universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER’S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master‘s Thesis

“Hard Times: Expressions of Depression in the Songs of Julien Baker, Paramore, and Architects”

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2020 / Vienna 2020

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt / degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	UA 066 844
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt / degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Masterstudium Anglophone Literatures and Cultures
Betreut von / Supervisor:	Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Alexandra Ganser-Blumenau

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Introduction

The power of popular culture, aside from its ability to provide pleasure, is its ability to communicate and persuade. According to Deanna D. Sellnow, a professor of strategic communication, popular culture has "the persuasive power to shape beliefs and behaviors […] If we fail to study popular culture, we are left vulnerable to remaining fixed in our beliefs and behaviors, rather than examining them" (5-6). This thesis will explore the rhetorical power of popular music as it relates to the increasingly reported presence of mental health issues across various demographics in contemporary society. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), nearly 1 in 5 adults in the United States lives with a mental illness, with "the prevalence of AMI [any mental illness, defined as a mental, behavioural, or emotional disorder ranging from no impairment to mild, moderate, and severe impairment] being higher among women (22.3 percent) than men (15.1 percent)." The highest prevalence of AMI (25.8 percent) is among young adults aged 18–25 years and among adults reporting two or more races (28.6 percent) (NIMH). The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) notes that "suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S., and the second leading cause of death for people aged 10–34." Mental Health America (MHA) has reported that from 2012 to 2017, "the prevalence of past-year Major Depressive Episode (MDE) increased from 8.66 percent to 13.01 percent of youth ages 12–17. Now over two million youth have MDE with severe impairment." Suicidal ideation in adults has also increased with over 10.3 million adults in the U.S. (in 2017) reporting serious thoughts of suicide (MHA). With alarming statistics such as these, it is understandable that contemporary American popular culture has begun reflecting on and articulating feelings of mental distress.

Specifically, this thesis will examine how songs reflect and comment upon the state of contemporary society and how they are able to influence people's beliefs, particularly about depression. Three songs from the more recent albums from musical artists Julien Baker (*Turn Out the Lights,* 2017), Paramore (*After Laughter*, 2017), and Architects (*Holy Hell,* 2018), will be analyzed. The artists chosen for analysis represent three differing demographics, highlighting how widespread and indiscriminate depression can be. Due to the broad reach of popular music, musicians may use their visibility and platforms to bring awareness to issues in ways that may help both themselves and their audience navigate times of personal and cultural instability. According to cultural studies scholars Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, "[Pop songs] express the drive for security in an uncertain and changeable emotional world" (qtd. in

Storey 125). By drawing upon authentic feelings and expressing "emotional realism[1]," young people in particular use these "collective representations" to, at least in part, form a "mental picture of the world" and perhaps better understand how to navigate their place in it (Hall and Whannel qtd. in Storey 125).

The relationship between music and mental health is not an entirely new area of research. However, contemporary popular music and its representations of mental health conditions, specifically from a gender studies perspective, have yet to be explored in greater detail. This thesis will attempt to bridge this research gap by highlighting the ways in which societal pressures regarding gender and sexuality may factor into the onset of depression. Psychological scholarship on music, particularly its therapeutic role, has predominantly focused on music that lacks a lyrical component, such as classical music and film scores. Kate Gfeller (2005), in her book chapter titled "Music as Communication," is one of many scholars who asserts that the nondiscursive nature of music allows for a heightened transmission of emotional messages and "as a result, music makes an effective tool for evoking or reflecting emotional response, identifying or heightening emotional awareness, and expressing or reflecting themes relevant to group processes" (54). However, as this thesis will explore, music that is accompanied by lyrics, can also be used as a tool for self-reflection and the processing of emotions.

In addition to its ability to induce positive emotions or to soothe overstimulated nervous systems, music can evoke a feeling of connectedness—a sense that one is not alone in how they are feeling. Sociomusicologist Simon Frith notes that "[w]e all hear the music we like as something special, as something that defies the mundane, takes us 'out of ourselves,' puts us somewhere else" (qtd. in Schäfer et al. 2). It is also this power to transport listeners, even if only temporarily, out of their own minds, which can often feel like a prison for those struggling with mental health issues, that makes music a therapeutic tool. Although there are many types and severities of mental illness, the focus of this thesis will be on depression, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter (Chapter 1).

