therapy in both qualitative and quantitative studies. The benefits of music therapy have been explored and studied since the early twentieth

centenary (MacDonald et al., 2012.) With this knowledge it is possible to start using music to enhance well-being and not just restoration from illness to health. One of the major benefits of music as a positive intervention is the wide access to music, low cost, and intrinsic motivation for listening (Västfjäll et al., 2012.) Positive Psychology has been found that intrinsically motivated behavior is more successful than externally motivated behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000), so in a non-clinical and clinical setting self-selecting music can have positive affects (Västfjäll et al., 2012.)

Victor Hugo, author of the novel *Les Misérables*, wrote, “Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and cannot remain silent.” (MacDonald et al., 2012.) I wonder if he knew that his revolutionary book would be put to music in 1980, and would be the longest running musical in British theater (*Les Misérables: Creation of the Musical*, n.d.) The musical made Hugo’s message of a human family approachable to my younger, seven-year-old, self. I remember being moved by the music from *Les Misérables* as a young child. From feeling inspired by a call to action in “Do You Hear the People Sing” to connection of the reflection of loss in “Drink With Me” the songs created from Hugo’s work touch on the deepest of human emotions and resonated with me across culture and time.

If the humanities influence our well-being then why not encourage positive psychology and the humanities to work together to help measure these impacts and discover and implement interventions to enhance well-being? Pawelski (2015) explores the possibility of a culture of human flourishing through the humanities, encouraging the humanities to consider effects of their work on well-being. A eudaimonic turn in the humanities can shift the way in which we write about, interact and participate with and discuss well-being. In order for this shift to happen

it will take open minds and a willingness to collaborate, but the change of focus could have a powerful impact on society.

What are Lyrics?

For the purpose of this paper, when I talk about lyrics I am speaking of words set to music, though please note that music is notoriously difficult to define (Levitin, 2006). Considering the definition of lyrics as, “words placed to a melody” it would be impossible to talk about lyrics without talking about music. They support each other and work together to create one experience, an experience that would not be the same with one aspect missing.

Music has long been an effective way to communicate to the masses, and lyrics have played a massive role. Scholars have found evidence that emotions can be influenced by purely instrumental music. However, only a few studies exploring music and emotion have included lyrics (Juslin, 2005). While it is difficult to find conventional academic studies of lyrics, history has a long documentation.

In *The Singing Neanderthal*, Steven Mithen (2006) goes into great detail of the origin of music, language, mind, and body. Mithen says that it is hard to tell what came first music or language, which quite possibly means that lyrics have been around since the origin of language itself (2006). Perhaps it wasn't used in a particularly deliberate way, as it is in songwriting, but the partnership of music and words was there. In fact, the first documented melody was written in the 1400s (Wulstan, 1971). With the close relationship of language and music it would be fair to deduce that the first lyrics came shortly after.

Over time, we know music and lyrics have been a part of every society (Levitin, 2006). From Gregorian chants, used to memorize and communicate religious passages and psalms (Apel, 1958) to protest songs of the civil rights movement in the early sixties (Rodnitsky, 1969)

throughout history humans often turn to songwriting as a form of communication. While there are many functions of music, one primary function is to communicate (Miell et al. 2005). With the provenance of songwriting throughout human history, why are we only studying half of the equation? So many studies on the effect of music do not even mention if the music had lyrics or not.

Part of this reason might be that it is difficult to measure the influence lyrics have. In a study of the effect of sad lyrics on emotions induced by happy music, Mori and Iwanaga (2013) describe the difficulty of measuring lyrics separately from music. There are contradicting studies on the relationship between music and lyrics. Most of these studies have been to find which one has the most impact or which one influences the other. For example, one study played happy melodies with sad lyrics in a foreign language (Sousou, 1997). The study had participants listen to a happy melody with sad lyrics in a foreign language; they were then shown the sad lyrics in their native language and asked how they felt. The study showed that participants were not influenced by reading the sad lyrics in their native language and still felt happy when listening to the song (Sousou, 1997). In a review of many studies on lyrics, Ali and Peynircioğlu (2006) highlight the conflicting conclusions of the impact of lyrics. They also point out the difficulty in trying to study lyrics out of the context of music (2006).

Sad Songs

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the benefit of sad songs. As long as these songs don't lead to rumination, they can be helpful to overall well-being. In fact, sad song lyrics can sometimes bring about pleasant feelings. This happens when a listener feels understood by an artist (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007). As positive Psychology's intention is not to ignore or diminish the negative or difficult emotions, the same is true with the suggestion that positive

psychology and lyrics should team up. There is a definite time and place for songs that speak to the pain and suffering of the human condition, as there is a time and place to put your hands up and act like you just don't care. What I am arguing is that we could have fewer songs that contradict well-being and more songs that support well-being. Sad songs of heartbreak don't counter well-being in my opinion. They are valuable for the person who doesn't want to feel alone in their difficult time or for the person who cannot express what they are going through, they feel understood (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007).

Many studies have found the influence music has on emotions. These studies are fairly well balanced, showing that music is a tool that can positively or negatively affect mood. Most of the studies on lyrics reflect the negative impact lyrics can have; for example, inducing rumination about negative messages (Zullo, 1991) and life destructive messages (Fedler et. al., 1982). This is a problem because as psychology has taken a disease model, I fear that the study of lyrics will do the same. Lyrics are a tool just as music is, and when partnered with positive psychology, can make a positive impact on the hundreds and thousands of people who listen to music on a daily basis.

