Comparative Analysis Between the Empowering Lyricm of Queer and Non-Queer Pop Music Artists

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ABSTRACT

Symptoms of depression experienced by self-identified LGBTQ+ (queer) high school students across the United States continue to be concerningly high. Part of what is found to have contributed to the onset of depression symptoms experienced by U.S. queer high school students is the lack of representation, applicability to, and inclusivity of LGBTQ+ individuals in the media due to its constant portrayal of heteronormativity. This study investigates this problem in the area of musical media. To acquire a better understanding of how this issue affects this study's demographic, a survey was given to queer high school students in a northern Californian high school, and a one-sided two-sample t-test was also conducted to statistically analyze the average ratings of confidence reported after analyzing both types of lyricism. Survey results showed that the average level of increased confidence experienced after analyzing LGBTQ+ artists' lyrics was approximately 3.15 out of 5, whereas identical survey question responses after analyzing lyrics written by heterosexual and cisgender artists were approximately 2.83 out of 5. This study's unique analysis of how effective empowering mainstream American pop song lyrics are to queer high school students in empowering them finds that queer high school students generally find the empowering lyricism of LGBTQ+ artists to be slightly more empowering than that of heterosexual and cisgender artists. Findings in this study also support the conclusion that most queer high school students agree that LGBTQ+ representation and inclusivity could be more common in the mainstream American pop song industry.

Introduction

Facing symptoms of depression, whether diagnosed with it or not, is found to have unfortunately affected the outlook on life and mental health of numerous LGBTQ+ high school students across the United States, as a 2016-2017 survey given to queer youth by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation reports that ''28 percent of LGBTQ youth — including 40 percent of transgender youth — said they felt depressed most or all of the time during the previous 30 days, compared to only 12 percent of non-LGBTQ youth'' (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2017). This issue has been proven to persist contemporarily, as a 2020 study conducted by the Trevor Project found that ''LGBTQ youth were 1.75 times more likely than their peers to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression'' (Paley, Villines 2020-2021). One of the major issues currently causing the onset of depression symptoms experienced by the demographic is the lack of queer representation and inclusivity in media. One area of media this issue can be seen prevalent in is musical media, specifically with mainstream American pop songs. While there is a common understanding among contemporary society that mainstream American pop song lyrics may generally appeal to all audiences that may hear of or view the lyrics of those songs, and at that, be able to uplift the mood of anyone through its lyrics regardless of their personal background and identity, many LGBTQ+ high school students argue a disposition that negates this common belief in that mainstream American pop songs do not commonly uplift their mood through its lyrics, and instead may either keep the level of depression symptoms experienced by them unalleviated or even cause an increase

in severity of such depression symptoms. This problem has negatively impacted the mental health of many self-identified LGBTQ+ high school teens who have already experienced pre-existing symptoms of depression and feel as though their freedom of expressing confidence and equal representation for their community in comparison to the heteronormative lyricism found in mainstream American pop song lyrics aren't commonly seen in mainstream American pop songs whose lyrics aren't written by artists that aren't queer individuals themselves. A possible cause of this problem is that there aren't as many mainstream American pop musicians/artists who are LGBTQ+ as there are cisgender and heterosexual musicians/artists in the music industry concurrently, leading to the unequal lyrical representation of LGBTQ+ confidence for self-identified LGBTQ+ high school teens experiencing symptoms of depression.

Literature Review

Previous Research

A study that inspired the demographic that would be used to collect data from is a research paper titled *Understanding the Experiences of LGBTQ Students In California* by Thomas Hanson et al. The main goal of the paper's study strived to acquire a more nuanced understanding of what students in specific gender and sexuality groups included in the LGBTQ+ community go through mentally and circumstantially. Furthermore, two key findings that this study found through its survey data that inspired this study to gather data from and evaluate perspectives of LGBTQ+ high school students was that ''High school students who identified their sexual orientation as 'something else' were also likely to report chronic sadness (59%) and suicide ideation (41%) at rates about two to three times higher than for straight students'' (Hanson et al. 2019) and that ''High school students who identified their sexual orientation as 'something else' were also likely to report chronic sadness (59%) and suicide ideation (41%) at rates about two to three times higher than for straight students'' (Hanson et al. 2019). Because these students who identified as ''something else'' fall under the category of LGBTQ+, this data demonstrates clearly how concerning these statistics are in comparison to the reports of their heterosexual peers. These statistics that were gathered from the study's surveys given to LGBTQ+ high school students in California revealed that there are those in that demographic who also clearly face symptoms of depression. In turn, this inspired the demographic from which this study collected data due to how this demographic comes from the U.S. state that this study gathers data from and how this study could help understand the perspectives of its demographic since this study and the study conducted by Hanson et al. have regional similarity in data collection. In terms of research variable similarity, this paper excludes the focus of lyric analysis entirely from its research, though it does however identify and gather quantitative data from the demographic from which I desired to research and garner data in my study. This study then identified how lacking media representation for queer folk and how it may worsen their depression symptoms as a problem that could explain why statistics collected by Hanson et al. were as concerningly high in reports of experiences with depression as they were.