As previously mentioned, a selection of three songs from the most recent albums by American musicians Julien Baker and Paramore, and British band Architects will be analyzed in an attempt to bring together the roles of music as a cultural artifact and a therapeutic tool.

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[1] According to *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*, emotional realism is "a representational quality in a narrative that is felt to be 'true-to-life' by audiences in terms of the enactment of recognizable subjective experiences" (qtd. in Oxford Reference). That is, even though a situation presented in a narrative may seem "unrealistic", the emotions that the situation evokes are similar to ones that the audience have experienced in their own lives.

Through the analysis found in Chapter 2, this thesis will explore how contemporary musicians use music to express mental health struggles and the disconnect that comes from attempting to fit into the gendered expectations of Western society. The three artists chosen for this analysis have found their respective success within different genres of music, ranging from folk-acoustic to metal. By selecting artists that span a variety of musical styles, as well as appeal to different demographics of listeners, the wide reach of mental illness is underscored.

As an openly queer artist, Julien Baker will provide a non-heteronormative lens through which anxiety and depression can be examined. In addition, Paramore will allow for a cisgender[2] female, heterosexual perspective. Although intersectionality is an important element of contemporary feminism, this thesis will not be exploring race as an additional point of struggle. Since the history of systemic racism in the United States is an extensive one, including a satisfactory discussion of it will likely surpass the limited scope of this research. However, "toxic masculinity," a term first coined by Professor of Psychology Shepherd Bliss during the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1980s and 1990s (Salter), and which emphasizes the harmful effects of adhering to certain traditional masculine stereotypes, will be discussed. Therefore, songs from the most recent album of the British band Architects, who have a large American fanbase, will be included. The research will be undertaken predominantly from a gender and cultural studies perspective. Elements of Judith Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender is socially constructed through repetitive acts or behaviours, and Raewyn (R.W.) Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity, which underlines the power position of men in society while also accounting for multiple masculinities, will aid to understand how fixed gender roles may affect how one experiences the world. In terms of the analysis of the cultural artifacts, Deanna and Timothy Sellnow (2001) have expanded upon Susanne Langer's (1953) theory that "argues that music as an aesthetic symbol creates an 'illusion of life' for listeners" (qtd. in Sellnow and Sellnow 398). Langer asserts that human beings have an inherent need to use nondiscursive symbols to understand their experience. It is this lack of fixed meanings that makes music a useful tool for comprehension. "In short, music sounds the way feelings feel. And, where words fall short in expressing the inner emotions of the inmost being, music is able to do so" (Sellnow and Sellnow 397). The "illusion of life" theory addresses how lyrics ("cognitive content") and

[2] Defined as an expression of gender that aligns with one's biological sex assigned at birth. Often shortened to "cis."

music (“emotional content”) work together to convey meanings. The congruency or lack thereof between these two elements influences the meanings (Sellnow 10).

The final chapter (Chapter 3) in this thesis will briefly discuss audience reception and how the artists and albums in question have encouraged a more open conversation around mental health. By reviewing a selection of social media posts from fans of each artist, specifically those found on the social media platform Twitter, a preliminary sense of the conversation that has been inspired by the respective releases can be collected. The ability for many fans to relate to the feelings expressed by these artists, as well as to be exposed to other individuals from around the world who also acknowledge similar struggles with their mental health, helps to create a community of support and decrease the dangerous stigma around this particular subject. Music and community are inextricably linked, and it is this sense of community that can be considered extremely beneficial for individuals living with mental illnesses who often feel alone in their pain or as if their experiences are unique.

Throughout the following chapters, the goal of this thesis is to illuminate how music is used to convey meanings about the human condition in current times, specifically with regards to the societal pressures around gender and sexuality, and to aid in eliminating the stigma surrounding depression. Contemporary society has been fraught with instability and the effects of this insecurity are becoming increasingly visible in the world’s population. With such a high prevalence of mental illnesses of varying severities, it is of the utmost importance to increase awareness and bring to the forefront the significance of mental health in order for current and future generations to thrive. The extent to which popular music permeates everyday life affords it the power to place a spotlight on mental health and to assist in destigmatizing mental health conditions, such as depression.