Positive psychology and lyrics partnership

Now that the constructs from positive psychology and some background of lyrics have been established it is time to put the two together. While music and lyrics can definitely support each element of PERMA, I'd like to focus on positive emotions and meaning.

Music as an anchor to positive emotions

There have been many studies on the impact of music on emotion and health (Clark, 2013; Juslin, 2001; Juslin, 2003; Levitin, 2007; Västjäll et al., 2012). A lot of these studies have

been conducted by music therapy and on populations that have mental health problems, physical health problems, and physical disabilities but the impact of music listening on the general population is a relatively new concept (Västjäll et al., 2012).

In a study by Bharucha et al. (2006) they found that people listen to music to have an emotional experience based on the emotions they get from the music. While this might seem obvious, “listen to the sad song to feel sad” or “listen to the happy song to feel happy” it’s important to note that music has the capacity to influence our emotions in an active or passive manner, (Västjäll et al., 2012). The act of selecting a song uses a number of nuanced psychological assessments; we subconsciously know that the pieces we play can change the environment and emotional states of those around us (MacDonald et al., 2012). In an Experience Sampling Method study, participants were signaled randomly during a 2-week period to complete a questionnaire about current experienced emotions, activities, situation and experience (Västjäll et al., 2012). One of the questions asked if music was present. Of the analysis on the self-reported stress, it was shown that there was significantly less stress in musical episodes than non-musical. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to account for the complex interactions of “listener, music, and situation” (Västfjäll et al., 2012). It would seem that even passive listening of music can affect well-being.

It is important to note that music can also be used to manipulate mood without the listener’s consent. Musicologist Morag Grant (2012) has focused her research on the study of music torture, finding that music has been used to manipulate and torture victims in Greece, Chile, by the British military, the Nazi Regime, and by the American Government in Guantanamo Bay. Music torture can take many forms, including playing loud music for days on end (known as ‘sonic warfare’), making prisoners sing as they are beaten, and other forms of

psychologically humiliating detainees (Grant, 2012). The President of the European Court of Human Rights stated that ‘Music can amount to torture, and lyrics can be the vehicle of human rights abuses’. (Spielmann, 2012). While these are examples of negative emotions as a result of music, it speaks to the science of emotional influence. Knowing this information we can actively work to create and listen to music that can connect us to positive emotions.

It is difficult to measure the impact of music listening on mood in real-life situations and as a result most studies have been conducted in a laboratory (Västfjäll, Juslin, & Hartig, 2012). Can you imagine listening to that same sad song while sitting at a lab table with a survey in front of you? It might not come to similar results as it would in the natural context. However, they have found through an Experience Sampling Method study, where people are beeped throughout the course of their day in their natural environment and asked about their current experiences, that music listening does have emotional consequences and that people use music to better their emotional states (Västfjäll et al., 2012).

In Artifact two of this paper I have provided a PERMA playlist, songs from my music catalog that I feel reflect each element of well-being. My list for positive emotion could easily fill pages. There are so many songs that bring hope, joy, inspiration, pride, etc. Yet not all lyrics lead to positive emotions. Some have more to do with meaning.

The Message and Meaning in Lyrics

When individuals understand where they find meaning in their own lives they understand a little more about themselves (Steger, 2009). This self-understanding is important for many reasons. It may provide clarity into who we are and how we make decisions. The more meaning you have in your life the higher your well-being (Campbell, 1990). Researchers have looked at the role of meaning in the workplace and have discovered that the more meaning in the

workplace can lead to more personal fulfillment, higher engagement and motivation, and better career development (Wrzeniewski, Berg, & Dutton 2010; Wrzeniewski 2003). In a study of 143 college undergraduates, Spiritual meaning has also been researched as a buffer against stress and found to act as a buffer against stressful situations (Mascaro & Rosen, 2006). Students with high levels of spiritual meaning showed less daily stress and depression as measured by the Life Regard Index-Revised, a 14 self-report scale that measures the framework or philosophy for living, and Frankl (1963) writes that when we come across a roadblock to a goal we are more likely to resist stress and persevere if we find meaning.

Like positive emotions, the ability to find meaning is an area we can cultivate. Fields such as narrative therapy help people change the meaning they give to the stories they themselves, transforming self-image (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007). By transforming this self-image it gives the individual a meaningful way to connect to past and present circumstances allowing for the ability to make sense of their lives and the world around them (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007). As we find meaning in our surroundings and our stories it is important to look at the messages we receive on a daily basis and how we might interpret them.

Teenagers are some of the biggest consumers of music. Laurence Steinberg's (2014) research on adolescents says that the plasticity in the brain is at prime time for learning, soaking in every bit of the environment. Teenagers are at the second most impressionable age, almost as impressionable as they are during the first two years of life (Steinberg, 2014). Music is widely accessible (Levatin, 2006). The trouble is that a lot of popular music seems to have a message that damages self-image and encourages toxic behavior, yet these are anthems in locker rooms, teenage cars, and dance floors. I remember sitting down to learn the lyrics to "Baby Got Back"

and “Get Low.” As an example to the degrading message sent to young teenage girls, “Get Low”, a popular song from 2003 by Lil Jon and The Eastside boyz, says

“Hoe don’t disrespect it, Pa pop yo pussy like this cause yin yang twins in this bitch. Lil Jon and the East side boys wit me and we all like to see Ass and titties. Now bring yo ass over here hoe and let me see you get low if you want this thug.”