Once the demographic of this study and a problem that demographic is subjected to was identified, further research that could potentially gain a better understanding of that problem became much clearer when looking at *Perspectives of LGBTQ emerging adults on the depiction and impact of LGBTQ media representation* by Lauren B. McInroy and Shelley L. Craig. While our studies' methods are not similar, there is a primary similarity between our studies in that both identify how a lack of inclusive or normalized LGBTQ+ media representation in musical media may worsen depression symptoms among an LGBTQ+ demographic. Specifically, this study goes about researching further into this issue—by eventually acquiring through a series of interviews—a new understanding that LGBTQ+ media representation was generally interpreted as not as inclusive or normalized as heteronormativity is by discussing how ''LGBTQ young people were represented in traditional media as one-dimensional stereotypes, while more complex characters and many LGBTQ subgroups remained largely invisible'' (McInroy et al. 2016). These conclusions were drawn from their interview

data of consenting LGBTQ+ young adults on queer media representation. These findings support the problem that is identified in my paper and inspired this paper to look more into heteronormative themes in some form of media. Heteronormativity, as addressed in this study, became a major aspect of this research project that was addressed earlier in this paper's introduction as a leading cause of the problem identified in this study.

After identifying this study's demographic of LGBTQ+ high school students and how heteronormativity in the media naturally worsens their depression symptoms, a specific form of media needed to be identified in this study to distinguish it apart from other studies. This was achieved by looking at ''*Spending Time In The Past, Making Music For Today: Post-Marriage Equality America, Vintage, and Nostalgia in Queer Female Pop Music Videos*'' by Amanda Jarvis. This study compares how queer music listeners have interpreted themes of LGBTQ+ empowerment in pop music videos before and after gay marriage was legalized throughout the United States through doing case studies of music videos created by queer artists. Further, case studies on the music videos analyzed in this study demonstrate how queer empowerment in musical media helps increase queer inclusivity and representation, which is also an underlying aspect of what this study strived to understand more about. Jarvis' concluded that ''music videos offer an ideal platform for the reclamation and renegotiation of queer narratives'' and that ''The post-2015 landscape has effectively acted as the queer 1950s, offering greater access to marriage, parenting, spousal rights, and visibility'' (Jarvis 2021). While our methods aren't similar, this study was influenced by this paper by analyzing empowering pop songs through comparative analysis and studying a similar demographic as Jarvis' study did, where empowering pop songs such as the ones that were analyzed in this study will be compared in their individual abilities to empower self-identified LGBTQ+ adolescents who face symptoms of depression.

Once the component of mainstream empowering pop music was implemented into this study thanks to the influence of Amanda Jarvis's paper and her findings, the only other component of this study that was missing was something specific about mainstream empowering pop songs that participants contributed data to this study could analyze. This missing component was helped in being found by identifying it as the empowering lyricism in mainstream American pop songs after looking at a study made by music therapist Barbara Jurgensmier, a graduate of the University of Kansas. She conducted a research study where she analyzes the effect of group lyric analysis on consenting homeless adolescents, and she wanted to see if there was a correlation between group lyric analysis sessions and an increase in self-esteem among the homeless adolescents (Jurgensmier 2012). Through collecting survey data, she found that the vast majority of homeless adolescents who participated in the study reported a drastic increase in their self-esteem compared to their levels of self-esteem before participating in the sessions.
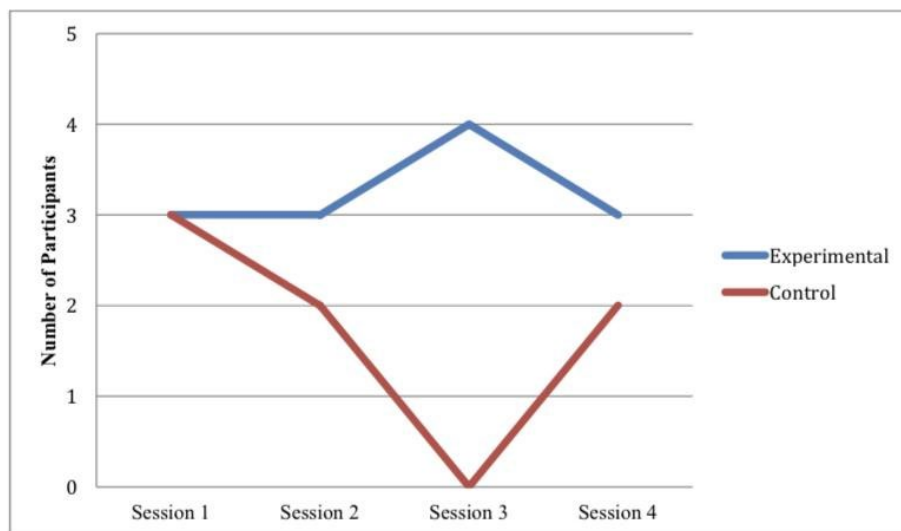
Figure 3. Comparison of experimental and control group attendance rates.