1 Understanding Depression

1.1 A Brief History of Depression in the Western World

Mental illnesses are by no means new phenomena. In fact, according to British historian Roy Porter in his book, *Madness: A Brief History* (2002), "Archaeologists have unearthed skulls datable back to at least 5000 BC which have been trephined or trepanned—small round holes have been bored in them with flint tools. The subject was probably thought to be possessed by devils which the holes would allow to escape" (10). Madness, as mental illness has been referred to historically in Western culture, has featured prominently in religious myths and epic tales about heroes since even before the age of classical antiquity. Disordered behaviour was believed to be caused by "spirit invasion, sorcery, demonic malice, the evil eye, or the breaking of taboos" (Porter 12), with human conduct, both "normal" and "abnormal", seen as being externally influenced by supernatural forces (Porter 13). However, by the fifth and fourth centuries BC, Hippocratic medicine began to bring madness "down from the gods" and to find increasing evidence for the causes of neurological disorders being of a natural origin (Porter 16).

With the official recognition of Christianity in the Roman Empire in AD 313, perceptions of madness and its causes shifted to "an apocalyptic narrative of sin and redemption" where "the Holy Ghost and the Devil battled for possession of the individual soul" resulting in symptoms of despair, anguish, and other expressions of a disturbed mind (Porter 17). Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the concept of possession as the cause of mental disturbances was replaced once again by a recognition that a defective brain was to blame (Porter 29). The Age of Enlightenment re-established the "rational individual—or, more precisely, educated, eminent males […]—as the paradigm for ethical and political ideals" (Porter 35). This binary thinking and Cartesian dualism placed mind in a position of superiority over matter or body and "implied that as consciousness was inherently and definitionally rational, insanity, precisely like regular physical illnesses, must derive from the body, or be a consequence of some very precarious connections in the brain" (Porter 58).

As a response to the scientific Age of Reason, the Romanticism movement of the eighteenth century brought to the forefront emotion and saw mental illnesses become increasingly "fashionable"—namely, the mood disorder of melancholia, which was said to be caused by too much black bile, or melancholy, in the human body (Scull 94). The medical focus on the shifting balance between the four primary humours or fluids of the body (blood, yellow bile or choler, phlegm, and melancholy), is known as humouralism and was to become

the basis for western medicine as we know it today (Porter 37). According to Clark Lawlor in his book *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression*,

> The glamour invested in melancholy by the Aristotelian tradition [that is the idea of the melancholic genius] meant that men and women were willing to announce themselves as having at least a touch of the melancholic disposition or 'habit'. Although the vogue for melancholy began in Italy, it quickly spread through the network of European intellectuals and aristocrats to the north, and became firmly entrenched in Britain, to the extent that characters like Hamlet manifested themselves in literary representations, and then so firmly stereotyped that satirical portraits of moody young men started to appear shortly afterwards. (61-62)

Although poets such as Keats and Wordsworth may have considered melancholia a "dreamy sadness" (Porter 45) that inspired their literary genius, clinical accounts from Greek medicine, such as one from Aretaeus of Cappadocia's *On the Causes and Signs of Disease*, acknowledged the potential dangers of such a condition:

> Sufferers are dull or stern: dejected or unreasonably torpid, without any manifest cause: such is the commencement of melancholy, and they also become peevish, dispirited, sleepless, and start up from a disturbed sleep. Unreasonable fears also seize them […] But if the illness become more urgent, hatred, avoidance of the haunts of men, vain lamentations are seen: they complain of life and desire to die […]. (qtd. in Porter 45)

The Victorian period saw the term "melancholy" move towards the term "depression" that is in use today. Lawlor notes that the shift was "partly enabled by the advent of psychology as a profession, increasing knowledge about brain and nerve anatomy, and the overall move from the idea of melancholy as a disorder of the intellect to the notion of melancholia and depression as a mood or 'affective' disorder" (102). Although the cultural perception of depression has undergone many more progressions that bring us to our current understanding of it (such as the push for confinement and hospitalization and the development of modern psychiatric treatments, just to name a couple), this thesis will now move from the brief historical summary of depression to a description of depression, as it is psychologically understood today. Basic knowledge of this common mental health condition will allow for a more thorough exploration of the songs that will be analyzed in Chapter 2 (Rhetorical Analysis of Selected Songs).

1.2 Diagnosing Depression

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), "Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these)" and are often "associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities." As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, nearly one in five U.S. adults will

experience some form of mental illness in a given year, ranging in severity from ones that have a limited impact on daily life (such as mild phobias) to ones that require hospitalization (APA). Seventy-five percent of all mental illnesses develop by the age of 24 (APA) and although mental illness can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, social status, race, etc., social and cultural factors have proven to play a role in the potential causes of mental health conditions. This will be discussed further in section 1.3 (Society and Depression).