“Burred Lines” by Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams in 2013 gives the direct impression to men and women that no doesn’t actually mean no, it really means “come and get it” which complicates an already complicated rape culture. One line in particular, just to drive the point home, “I’ll give you something big enough to tear your ass in two.” Blurred Lines was the longest running number one single of 2013 and of the 2010s decade, staying at number one for over twelve weeks (“Blurred Lines: Wikipedia”, 2014.)

A statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics committee on communications expressed concerns of negative impact of lyrics (Impact of Music, Music Lyrics, and Music Videos on Children and Youth, 1996). Studies have shown an increase of lyrics with an emphasis on sex, and drugs, and violence (Fedler, Hall, & Tanzi, 1982; Strasburger & Hendren, 1995). When witnessing these behaviors in music and music videos it is hard to disagree that these messages might have a negative impact. As people develop a purpose, they begin by noting the behavior of others and then mimic the behavior if it seems to be pleasing (Kashdan & Mcknight, 2009). So if the music industry glamorized drugs and violence, young teens might decide that is a positive situation to put themselves in.

There is hope, not all songs contradict well-being. There are some positive exemplars in the music industry like Macklemore and Sara Bareilles have also had number ones during 2013. Macklemore’s “Same Love” teaches a listener about positive relationships and marriage equality.

“The same fight that led people to walk outs and sit ins. It's human rights for everybody, there is no difference! Live on and be yourself.” And Sara Bareilles’ song “Brave” encourages people to have hope and courage to go for their dreams. “Maybe there’s a way out of the cage where you live. Maybe one of these days you can let the light in and show me how big your brave is.” One study found that listening to songs with pro-social lyrics increases empathy, which leads to helping behavior in other settings (Greitemeyer 2009a, 2009b). The study used the General Learning Model (Buckley & Anderson, 2006), a theoretical model used to “measure effects and consequences of video games” as a template for listening to lyrics (pro-social relative to neutral). Individuals are able to connect with a larger world by listening to songs that contain pro-social lyrics and act in accordance with this interpretation of the world around them (Greitemeyer 2009a, 2009b). This meaningful interpretation of lyrics suggests that lyrics can impact action. People perceive their lives as meaningful when they are able to understand and explain their experiences (Proulx, Markman, & Lindsay, 2013).

In an article for MTV, Simon A. Rego, the director of the cognitive behavioral therapy training program at Montefiore Medical Center said that Taylor Swifts popular song, “Shake it off” models CBT (Ehrlich, 2015). Rego suggests that the lyrics mirror aspects of cognitive behavioral therapy and that listening to the lyrics can help teach the tools of cognitive behavioral therapy.

Application and Suggested Research

Americans spend more money on music than on sex or prescription drugs (Levitin, 2006). If positive psychology is looking for a “watering hole” for intervention, this would be a great place to utilize. From the radio, to music festivals, and online music sharing platforms like Spotify and Pandora, a change in how we measure the impact of music and lyrics could

potentially change the type of music we consume and the role that the music industry plays in well-being.

There are so many questions that need answers if we are to discover the true nature of lyrics and music. Do we hear to the lyrics even if we don't listen to them? Does the message get received even if we don't pay attention? The advertising industry has used subliminal messaging techniques based on the fact that our surroundings influence decision, mood, and well-being, without our awareness (Moore, 1982). (2006) discusses fMRI machines that can detect if the language center of the brain is being activated or the music center of the brain. The brain is such a complicated instrument that it is hard to know if these centers are accurate or how each center relates with the other. Perhaps the language center isn't being activated when listening to a song but the words are received through the music center of the brain just the same. Or perhaps the words are only received if the language center is activated and is more dominantly involved than the music center of the brain. These are the kind of studies that are missing from the literature.

Another area where this research might be applied is facilitated songwriting, when a participant works with a trained musician to write a song that helps the participant express and communicate. Songwriting has been studied for therapeutic effects by music therapists (Edgerton, 1990; Gallagher & Steele, 2002; O'Callaghan, 1996). The populations studied are mostly people in need of some form of music therapy, though I think it would be beneficial for a healthy population as well. Suggesting songwriters can help others write a song could boost not only meaning and positive emotion, but also positive relationships, engagement, and achievement.

Future Research

There are research initiatives that can use the tools they currently have and shift focus to research music and lyrics. For example, The World Well-Being Project measures psychological and medical well-being based on language in social media (“WWB”, n.d.) They have found that word used in social media have an effect on well-being. It would be another possible way to research the effects of lyrics and music. The same goes for words we hear on the radio and Spotify instead of words written on Facebook and Twitter. The world well-being project hopes “that their insights and analyses will help individuals, organizations, and governments choose actions and policies that are not just in the best economic interest of the people or companies, but which truly improve their well-being” (“WWB”, n.d.) It is my hope that positive music can do the same. By spreading awareness, in a similar way to the World Well-Being Project, but also through artist and audience participation we can encourage people to choose what enhances their own well-being and the well-being of others.

If we can link lyrics on Spotify and songs on the radio, we could use a similar approach for awareness. When listeners know the impact lyrics could potentially have on them they might choose their stations more carefully.