This conclusion is supported by Figure 3 of Jurgensmier's data collection that Jurgensmier concludes from that ''the experimental sessions yielded an averaged 1.38-point increase (t(12) = 1.73, p = 0.11) while the control sessions' scores increased by an average of 1.71 points (t(6) = 2.30, p = 0.06). These marginal increases in self-esteem scores before and after treatment were found to be statistically significant at the 0.20 alpha level'' (Jurgensmier 2012). This research study incorporated correlational research just as Jurgensmier's study did to measure reported increases in confidence among self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students as they analyze samples of mainstream American pop song lyrics written by both self-identified LGBTQ+ artists and non-queer artists. Though Jurgensmier's use of statistical analysis differs from this study's specific type of statistical analysis used, this study's method of statistical analysis was also inspired by Jurgensmier's data analysis. Participants in this study's survey data also answered anonymous surveys similar to what Jurgensmier has done in her confidential surveying of homeless adolescents and their reports of self-esteem increase that gave insight into how their reported increases or neutrality in confidence after analyzing the survey's given lyric samples.

Research Question

Combining elements of data collection and variables used in similar studies as to what this study intended to find, this paper's research question does just that to acquire a new understanding of how self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students' confidence may stay neutral or increase when analyzing mainstream American pop songs. That research question is as follows: To what extent are themes of empowerment in mainstream American pop songs written by queer artists more effective in increasing levels of confidence experienced by queer high school students who experience symptoms of depression in comparison to such songs lyrically expressing themes of empowerment written by non-queer artists?

This study intends to answer this research question by utilizing correlational research based on survey data. Moreover, the correlational research being conducted in this study analyzes the correlation between analyzing song lyrics written by self-identified queer artists that include lyrics expressing themes of LGBTQ+ empowerment and the increase of experienced self-confidence in self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students. Such data will be collected through fully confidential surveys that anonymous, consenting participants in this study will complete. Before delving more into this study and its resolution that will be investigated and analyzed through a series of correlational research and survey data, it is vital that some terms being used in describing the variables involved in this research are defined as the following to provide a prefaced understanding:

1. Queer: an umbrella term used to address gender and sexual minorities---those of which are also high school students in this study---who are not heterosexual or are not cisgender (Merriam-Webster 2022).
2. Heterosexual: of, relating to, or characterized by sexual or romantic attraction to or between people of the opposite sex (Merriam-Webster 2022).
3. Cisgender: of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth (Merriam-Webster 2022).
4. Heteronormativity: denoting or relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation (Merriam-Webster 2022).
5. Depression symptoms: While symptoms of depression come in a wide variety, the specific symptoms that will be analyzed through survey data in this study to most effectively answer this study's research question are lack of self-esteem, anxiety, lack of energy, and guilt.
6. Mainstream American pop songs: Mainstream American pop songs will be defined in this study as pop songs made by American artists that were published in America ever since the year 1980 that have become considerably mainstream after having gone ''platinum'' by having over 500,000 copies of the song sold as a single.

7. Confidence: a feeling of self-reassurance that makes one feel less apprehensive over themselves for whatever reason they may feel that way (Merriam-Webster 2022).

Hypothesis

Analyzing mainstream American pop song lyrics written by self-identified queer artists is predicted to increase self-confidence in self-identified LGBTQ+ high school teens concurrently experiencing symptoms of depression more than song lyrics with themes of empowerment written by non-queer artists. This hypothesis is made for this study because of how it is likely that the vast majority of LGBTQ+ high school students who attest to this problem may also agree that the problem is linked to there being heteronormativity integrated into mainstream American pop songs that attempt to appeal to their empowering lyrics to any and all of whom may listen to those songs or be exposed to its lyrics.

Research Gap

Previous research papers have conducted similar studies, whether it be Barbara Jurgensmier's paper on the mental health benefits of increasing self-esteem for homeless adolescents, but there has been very little and insignificant research that looks into how queer representation in empowering mainstream American pop songs empowers LGBTQ+ high school students who report experiencing symptoms of depression. Above all though, the main aspect of this study that distinguishes it apart from other studies in this paper's literature review that makes for this study's gap is specifically the comparison between the empowering mainstream American pop song lyricism of queer artists and non-queer artists and which type of lyricism is more effective in their ability to empower listeners through their lyrics. This study intends to fill that gap though surveying LGBTQ+ high school students who experience symptoms of depression to see whether or not they find the empowering lyricism of queer artists to be more empowering, equally as empowering, or less empowering than that of heterosexual and cisgender artists.