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)'s most recent statistics on mental health in the United States assert that about 17.7 million adults aged 18 or older have experienced at least one major depressive episode in 2018 ("Mental Health by the Numbers"). Although some people may only experience one depressive episode during their lives, for many, depression (also known as major depressive disorder or clinical depression) is reoccurring and can last from a few months to several years (Truschel). According to an article on *PsyCom*, the third largest website in the U.S. focusing solely on mental health and created in 1996 by psychiatrist Ivan Goldberg, in order for individuals to be diagnosed with depression they must be experiencing five or more of the following symptoms listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the most recent version being DSM-5) for at least two consecutive weeks, and "at least one of the symptoms should be either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure":

1. Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day.
2. Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day.
3. Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain, or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day.
4. A slowing down of thought and a reduction of physical movement (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down).
5. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
6. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt nearly every day.
7. Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day.
8. Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide. (qtd. in Truschel)

Depression has many causes and although a specific event or physical illness can trigger it, it can also occur seemingly out of nowhere. NAMI reports that factors such as genetics, trauma, fluctuating hormones and physiological changes in the brain, stressful life circumstances, and substance misuse can all contribute to the development of depression ("Depression"). Whereas this mental health condition is "twice as likely to affect women than men" (Gregory), "men are more likely to die by suicide" (Hurley). The way that symptoms of depression present themselves differently in women and men can be linked to the roles these genders occupy in

society and will be touched on in section 1.4 (Gender, Sexuality, and Depression). The following section, however, will discuss the cultural perception of depression within Western society.

1.3 Society and Depression

In 1961, French philosopher Michel Foucault published what would become one of the leading works on madness[3]. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* is the 1964 abridged edition of his 1961 book. In it, he discusses the metaphor of the ship of fools, or *Stultifera Navis*. The literary concept of a ship filled with society's fools embarking on a journey to an unknown destination was a response to the rising population of madmen during the Middle Ages. The ship of fools and its segregation of the mentally ill can arguably be considered a precursor to the Great Confinement that lasted up until the last decades of the twentieth century, and saw the mentally ill confined in prison-like madhouses until their humanity was finally taken into account towards the end of the 1700s (Scull 190, 202). Even in contemporary times, people with mental disorders are often left to fend for themselves, as evidenced by the growing number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the United States, one quarter to one third of which have a serious mental illness (Harvard Health Publishing). However, Foucault recognized that the mentally ill occupied a liminal position, that is a position that is "[o]ccupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold" (OUP). He notes, "Confined on the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is delivered to the river with its thousand arms, the sea with its thousand roads, to that great uncertainty external to everything. He is a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest [*sic*] of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads" (11). Those living with mental illness are both free and confined, both within and outside of society.

The idea that those living with mental health conditions possess a unique ability to view society from an outside perspective and, therefore, see it for what it "truly" is, has remained a fixture of popular counterculture movements. An example of this kind of appreciation of madness can be seen throughout the creative outputs of those classified as the Beat Generation in the United States during the late 1950s and 1960s. With the emergence of the Cold War, American mass media focused on disseminating images of patriotism and the perfect American society, despite the growing feelings of anxiety, paranoia, and restlessness that hid behind the calm exterior of the happy nuclear family situated in the suburbs. The Beats were critical of

[3] Many of the ideas in sections 1.3 and 1.4 are taken from a previous seminar paper and have been expanded upon in this thesis. I would like to acknowledge Mag. Dr. Melanie Loidolt for the inspiration and initial sources.

post-war thinking that emphasized objectivity, rationality, and conformity over intuition, emotion, and subjectivity (Rogoveanu 248). They felt that social norms and upholding social conventions were repressive and produced an inhibited, neurotic individual who was incapable of connecting to a universal human essence. A connection with the universal promotes compassion, empathy, and a sense of community, which assists one to transcend the corrupt and restrictive Western system that emphasizes individualism and materialism (Reynolds 88). The Beats saw madness as the only authentic American spirit that would allow the individual to reconnect to the universal (Rogoveanu 250). This era saw the emergence of a counterculture and was also characterized by the increasing use of hallucinogenic drugs, which allowed users to simulate and self-administer madness (Reynolds 95). Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl", perhaps most fittingly captures this sentiment, opening with the following lines, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix / angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night." Drug use, particularly hallucinogenic drugs, induced the sense of transcendence and a connection with the universe, which mimicked what was thought to be the experience of the mentally ill. However, as will be discussed in greater detail further on in this section, it is important to note that mental illnesses, namely depression, can also evoke feelings of loneliness and disconnection.