Film executive, Lindsay Durahn, is an advocate for mood-elevating movies. She has used Martin Seligman’s PERMA lens for film (Rickey, 2012). She is now encouraging the industry to write, as well as produce more mood-elevating scripts (2012.) It would be interesting to bring this to the music industry. Simply bringing PERMA to the awareness of artists and encouraging them to write songs with this in mind could bring about more music that enhances well-being. It wouldn’t be enough to just involve the listener, writers, and artists; the whole industry would need to be involved. The literature would need to be spread from choreographers to music video

directors and everyone in between. If the songs message is of positive relationships and the video shows mostly naked bodies swimming around and drinking tequila; the audience might miss the intended message.

The Sync Project is another academic based organization that could look at music and lyrics together. They state that they are “a global collaboration harnessing the power of music for health” (The Sync Project, n.d.). A new organization, they already have several blogs sharing studies on music and well-being. The sync project is focused on creating a network of musicians, scientists, consumers of music, and more, they hope to create a giant impact on the world through music. Imagine the conversation that could start if they focus on the relationship of lyrics and well-being. It would be a great social platform to gather information like “do you listen to lyrics?” “Is the message of a song important to you?” or “How many songs that you listen to contain lyrics?” This social platform can help contribute information to scientific research as well as start a conversation among musicians and music lovers.

Conclusion

Martin Seligman’s stated that his goal for positive psychology is to have 51% of the human population flourishing by the year 2051. Positive Psychology could help the music industry shift at least some of its major hits to include elements of PERMA in the lyrics. More than that by brining awareness of music’s ability to influence emotions and lyrics ability to connect to meaning we can enhance individual well-being through listening to music.

Much more research has to be done in order for this hypothesis to grow roots. We are only beginning to have the language to discuss the positive and negative effects of lyrics. Positive psychology needs to be a part of this conversation so that lyrics might be harnessed to meet the flourishing goal of 2051.

Introduction to Artifact 1 & 2

Social Work published an inspired editorial piece by Ann Hartman titled “Many Ways of Knowing,” where she describes the limits of one avenue of research or way of knowing. She takes the position that there are many truths and many ways of knowing. Each deepens our understanding and adds another dimension to our view of the world. As far back as I can remember, my avenue has been music. My truth has always been felt first and articulated second. It is why I included some of my own songs in Artifact 1. I needed to share my own voice. Artifact 2 has a different approach to sharing music. There are so many great songs in this world that coincide with various circumstances, emotions, and purposes. I have created a PERMA playlist, pairing some of my favorite songs by elements of well-being. These playlists can be used to influence the atmosphere in classrooms, workshops, or for personal reflection. You are welcome to use the playlist I created here, however I acknowledge that musical preferences differ. Feel free to create a playlist of your own that is designed to connect to the audience or students in attendance.

* * *

Listening to lyrics is a personal experience, and like with many personal experiences, people develop preferences. I’ve seen two main preferences over time: Many people love dissecting the meaning for themselves, and speculating on the artist’s intention. This is perhaps why some people don’t like to hear the artist’s explanation; the speculation is fun and the mystery lives on. Or perhaps they don’t care much about the intention of the song, and they would rather experience the song without distractions. Others love knowing the intricacies and process of each artist. It makes them feel like they have insight and a deeper ability to feel the song itself, connecting their own world to the world of the artist. All of these preferences are just that - preferences. None is better or worse than the other, and each has the ability to connect to the listener, which I think is the point.

Many songwriters do not like to share the songwriting process or the inspiration and intention behind the song. I am not one of those songwriters. I absolutely love to hear the process and inspiration from other songwriter’s works, and I like to share my own. In Artifact 1, I share two songs written during the capstone writing process as well as background on the songwriting process and my inspiration. The first song, “Words,” is inspired by a popular phrase in positive psychology, “Words create worlds.” The second, “Absence,” is about the capstone writing process in general, which includes the struggle and the meaning found in the process.

Attached is an mp3 of each song, as well as lyrics. Following your own preferences, you can read the explanation first, second, while listening to the song, or after reading the lyrics. The songs were recorded on my laptop in the newly designated music room in our home. Pictures were yet to be hung, we only had cajons (wooden box hand drums) for chairs, and an old rug passed down from my parents lay on top of new carpet in an attempt to “add character” to the room. It worked. I love being in this room and although it was not the best for recording, I enjoyed writing the songs and recording them in this space to share with you today.

* * *

Do you remember “mixed tapes”? Fifteen to twenty of your favorite songs on a cassette tape, or if you were born after 1995, a CD, and nowadays it would be called a playlist. You make them for your best friend, love interest, or a particular life event that could do with a rockin’ soundtrack. Artifact 2 is a playlist of some fantastic songs that I feel represent elements of PERMA, the five elements of well-being.

I love making playlists for friends and family. I make them for their breakups, celebrations, trials, and for basic “music education.” But here’s the thing: I cannot just send the playlist. Most of the time I like to write out cool tidbits for each song and explain why I put them on the playlist. I’ve done the same for some of the songs in Artifact 2. Not all of them, just the ones where I simply couldn’t help myself.