Codification

Similar to how studies analyzed in this paper's literature review codified data, this study's data will be collected via surveying with questions rated on a 1-5 Likert scale. Similar to Jurgensmier's study, a correlation will be analyzed between the song lyric sample's effectiveness to increase confidence or cause neutrality in it. All data will be displayed on histograms to display and compare average ratings of confidence reported for either type of lyric sample.

Methods

This research study used methods of comparative analysis, statistical analysis, and surveying to appropriately collect data from what is being measured and analyzed in this research study. Surveying was used in this study as a way to collect data, and comparative analysis and statistical analysis were the two methods used in this study that analyzed all data collected from survey responses. Moreover, those survey responses would be analyzed via averaging all individual mean ratings of confidence resulting from each question's responses.

Surveying

Surveying was used as a method for this study in order to collect data from its demographic. Doing this allowed for this study's data to be visualized on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating no increase in confidence whatsoever and 5 indicating a full increase in confidence. These confidence ratings were based on lyric samples included in the survey and helped allow for both quantitative and qualitative analyses to be conducted after data was collected from the survey. Surveying is an appropriate method to use for this study due to how ''the primary purpose of… survey research [is] to obtain information describing characteristics of a large sample of individuals of interest relatively quickly'', and this study's findings strive to be as accurately representative as possible for the demographic of LGBTQ+ high school students who face symptoms of depression (Ponto 2015). Since my research question strives to acquire a new understanding of whether or not the empowering lyricism of queer artists is more empowering than that of heterosexual and cisgender artists, surveying is the most efficient and appropriate method that can achieve doing that by generating quantitative results of which two respective average ratings of confidence can be drawn from both types of lyric samples.

Comparative Analysis of Survey Responses

Comparative analysis was used as a method in this study to analyze the difference in the average level of confidence that was reported from the LGBTQ+ artist and non-queer artist sections of the survey. This was done by finding the average of each mean score of every question asked based on the lyric samples given for both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual/cisgender results of confidence ratings. Applying this method to this study's data collection helped to answer its research question by seeing if there is any significant difference in confidence levels reported by survey participants analyzing the given lyric samples in the survey.

Statistical Analysis of Average Confidence Ratings

Statistical analysis was used as a method in this study to help acquire a more advanced understanding of how reliable this study's findings were. To achieve this, a one-sided two-sample t-test was conducted to obtain a p-value for the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual/cisgender artist lyric sample survey data and to obtain a conclusion as to whether or not to reject the null hypothesis based on the p-value calculated from the t-test. Obtaining a p-value helped to conclude how reliable my data was as well because how it helps to provide an understanding of whether or not two sets of data results would result by random chance. Moreover, based how low a p-value is, it can help a researcher determine whether or not their data is ultimately reliable in there being a significant difference between two data sets (McLeod 2019). Because that is such a key component as to what this study's research question strives to understand between the difference in effective empowerment between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual/cisgender lyricism, conducting a one-sided two-sample t-test will is inherently effective at helping to understand how effectively my data helped answer this study's research question.

Population Selection

The population that my data was collected from was selected by choosing a northern Californian high school's LGBTQ+ student body club and its Feminist Society. These clubs were chosen for the study to have participants gathered from due to how many students reported being LGBTQ+ and also report experience with symptoms of depression. In turn, advocating this study's survey to the students in those clubs was ideal due to how asking students in those clubs to complete the survey would reach this study's target demographic to have data collected from. Additionally, a link to this study's survey was included in the Google Classroom pages of both the LGBTQ+ and Feminist Society clubs for students to easily access the survey. For a broader reach of other

LGBTQ+ students with symptoms of depression on campus to take the survey, this study was also included in any and all other Google Classroom pages that the teachers who advised those two clubs had for all of the classes that they teach on campus.

Data Analysis & Results

This study's survey consisted of five total sections. These sections included the preliminary section, the first lyric sample set, the second lyric sample set, the third lyric sample set, and the cumulative reflection section. Each of the lyric sample set sections had LGBTQ+ artist lyric samples and heterosexual/cisgender artist lyric samples included with those sections, with each lyric sample being from a mainstream American pop song that has gone ''platinum'' or has had over 500,000 copies of the song sold and has been released as early as 1980 up until the present. Three questions were repeatedly asked for each LGBTQ+ artist and heterosexual/cisgender lyric sample included in those sections. The following charts display the averages scores of the responses given by all survey participants that measure their rating of how much their confidence increased after analyzing the given lyrics for each sample on a Likert scale of 1 through 5, with 1 indicating ''There was no increase in confidence at all'' and 5 indicating ''There was a very noticeable, major, and utterly significant increase in confidence''.