As counterculture movements have seemingly decreased in visibility, it may seem as though the perception of the mentally ill as truth-tellers is outdated. However, a contemporary example can be found in American rapper, singer, producer, and entrepreneur, Kanye West. Whether bringing up white privilege when declaring that "George Bush doesn't care about Black people" during a televised Hurricane Katrina benefit in 2005, or when declaring Beyoncé as the more deserving recipient of the MTV Music Video Award for Best Female Video in 2009, infamously interrupting Taylor Swift's acceptance speech (Complex), Kanye West has developed a reputation for controversial behaviour[4]. The 2018 release of West's album, *ye*, revealed that he had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and saw him proclaim at the end of his song, "Yikes," "That's my bipolar shit, n***a what? / That's my superpower, n***a ain't no disability / I'm a superhero! I'm a superhero!" (qtd. in Complex)[5].

[4] It is necessary to acknowledge that West has made incredibly problematic statements as well, which this thesis does not condone or support. However, the instances described in this paragraph illustrate the truth-teller argument effectively.

[5] Although West's diagnosis is that of bipolar disorder, which is characterized by alternating periods of mania and depression, his exaltation of his mental illness encourages those living with a mental disorder to embrace their

The agency that those with a mental health condition have, being in a position outside of the normative constraints of society regarding thought and behaviour, aligns with feminist theorist Sandra Harding's "standpoint theory." This academic concept argues that those who are situated at the top of social hierarchies "lose sight of real human relations and the true nature of social reality and thus miss critical questions about the social and natural world" (Borland). It can be argued that the existence of "real human relations" and the "true nature" of anything are objectively non-existent since they are socially constructed. However, the ability to view a situation from an outside perspective can offer fresh insight. Originally highlighting the insight that women can provide, standpoint theory was expanded upon in 1990 by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, who emphasized the perspective of African American women experiencing life under a "matrix of oppression—an interlocking system of race, gender, and class oppression and privilege" (Borland). The theory has since been extended to "embrace the diverse standpoints of many marginalized groups [including] categories of race and ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, nationality, and citizenship status" (Borland). Those living with a mental health condition, across the spectrum of severity, can also be added to the list.

The marginalization of the mentally ill has been greatly assisted by the dawn of psychiatry and institutionalization. However, during the 1960s, philosophers such as Foucault began thinking critically about this medical specialization. For Foucault, psychiatric institutions were "largely tools of social control, an argument that was effectively applied to mental illness more generally" (Smith). The shift of perspective regarding the purpose of psychiatry during this time moved from one based on the struggles of the individual and their personal pathology, as was emphasized by Freudian psychoanalysis, to a discussion of context and an individual's relationship to their environment and society. The first half of the twentieth century provided increasing evidence that environmental factors could be blamed for the triggering of mental illnesses. According to Michael E. Staub's, *Madness Is Civilization: When the Diagnosis Was Social, 1948-1980*, social participation or an individual's lack thereof was an important precursor to suicide (15–16). Scottish psychiatrist and author of *The Divided Self*, Ronald David Laing, recognized that those who society at large considers mentally ill suffered from feelings of extreme loneliness and that "insanity was a result of being misunderstood or neglected" (qtd. in Staub 54–55). Laing theorized that mental illnesses were not the result of

condition and to decrease the feelings of shame and guilt that result from the stigmatization of mental illnesses, including depression.

an inherited defect or stunted development but a disconnect from society and a tool that an individual uses to survive (qtd. in Little 49). Although a chemical imbalance in the brain can be a factor in causing clinical depression, this thesis will focus predominantly on the external factors that play a role in the onset of the mental health condition since it argues that the inability of the individual to live up to society's expectations, particularly in terms of fixed gender roles, is a significant source of mental distress. Additionally, it is the external pressures that this thesis argues are being subverted by the popular songs being analyzed, ultimately assisting in the de-stigmatization of mental illnesses, namely depression.