There is an intervention in positive psychology called a positive portfolio (J. Pawelski, personal communication, October 2014). In this intervention, you gather items that support an element of well-being you wish to enhance. It can be any element of well-being - meaning, any of the positive emotions, achievement, etc.... Once you have gathered these items, you then spend some time reflecting on your positive portfolio. This playlist is comprised of songs from my musical catalog. You may enjoy them, and I hope you do; however, the genre might not be your cup of tea, and that’s OK! I encourage you to do this process and reflect on each of the songs that make it onto your playlist. Listen to the words, reflect about how and why you feel connected to each song, dance that feeling, draw that feeling, sing along, and enjoy your musical positive portfolio.

Artifact 1
Songs written during the MAPP capstone by Tricia Fox

Lyrics and Mp3 <https://soundcloud.com/tricia-fox-music/words>

Words
By Tricia Fox

They say words create worlds
The smallest drop turns to a wave
My hurt and your hurt
You know that we can talk about it for days and days

On the screens are painted images
of all the wrong that ever did
show us the meaning of hate
I wanna know
If they showed us something beautiful
That our hope would change

Cuz I’m not naïve enough
To think that our words don’t mean that much
They can silence just ‘bout anything
But it won’t stop the caged bird singing
Or from having wings

There's a flag flying high
 with thirteen stars marking the sky
 there are hundreds and thousands of people
 with a desire to be right

there was a dream in spite of difficulty
 that lead a nation on a fight to be free
 and what if we were judge by our character
 and by the content of our words

**Cuz I'm not naïve enough
 To think that our words don't mean that much
 They can silence just 'bout anything
 But it won't stop the caged bird singing
 Or from having wings**

In that world where that word happened to start a wave
 There are people that care willing to carry the change

Explanation of “Words”

“Words create worlds” is a common phrase in positive psychology. This can mean the words we use or the words we hear, which is why I am so surprised that lyrics have not been well researched. David Cooperider (2005), founder of Appreciative Inquiry, uses this as a philosophy in his work with organizations, reminding them that the type of questions they ask themselves matter. For example, there is a difference between asking, “What are we doing well?” vs. “What are we doing wrong?” When a company asks, “What are we doing well?” the company takes on a “strengths-based” approach, which enhances innovation, productivity, profitability and sustainability. Many other fields utilize this idea that what we say or listen to influences our well-being. I wrote the first verse inspired by the phrase “Words create worlds:”

*They say words create worlds
 The smallest drop turns to a wave
 My hurt and your hurt
 You know that we can talk about it for days and days*

The second stanza talks about the media's role in our world:

*On the screens are painted images
 of all the wrong that ever did
 show us the meaning of hate*

It is almost impossible for me to watch the news these days without seeing how glorified the hateful things are. This is changing, though. Cathrine Gyldensted (2015), contributor and writer for *The Huffington Post* and *The Guardian*, as well as a graduate of the Masters in Applied

Positive Psychology from University of Pennsylvania, is working to incorporate aspects of positive psychology into journalism to bring balance back into the media.

I have had songs take 20 minutes to write and some that I have started years ago that probably won't be finished for years to come. As for "Words," I wrote that first verse in about 30 minutes and then couldn't find the right words or melody for the chorus, so I took a break. A few weeks later, on June 17th, 2015, in Charleston, South Carolina, a mass shooting shook the United States. A gunman entered Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, killing nine people. Not only was it another mass shooting, but it was also another tragic event steeped in racism. The conversation that followed had a large focus on the Confederate Flag, which was still flying high in the state of South Carolina, as it was many other states in the U.S.:

*There's a flag flying high
with thirteen stars marking the sky*

The coverage and dialogue felt so polarized, like the conversations were never intended to change anything for the better, but rather only to prove that one side is right and the other side is wrong:

*There are hundreds and thousands of people
with a desire to be right*

During times of overflowing societal emotion and public friction or injustice, the urge to write songs overcomes my heart and mind. Writing and singing songs remedy my problem of never knowing how to get involved in conversations that are so full of hatred and blame. It doesn't feel like there is room for another person to join the conversation, so I turn to my guitar and to songwriting. Inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, I started to write the second verse. I had in mind the historical journey from the initial flying of the Confederate Flag to how far the nation has come, but, also how much further we have to go. It was evident to me that the words we choose during these moments of crisis and pain matter:

*and what if we were judge by our character
and by the content of our words*

The chorus was written from the anger I felt about oppression and the hope I feel about the human spirit and ability to rise above. Maya Angelou's poem, "Caged bird," inspired the chorus. Though many are caged and oppressed, their ability to express through music cannot be taken away; the possibility of flight won't disappear because of oppression. I genuinely believe that no matter how voices are silenced:

*...it won't stop the caged bird singing
or from having wings.*

The last line of the song ends halfway through a verse. I felt like it needed an abrupt ending to leave the listener with the message that it takes action, people willing to carry a change in order for change to happen:

*In that world where that word happened to start a wave
There are people with voices willing to carry the change.*

Lyrics and Mp3 <https://soundcloud.com/tricia-fox-music/absence>

**Absence
by Tricia Fox**

Here lies an absence of a meaning I was told
By a girl I knew so well some time ago
She told me once she told me twice she told me one more time
Knowing that I needed all three throughout my life

A road less traveled though still traveled on some days
By the ones who knew the scripture of the brave
I had my moments where I too could stand so strong
Hand in hand with the meaning and the song

You've got to feel to know
You've got to feel to know

You've got to feel to know
You've got to feel to know

They asked for proof and I too wanted to know
So I looked outside to find the facts from long ago
And I dissected every word from every tune
Placed them in basket scattered all around my room