Chart Key for Figure 1 and Figure 2.

S = set

= number

Q = question

Question 1, or Q1 = ''Read the following statement: I believe that these lyrics are generally effective and accomplished at conveying a message of empowerment to me, an LGBTQ+ high school student concurrently experiencing symptoms of depression.''.

Question 2, or Q2 = '' Read the following statement: I believe that these lyrics were inclusive of and applicable to members of the LGBTQ+ community in its conveying of empowering themes.''.

Question 3, or Q3 = ''When reading through the following sample of lyrics, how effective were they in increasing your own self-confidence through the themes of empowerment that the lyrics in this sample expressed?''.

Lyric sample set #1, or S1, lyric samples = ''Firework'' by Katy Perry as its LGBTQ+ artist lyric sample and ''Fight Song'' by Rachel Platten for its cisgender/heterosexual artist lyric sample.

Lyric sample set #2, or S2, lyric samples = ''Don't Stop Me Now'' by Queen as its LGBTQ+ artist lyric sample and ''Wild Things'' by Allesia Cara as its heterosexual/cisgender artist lyric sample.

Lyric sample set #3, or S3, lyric samples = ''Express Yourself'' by Madonna as its LGBTQ+ artist lyric sample and ''Brave'' by Sara Bareillis for its heterosexual/cisgender artist lyric sample.
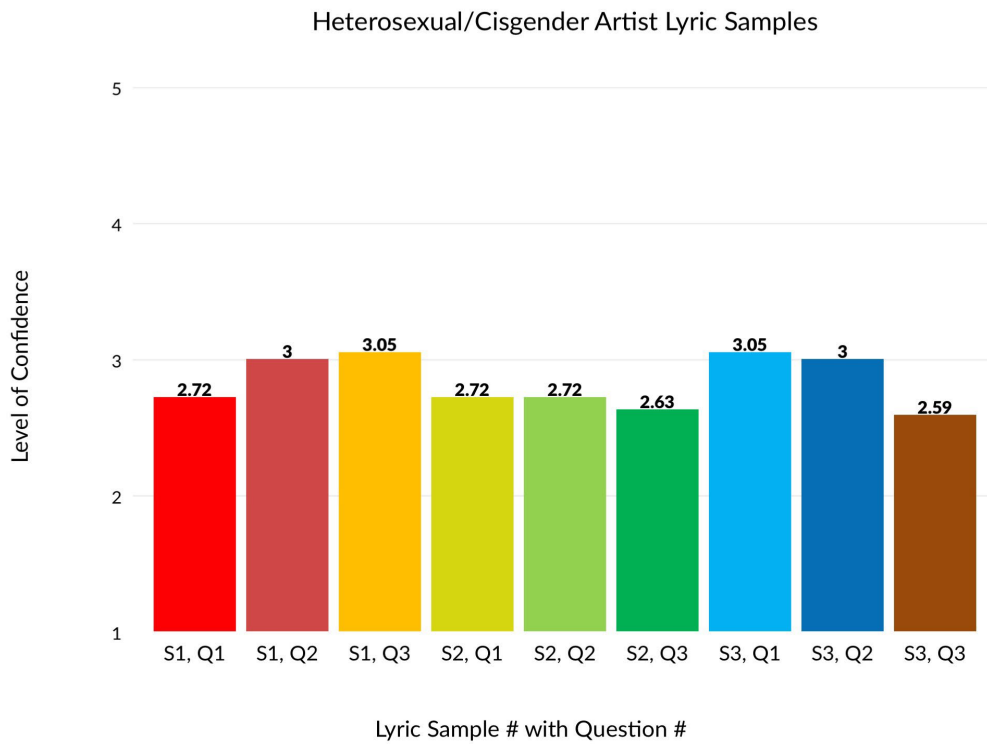
Heterosexual/Cisgender Artist Lyric Samples

Figure 1. Heterosexual/Cisgender Artist Lyric Samples
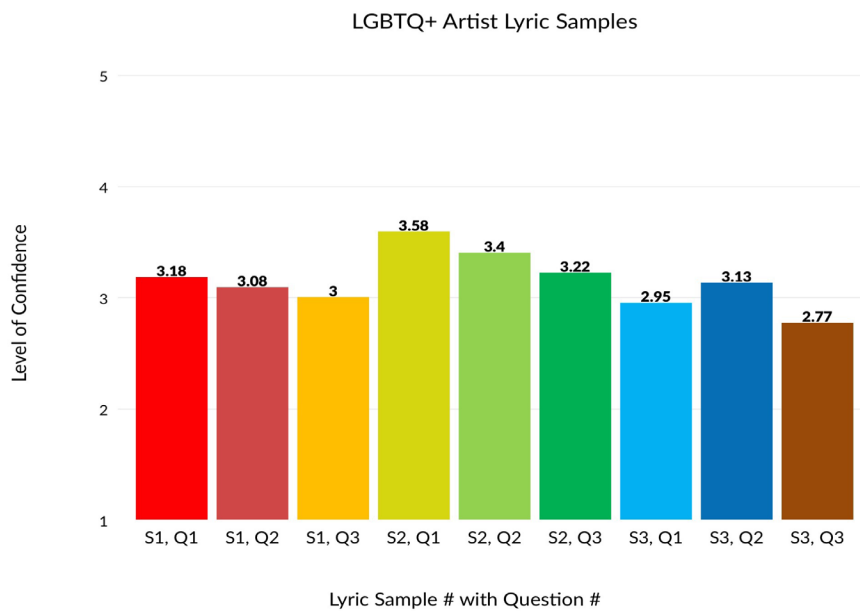
LGBTQ+ Artist Lyric Samples