According to author Johann Hari, in his 2018 book *Lost Connections: Why You're Depressed and How to Find Hope*[6], "We are told in our culture that depression is the ultimate form of irrationality: that's how it feels from the inside, and that's how it looks to the outside" (63). However, sociologist George Brown and psychologist Tirril Harris expanded upon Laing's perspective writing, "clinical depression is an understandable response to adversity" (qtd. in Hari 63). The idea that one's mental health can be affected by their environment is not a new revelation. The compound noun of "psychosocial," defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "of or relating to the interrelation of social factors and individual thought and behaviour," first emerged in the 1890s. Reader in History Rhodri Hayward, in his article "The Invention of the Psychosocial: An Introduction," notes that the period between the First and Second World Wars saw the psychosocial domain flourish. In the United States, psychoanalysts such as Trigant Burrow, Karen Horney and psychiatrist Frankwood Williams "used psychodynamic theories to sustain a radical critique of contemporary forms of social organization" and "sought to demonstrate the psychopathological consequences of modern capitalism while demonstrating the foundational role of social life in the constitution of the psyche" (Hayward 5). By combining the psychological and social, the potential for healing that therapy provided was extended and "where Freud had insisted that the neurotic individual should be cured through the interrogation and recovery of their personal history, social psychologists and anthropologists insisted that individual personality could be remade through the creation of new forms of social organisation" (Hayward 6).

The way that contemporary Western society is organized, largely built around capitalist ideology, has left individuals disconnected from a variety of factors that Johann Hari, and many others, argue would allow for a greater quality of life and a healthier mind. Hari's book

[6] The 2018 publication of this book is titled *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression – and the Unexpected Solutions*, while the 2019 paperback edition, which is referenced in this thesis, is subtitled *Why You're Depressed and How to Find Hope*.

identifies that the lack of meaningful work, an absent sense of community, a life spent pursuing superficial values, a disconnection from the natural world and an insecure future, are just some of the features of our external environment that can lead to struggling with one's mental health. Max Kirsch, Professor of Anthropology and UNESCO Chair in Human and Cultural Rights, explains that "capitalism has produced the ideal of the individual as separate and self-sustaining, a position that enhances the role of the self in determining consciousness and action" (263). This emphasis on the individual, which is a cornerstone of capitalism, even more so in its neoliberal version, creates an environment for loneliness and disconnection to flourish, as well as productivity and materialism to take priority. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, American cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg argues that "youth (i.e. American youth) are being squeezed between policies which jeopardise their economic and social future and policies that demand they take more and more responsibility earlier" (qtd. in During 135). Hari makes a similar point noting,

> There was a window when people on middle-class and working-class incomes had some sense of security and could plan for the future. The window has been closing, as a direct result of political decisions to free businesses from regulation and to make it very hard for workers to organize to protect their rights, and what we are losing is a predictable sense of the future (172).

By having "a stable picture of yourself in the future," one gains a greater perspective when reflecting on one's current mental state (Hari 174). The future, however, can never be stable or certain. According to philosopher and writer Alan Watts,

> Since what we know of the future is made up of purely abstract and logical elements — inferences, guesses, deductions — it cannot be eaten, felt, smelled, seen, heard, or otherwise enjoyed. To pursue it is to pursue a constantly retreating phantom, and the faster you chase it, the faster it runs ahead. This is why all the affairs of civilization are rushed, why hardly anyone enjoys what he has, and is forever seeking more and more. (qtd. in Popova)

It is perhaps less so the guarantee of a successful or gratifying future that mitigates feelings of insecurity or hopelessness, but the possibility that circumstances can get better eventually. For individuals living with depression, embracing and learning to navigate change can be truly lifesaving.

Another factor that can both cause and result from a mental health condition, such as depression, is loneliness and lacking a sense of connection and belonging. According to Hari's research, "Feeling lonely, it turned out, caused your cortisol levels to absolutely soar—as much as some of the most disturbing things that can ever happen to you […] Being deeply lonely seemed to cause as much stress as being punched by a stranger" (90). Although the power of community when coping with mental distress will be discussed further in Chapter 3 (Audience

Response), loneliness in the United States is on the rise. A national survey led by health insurer Cigna found that in 2019, three in five Americans feel lonely, increasing by 13 percent from the previous year, "with more and more people reporting feeling like they are left out, poorly understood and lacking companionship" (Renken). Brief biographies[7] of the musical artists whose work was chosen to be analyzed in this thesis will be provided in Chapter 2, but it can be surmised that loneliness has presented itself in the lives of Hayley Williams (singer and lyricist of Paramore) and the members of Architects (specifically drummer and songwriter Dan Searle), at least once following traumatic events of divorce and death, respectively.