Full baskets, empty text, theories of clay
No longer curious a slow and aching pain
A heart left out simply sitting in a cage
Waiting for her voice to breathe worth in someday

You've got to feel to know
You've got to feel to know

You've got to feel to know
You've got to feel to know

Is it enough to know without nurture and value?
Or will passion wilt and joy go on with out you
My passions tiptoed out without a sound
I cannot blame them I really wasn't around
I focused more on if I'd fail or if I'd fall

Then on if I befriended them at all

You've got to feel to know
You've got to feel to know

You've got to feel to know
You've got to feel to know

As hope would have it I will sing or I will die
Along with meaning delivered to my life
Lucky for me my friend
She knew that it was time
To remind me of the truth I tried to find
She said, "don't think to much, you've got to let it flow
You've got to feel to know"

You've got to feel to know
You've got to feel to know

You've got to feel to know
You've got to feel to know

Explanation of "Absence"

As odd as this sounds for a singer songwriter to say, writing isn't my most natural form of communication. Singing gives me access to words that a blank screen and information in my head does not. At the risk of sounding too honest and vulnerable, I had a hell of a time writing my capstone. It became almost an unnecessary struggle that piled on itself as time went on, causing anxiety and some downright mean thoughts toward myself, which likely stunted my ability to communicate:

A heart left out simply sitting in a cage

When I took a step back to understand why I was having such a hard time, I realized that my capstone no longer felt meaningful. I was so focused on academically proving something I have always internally trusted through experience. But now this experience felt almost foreign to me, as I hadn't written a song in months. One of the reasons I believe in the power of the humanities is because I have seen songwriting help not only myself in times of struggle, but also kids undergoing cancer treatment and teens in drug and alcohol recovery. This song is a result of that realization and a particularly hard day.

I thought about not sharing the details of this particular song. It feels so personal and specific to my situation, and the lyrics seem straightforward. But I will share two stories about it that connect to my schooling in positive psychology.

The first story is about how this song was buoyed by the power of community. I am lucky to have a great group of friends and fellow musicians in Houston, Texas. Last year, we started a

songwriting group with a prompt each month, encouraging each other to write songs based on that prompt and share them with each other. I highly recommend this model to any creative, professional, or otherwise. It has opened my songwriting to songs that would have passed me by, as well as let me be witness to some truly inspired songs. The songwriting prompt for the get together that spurred this song was “Absence.”

Second, the first line of the song, *“Here lies an absence of a meaning I was told by a girl I knew so well some time ago,”* is referring to me, before this whole process started; the girl that started my degree with such passion, meaning, and the purest of intentions. The last verse, *“my friend she knew that it was time to remind me of the truth I tried to find / She said, ‘don’t think too much, you’ve got to let it flow, you’ve got to feel to know,’”* is also referring to me, but this time the person who now understands, temporarily at least, that connecting to the meaning behind this capstone is more important than sounding a particular way, impressing leaders in the field, or even making a visible impact. Not an easy lesson, but one I remind myself of anytime anxiety tries to throw me an “I can’t” party. And I am grateful for that lesson.

Artifact 2 PERMA PLAYLIST

Positive Emotion

Song	Artist	Thoughts
Give a Little	Hanson	This song could have been placed in positive relationships but if you watch the music video you will feel so happy and you'll understand why I put "Give a Little" in this playlist.
Bright Side Of The Road	Van Morrison	"Let's enjoy it while we can, help me share my load, from the dark end of the street to the bright side of the road"
I'm On My Way	The Proclaimers	It could be the Scottish side of me but I love a good Proclaimers song. "I'm on my way from misery to happiness today"
Give Love	MC Yogi	Love is one of the 10 positive emotions but I think this song is full of joy, hope, and inspiration. "Love is the best medicine, I shine like Edison whenever I let it in"
Shake It Off	Taylor Swift	Simon A. Rego, director of the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Center told MTV that this song mirrors the techniques used in CBT. So listening to this song will boost well-being. While this could probably go on many of these playlists the music to song puts it on the positive emotions list for me.
Blessed	Brett Dennen	Gratitude is a large contributor to positive emotions, many interventions focus on gratitude as a practice, I wondering if singing about gratitude counts!
Brand	Joshua	"And for the first time in such a long, long time, I know I'll be