Figure 2. LGBTQ+ Artist Lyric Samples

New Understandings

Earlier in this paper's literature review, the study addressed the research question ''To what extent are themes of empowerment in mainstream American pop songs written by self-identified queer artists more effective in increasing levels of confidence experienced by self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students concurrently experiencing symptoms of depression in comparison to such songs lyrically expressing themes of empowerment written by non-queer artists?''. Above all, the survey gathered a total of 22 responses, which is somewhat smaller than the number of responses that were desired to have been garnered but is an expected number of responses for the demographic being researched in this study. This paper's results helped acquire a new understanding of how LGBTQ+ high school students concurrently facing symptoms of depression favor the empowering lyricism of queer artists more than that of heterosexual and cisgender artists, with how the set average rating of confidence for the LGBTQ+ artist lyric sample sets in the survey was approximately 3.15 out of 5, while the average rating of confidence for the heterosexual/cisgender artist lyric sample set was approximately 2.83 out of 5.

$$t = \frac{(x_1 - x_2) - (m_1 - m_2)}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1{}^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2{}^2}{n_2}}}$$

$$t = \frac{(2.83 - 3.15) - (0)}{\sqrt{\frac{1899^2}{9} + \frac{2411^2}{9}}}$$

Test statistic (t) = -3.13

P-value = 0.003

Furthermore, as a way to gather additional insight into this study's data collection, a one-sided two-sample *t*-test was conducted to gather a p-value from the LGBTQ+ artist cisgender/heterosexual artist lyric sample sets by plugging in the average ratings of confidence found from both lyric sample sets into the one-sided two-sample t-test formula. Doing this allowed for the acquisition of further insight into what the reliability of this study's survey results would be through ultimately finding the p-value of these survey results, or what the probability would be of there being identical survey results that would be collected if this same exact study was conducted at any other time. After calculating the test statistic found from the two lyric sample sets, being -3.13, the resulting p-value was able to be calculated, with it being 0.003. This means that there is a 0.003% chance that identical survey results would be collected from this same exact study being conducted at any other time. Due to the fact that ''a *p*-value less than 0.05 (typically ≤ 0.05) is statistically significant'' and ''indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis, as there is less than a 5% probability the null is correct (and the results are random)'' the null hypothesis of the test statistic was rejected and the difference in confidence ratings between the lyric samples was concluded to be significant (McLeod 2019). Considering that a p-value below 5% is considered significantly reliable, this study was able to collect greatly reliable data from its survey results, even if there were only 22 survey results that were able to be collected in total.

Chart Key for Figure 3:

Question 1 = ''The song lyrics written by a self-identified LGBTQ+ artist were, in some way, more effective at being inclusive and overall appealing in their empowering lyricism to me, a self-identified member of the LGBTQ+ community.

Question 2 = ''Both of the lyric samples were equally as effective in its ability to empower me, a self-identified member of the LGBTQ+ community''.

Question 3 = ''The song lyrics written by an artist who isn't a self identified member of the LGBTQ+ community appealed to me, a self-identified member of the LGBTQ+ community more than the song lyrics written by a self-identified LGBTQ+ artist in some way''.

Question 4 = ''I believe that the song lyrics expressing themes of empowerment and lyrically promoting self-confidence solely being written by a self-identified LGBTQ+ artist is more empowering and overall appealing to me as a self-identified member of the LGBTQ+ community than such lyrics that were written by a cisgender and heterosexual artist, or artist who has never once publically claimed to be LGBTQ+''.