New Day	Radin	OK" Hope, Inspiration, and Awe fill the lyrics of this song and I love it!
Get Happy	Danny Wilson	I love this song, I've known it my whole life and without fail when it comes on shuffle I start singing along.
Let the Music Get Down In Your Soul	Marc Broussard	"When your life gets to complicated, gotta let the music get down in your soul. Forget all your frustration and let the music get down in your soul" Listen to this and try not to sing along with the "music, music" echo.
There's Hope	India.Arie	Hope is another of the positive emotions that makes its way into songs, this is one of my favorite India Arie songs, which is saying something because I love India Aire!
Brave	Sara Bareilles	Sara Bareilles has a great book "Sounds Like Me" where she describes how she wrote Brave and the story behind it. It is fantastic and I highly recommend. As for why I put this song on here, this song has given me a little extra Bravery when I've doubted my ability to "Say what you wanna say"
3 Things	Jason Mraz	All three things are beautiful but the second is my favorite, gratitude "The second thing I do is I close both of my eyes and say my thank you's to each moment of my life...I go where I know the love is and let it fill me up inside gathering strength from sorrow, I'm glad to be alive"
Fight Song	Rachel Platten	This song has been played a ridiculous amount in my house... volume on high and my voice blaring. I am so grateful for Rachel Platten writing this song giving voice and courage when I need it most. Here's hoping you find yours and sing" and I don't really care if nobody else believes, cause I've still got a lot of fight left in me"
Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)	Bing Crosby	This should have been a gratitude list! While there are plenty of other positive emotions this particular gratitude song reminds me of the three blessings exercise, a lullaby of gratitude
Rockin 'It Out	Becca Fox	It isn't lost on me that a lot of the songs I chose for the positive emotion playlist have to do with dancing and letting go. I think a large reason for this is because when we let go we are often able to feel those positive emotions and let them pour in and out of us, sometimes we need to shake a little to let that happen.
Glorious	Mamuse	Awe is another great positive emotion and this song peacefully encompasses the smile awe moments of a glorious day!
Don't Worry About A Thing	Bob Marley	This song often makes me relax but I think the lyrics speak to awe "rise up this morning and smiled with the rising sun"
Shine	Anna	I find this to be such an empowering song "isn't it time you got

	Nalick	over how fragile you are... you've only begun to shine" Pride is a beautiful positive emotion and my intention for this song is that it empowers you to feel proud of your potential.
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Engagement and Achievement

Song	Artist	Thoughts
Comeback Kid	Brett Dennen	One aspect of achievement that I love is the ability to stick with something; the ability to come back from struggle is a huge achievement and one that I think humanity enjoys being a witness of.
I Wanna Be Like Me	Sara Bareilles	Achievement takes a true knowledge of what you want and who you are, I have often found myself with goals that aren't my own. It is so refreshing to say, "What if I wanna be like me?"
Steer	Missy Higgins	"Your heart is fierce and you finally know that you control where you go, you can steer"
Walk of Life	Dire Straits	One of the lyrics in this song specifically gives the very definition of engagement "dedication, devotion, turning the night time into the day"
Ode	Dave Ransom	This song gets me in flow when I am running, though I am bias to the artist (my husband) I knew this song before I knew him and it is my go to when I want to get out of my head and just be.
You Gotta Be	Des'ree	Though it might sound strange, I give this song to engagement. It acts as a mantra of strong and meaningful traits said over and over getting you into a state of engagement.
Put The Message In The Box	World Party	"put the message in the box, put the box into the car, drive the car around the world till you get heard"
Waka Waka (This Time for Africa) {feat. Freshlyground}	Shakira	"The pressures on, you feel it but you've got it all believe it. When you fall get up, if you fall get up" It is impossible for me to hear this song and not dance, I hope you shake along with a little waka waka too.
All at Sea	Jamie Cullum	"But sometimes don't you just crave to disappear inside your mind. You never know what you might find. So come and spend some time with me we'll spend it all at sea."
Jump Rope	Blue October	I like that the lyrics of this song show the side of achievement when things get hard "life's like a jump rope."
Keep Your Head Up	Andy Grammer	When I think of achievement I often think of small achievements. Regardless of how grand the outcome, I believe it is these small achievements that get us to where we are going. This song makes me think of that perseverance it

		takes for those small goals.
We are the Champions	Queen	I think this song speaks for itself when it comes to achievement, both the glory and the hardship "but it's been no bed of roses, no pleasure crusade. I consider it a challenge before the whole human race."

Positive Relationships

Song	Artist	Thoughts
Twice As Good	Sara Groves	"Every burden I have carried, every joy it's understood. Life with you is half as hard and twice as good" I love this line, I love so many of Sara Groves lyrics but this line in particular speaks to the concept of positive relationships. Community and support in community is what makes life so good.
How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved by You)	James Taylor	"I want to stop and thank you baby, how sweet it is to be loved by you" gratitude at its finest! Try to listen to this without thinking of a loved one while swaying and smiling.
I Will Not Take My Love Away	Matt Wertz	This song feels like a hymn, it is not just the lyrics but the melody holds a space to feel safe and vulnerable and to trust that love will not be taken away. I was torn between putting this on positive relationships or on meaning, and landed on here after all; this type of unconditional love radiates positive relationship.
You Cannot Lose My Love	Sara Groves	This is my favorite lullaby of all time. Starting from losing baby teeth to losing innocence, I can't imagine a better expression of unconditional love from parent to child.
The Book of Love	Gavin James	"The book of love has music in it, in fact that's where music comes from. Some of it's just transcendental some of its just really dumb."
Let It Show	Dechen Hawk	Dechen is a friend of mine from college, a fantastic songwriter and wonderful person. I love this song and the sentiment behind it; let people know you care about them. It's a simple idea though not as easy to show it, music can help you out there.
Roll to the Middle	Sara Groves	This song made it into my marriage vows, I love how honest she is about the dark side of positive relationships and how to come back from those difficult places, vulnerability "Even though I can't be sure that you're going to roll in too I'm going to reach for you."
Thinking Out Loud	Ed Sheeran	There is a great anonymous poem "The beauty of Love" that ends "... Yes, there is a more beautiful thing than young love. Old love."
That's What's Up	Edward Sharpe &	You know when you have one of those days where you aren't feeling so loveable and you find that people love you