Question 5 = ''I believe that more LGBTQ+ representation among artists and in themes of empowerment in the production of mainstream American pop songs in the industry is greatly needed, and that there are not nearly as many widely recognized artists who are self identified as LGBTQ+ compared to artists that aren't''.
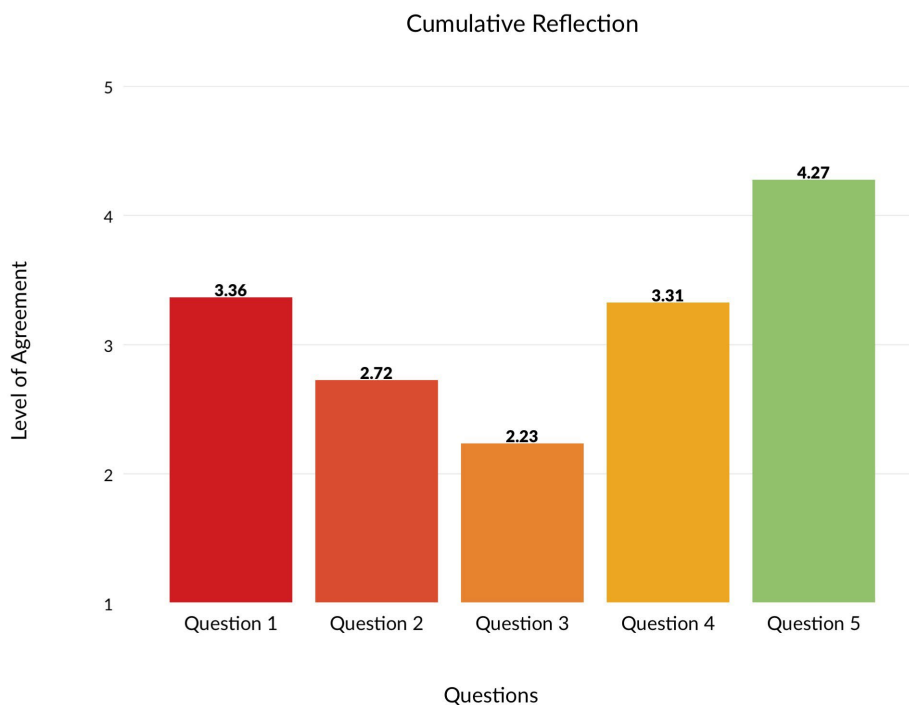

Figure 3. Cumulative Reflection

The ''Cumulative Reflection'' section of the survey helps provide more qualitative insight into the perspectives of LGBTQ+ high school students experiencing symptoms of depression. For reference when viewing the graph, all questions are worded as statements that participants were asked to rate their agreement to on a 1-5 Likert scale, with 1 indicating no agreement and 5 indicating complete agreement. Results from this section indicate that there is a general agreement among survey participants that empowering queer lyricism is more empowering to LGBTQ+ high school students with symptoms of depression than the empowering lyricism of heterosexual and cisgender artists.

Hypothesis (Revisited)

This study ended up answering this study's research question, with the data supporting this paper's hypothesis, being that the themes of empowerment expressed in mainstream American pop songs written by queer artists would be more effective in increasing levels of confidence reported by self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students. The initial hypothesis of this study's outcome resulted in being true, as the average rating of confidence for the queer artist lyric sample sections of the survey was higher at 3.15 out of 5 than that of the heterosexual and cisgender artist lyric sample sections of the survey, which resulted at 2.83 out of 5.

Discussion

Implications

This paper's results helped acquire a new understanding of how LGBTQ+ high school students concurrently facing symptoms of depression favor the empowering lyricism of queer artists more than that of heterosexual and cisgender artists. The findings in this paper can help signify to current and future heterosexual and cisgender songwriters that they should pay more attention to whether or not their lyrics for an empowering song of theirs are passively heteronormative or not, given that this study shows how LGBTQ+ high school students mostly agree that there should be more LGBTQ+ representation in the American music industry's mainstream pop song lyrics. Naturally, heteronormativity in any form of media can easily worsen the depression symptoms experienced by LGBTQ+ high school students, as mentioned earlier in this paper's introduction. If such a problem should be resolved, then a major implication that can be taken away from this study's findings is heterosexual and cisgender artists' attention to being passively heteronormative in their songwriting of mainstream American pop songs.

Fulfillment of Research Gap

When revisiting scholarly work identified in this study's literature review, Jurgensmier admits that while her study was ''limited by the transience of the homeless population, small sample size, and lack of multiple quantitative measures, attendance rates, RSES scores, and qualitative responses and observations warrant future music therapy research with this population'' (Jurgensmier 2012). Similarly, this study's collection of data was also limited to the demographic of high school students in northern California, but the results of any data collected by consenting participants in this study were applied to the wider demographic of American self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students to acquire a new understanding of how the conclusions of this research study may be beneficial in how empowering mainstream American pop songs written by self-identified queer artists may be more effective in increasing self-confidence levels and alleviating concurrent symptoms of depression that they experience compared to the same type of song lyrics being written by non-queer artists.