	The Magnetic Zeros	anyway? "I was feeling such a mess, I thought you'd leave me behind... but you helped me change my mind." Go ahead, rock out and have a dance party around at 3:10
One Step Closer to You	Michael Franti & Spearhead	The relationships that lift you up when you're feeling low are to be cherished "even when I'm falling down, my heart says follow through and I take one step closer to you"
Forever Like That	Ben Rector	Positive relationships are more than romantic relationships but for the sake of a good ole' love song... "I wanna spend my forever like that"
You're My Best Friend	Queen	I don't think there are enough "Best friend" songs out there but there should be! Thanks, Queen!
Better Together	Jack Johnson	"love is the answer at least for most of the questions in my heart, like "why are we here" and "where do we go" and "how come its so hard?" its not always easy and sometimes life can be deceiving. I'll tell you one thing it's always better when we are together.
Crazy Love	Van Morrison	Van Morrison makes his way onto most of my playlists in some form or another, nostalgia or not, this is a wonderful love song.
Found a Heart	Emily Hearn	Music is a huge part of my life, so picking songs for our wedding was a big deal. This is the song we chose for my bridesmaids to walk down the aisle, when the line "I'm ready" started my heart grew so big I thought it would pop right out of my chest. Now I get that feeling anytime I hear this song. It might be dangerous to listen to...
Shower the People	James Taylor	"If it feels nice, don't think twice. Shower the people you love with love, things are gonna work out fine if you only will do as I say and shower the people you love with love."
I Choose You	Sara Bareilles	Relationships aren't always easy and they don't just happen, sometimes it takes the action and a commitment "I choose you" I think this is true not just of romance but also of friendship and family.
Our Wedding Day	Tricia Fox and Dave Ransom	My husband and I wrote this for our first dance as a married couple. From dying age to before we met and those big "I do" moments I like the story it captures, it's not only ours but the story of so many who have chosen their significant other "every step of the way like that day"
Same Love	Macklemore and Ryan Lewis	I love that music can help shift and change a generations view of love and marriage. I genuinely believe this song helped change history for the better "its human rights for everybody there is no difference."

Meaning

Song	Artist	Thoughts
(What's so Funny 'bout) Peace Love & Understanding	Elvis Costello	What if meaning in life could be summed up by those three words? "And each time I feel like this inside there's one thing I wanna know, what's so funny about <i>peace love and understanding</i> ?"
Add to the Beauty	Sara Groves	I like this song because it's so peaceful while talking about difficult aspects of life "go easy now, later on the road I'm gonna lay my body down"
Lay my Body down	HeM	I love this song, without directly referencing meaning; I find it brings peace to death through words and melody.
For a Dancer	Jackson Browne	"Just do the steps that you've been shown until the dance becomes your very own... somewhere between the time that you arrived and the time you go may lie a reason you were alive that you'll never know."
Ain't No Reason	Brett Dennen	Sometimes we search so hard to find reason and meaning when painful things happen to us or to the world, I find that this song helps soothe my heart when I'm trying too hard to find this meaning.
All Will Be Well	The Gabe Dixon Band	This opening line is perfect for this playlist "the new day dawns and I'm practicing my purpose once again..."
Holding Roses	Mary Beth	I can't pick just one lyric from this song, I have found various meaning in my life through this song time and time again. Have a cup of tea, listen to the words, to the piano, and see what happens.
He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother	The Housemartins	This could easily go in the positive relationships playlist, but it feels so deeply connected to meaning that I put it here instead "So on we go, his welfare is my concern no burden is he to bare, we'll get there...he ain't heavy, he's my brother"
I Am Light	India.Arie	I use this song as a Mantra, especially when I'm feeling low or doubt my meaning in life "I am light"
Break the Shell	India.Arie	"life's going to hurt but it's meant to be felt you cannot touch the sky from inside yourself you cannot fly until you break the shell"
Back To the Earth	Jason Mraz	One aspect of positive psychology that still has room to grow is the relationship with the earth, not just with ourselves and each other. I love this song because of that connection.
We Are Here	Alicia Keys	Alicia Keys wrote this song as a part of a social justice movement, talking about issues from control to international policies, all coming back to the fact that we are here to help each other.
Why It Matters	Sara Groves	The last line of this song hits me every time, right in the tear ducts. Where we find meaning matters and as I the last line of

		this song..."like a single cup of water, why it matters"
Exactly	Amy Steinberg	Oh, I love this song. From the spoken word to every single word. "yes I believe there is a purpose just for me and I believe that we are light and we shine infinitely"
Life Uncommon	Jewel	"lend your voices only to sounds of freedom. No longer lend your strengths to that which you which to be free from. Fill your lives with love and bravery and you shall lead a life uncommon"
Talkin' Bout a Revolution	Tracy Chapman	A revolution takes many people coming together for something bigger than themselves "don't you know we're talkin' bout a revolution, it sounds like a whisper"
One Day	Matisyahu	Regardless of religious belief (Substitute the word "God" for whatever word words for you, universe, life, etc.) I love the beginning of this song "Sometimes I lay under the moon and thank god I'm breathing and I pray don't take me soon, cuz I am here for a reason"
Floodplain	Sara Groves	Listening to Sara Groves explain how this song was written is beautiful. This speaks to her relationship to anxiety, depression, and the Mississippi River "Closer to the life and the ebb and flow, Closer to the edge of I don't know, Closer to that's the way it goes, Some hearts are built on a floodplain"

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