Additionally, to demonstrate similarity in methods and findings used in previous research that found similar findings in this study's model paper mentioned in the literature review written by Barbara Jurgensmier, the results of Jurgensmier's paper and the effectiveness of her methods used to acquire a new understanding of how analyzing empowering lyricism in pop songs may boost the self-esteem of homeless adolescents were similar to this study's findings, but with this study still having obtained a new understanding of what was studied. Moreover, the end result showed a positive correlation between the levels of confidence reported by participants as they analyzed empowering pop song lyrics by queer artists more so than heterosexual and cisgender artists. This study's gap is specifically the comparison between the empowering mainstream American pop song lyricism of queer artists and non-queer artists and which type of lyricism is more effective in their ability to empower listeners through their lyrics, and this study fulfilled that gap by finding that the empowering lyricism of queer artists is more empowering than that of heterosexual and cisgender artists to LGBTQ+ high school students with symptoms of depression. These conclusions in how the research gap addressed in this study was filled were drawn from the fact that the average rating of overall confidence increase reported by survey participants was 3.15 out of 5 compared to participants' average rating of overall confidence increase after analyzing lyrics by heterosexual and cisgender artists at 2.83 out of 5. In turn, these findings clearly provide a new understanding that was found thanks to the data collected in this study that fulfilled its research gap.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the demographic of which it researched provided a very limited sample of people that consenting participants could be drawn from to partake in the study's survey. This is due to the fact that this study specifically strived to collect data from self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students who, at the time of being asked to contribute to this study's data, reported experiencing symptoms of depression. It would make sense that this would be a major limitation of this study given that ''roughly 8% of all high school students in America, report being lesbian, gay, or bisexual'' (Schlanger 2017). When also requiring that high school students from that population also experience concurrent symptoms of depression, it's easy to see how striving to collect data from such a specific demographic inherently makes this study prone to having a small number of participants in that demographic that would be willing to contribute to its data.

Another limitation of this study was the possibility that there may have been survey responses that were dishonest and that responses may have been biased. When the survey asked students to approve that they were a self-identified LGBTQ+ high school student experiencing symptoms of depression in the preliminary section of it, there is a possibility that some students may have taken the survey without being LGBTQ+ or having experienced symptoms of depression. Additionally, there is also a possibility that participants who answered questions in the survey may have been biased in their responses to questions that asked about any of the lyric samples in the survey. The main bias that may have influenced how they rated their increases or neutrality in confidence after having analyzed the lyric samples is that of especially favoring or especially disliking certain artists included in the survey. In turn, this possibility of there being bias in any of the participants' responses could have influenced them to ignore the meaningfulness of the lyrics' empowering messages and automatically label such sets of lyrics as empowering to them or not empowering to them due to their opinion of the artist who made the lyrics in a given lyric sample included in the survey.

The last main limitation of this study is that the data that was collected cannot accurately and appropriately represent all self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students who concurrently experience symptoms of depression due to the population that the data was collected from being limited to just one northern Californian school. Furthermore, the number of participants that took part in this study's surveys was 22. This is an arguably small number for participants in a data collection, so those numbers cannot accurately represent or account for the United States' entire population of self–identified LGBTQ+ high school students concurrently experiencing

symptoms of depression and how their experience of self-confidence would stay neutral or increase after analyzing mainstream American pop song lyrics. This is mainly because the perspectives of high school students in that demographic may differ due to different circumstantial influences, such as social environment, culture, at-home life, and population of self-identified LGBTQ+ students at any United States high school. Taking this into consideration, the limitation of this study's data being unable to represent the perspectives of all self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students in the United States is unavoidable with how small of a number of participants there were in this study's collection of data.

Future Research Directions

The shortcomings of this study's data collection and its limitations suggest new areas of improvement and discovery for future research. Similar studies in the future that study heteronormativity or queer media representation and how it affects LGBTQ+ high school students experiencing symptoms of depression could expand beyond California using identical research methods that this study used. Using such methods, including the request that a teacher may include their survey in their Google Classroom pages and interviewing members of a high school's student body club, a wider outreach can be made to collect survey responses if more clubs and teachers are reached in a high school than that of which was reached in this study. Applying statistical analysis when analyzing data collected from a study in the way that this study did with a one-sided two-sample t-test could also be useful for determining statistical significance between two sets of data in future studies similar to this one. Furthermore, this study's findings of how self-identified LGBTQ+ high school students generally favor the empowering pop song lyricism of queer artists more so than that of non-queer artists can help music therapists across the United States with future studies that analyze the therapeutic effects of empowering pop songs (Boggan et al. 2017). Future research that may also use comparative analysis as a part of their research methods in collecting data for a similar sort of study as this one could also send out surveys that perhaps evaluate responses from more than just one demographic like this one did, and could instead send out surveys to more than one demographic. Lastly, individual researchers looking to study a similar demographic, similar research topic, or similar variables as the ones identified in this study could ultimately expand beyond northern California and its population of queer high school students to other regions and similar LGBTQ+ demographics in the United States or other regions across the world.

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