Additionally, the lives of touring musicians, constantly on the road and in the spotlight, create critical conditions that can lead to struggling with one's mental health and longer lasting mental illnesses. In an article published on *Rolling Stone* magazine's website, reporter Nicole Frehshee explains,

> Aside from financial instability, all kinds of stressors accompany this literal gig economy: loneliness; being surrounded by drugs and alcohol; strain on relationships; poor sleeping and eating habits; lack of access to quality health insurance and care, and so on. "Creatives in the industry today suffer more because their routines are so destabilized," says Dr. Chayim Newman, a Toronto-based clinical psychologist whose private practice focuses on performers and touring artists. "The intense, long hours on the road or in the studio create a challenge in maintaining health routines and healthy relationship routines." Or, as Osborne puts it, "it's the perfect collision" for a breakdown.

With stressors such as these, it is perhaps unsurprising that a 2019 study from Swedish digital distribution platform, Record Union, reported that 73 percent of independent musicians live with a mental health condition, the most prevalent of which are depression and anxiety (qtd. in Schatz). Although the lifestyle and environment of musicians is an exceptional one, many of the aforementioned external factors that impact mental health can be applied to a large cross-section of the population in varying degrees. However, different aspects of how individuals identify can also play a significant role. The subsequent section will explore the relationship between gender, sexuality, and depression.

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[7] Cultural studies criticism has moved away from the idea that a text is an extension of its author, and therefore has only one meaning, that is, the one intended by the author. It is now understood that a text can have many meanings and one will never know the author's true intention, since their mind is not available to us (Montefiore qtd. in Walker 563). However, as Associate Professor of Communication Theodore Matula explains, context, including fragments of the author's life, adds to the meanings that can be found when interpreting music:

> Music, no less than discourse, constitutes a kind of unending conversation and listeners enter with varying degrees of awareness of the conversation they are entering. Further, listeners approach music from positions that are framed by their existence in social and cultural settings; they bring a host of musical and non-musical experiences and values into the listening experience […] (Cohen, 1997; Frith, 1996; Lewis, 1992, 1994). The production of meaning, value, and persuasion occurs at the intersection of sound and context, which plays a multifaceted role in shaping the rhetorical impact of music (218).

1.4 Gender, Sexuality, and Depression

As noted in section 1.2, women are more likely to suffer from depression, while men are more likely to die by suicide, often stemming from untreated depression. Although this section will focus predominantly on the cisgender man-woman binary, it only does so due to its limited scope. Further research on the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals with depression is essential in expanding the discourse to better represent contemporary society. Binary constructions, such as culture-nature, mind-body, reason-emotion, and man-woman, are inherently problematic as they "represent the first term in each of these binaries as superior to or more 'human' than the second," which is misrepresentative of human reality as these constructions fail to acknowledge that the meanings of the first term result from its opposition to the second (Branaman 90–91). In addition, American philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler has been influential in the fields of feminist and queer theory with her argument that

> gender is not an essential, biologically determined quality […] but is repeatedly *performed*, based on, and reinforced by, societal norms. This repeated performance of gender is also *performative*, that is, it creates the idea of gender itself, as well as the illusion of two natural, essential sexes. In other words, rather than *being* women or men, individuals *act* as women and men, thereby creating the categories of women and men. (qtd. in Morgenroth and Ryan 1)

Gender is a social construction and according to Butler, "bodies do not exist outside of cultural interpretation," which produces "over-simplified, binary views of [biological] sex" that only seem natural because of the repeated performance of two opposing genders (qtd. in Morgenroth and Ryan 3). It is this performance that "creates the illusion of binary sex" and Butler goes on to argue that "[b]ecause there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (qtd. in Morgenroth and Ryan 3). The gender binary is upheld and reinforced by the reactions of others when confronted with those who do not adhere to "traditional gender norms." According to Butler,

> This punishment includes the oppression of women and the stigmatization and marginalization of those who violate the gender binary, either by disrupting the presumed link between sex and gender (e.g., transgender individuals) or between sex and sexuality (e.g., lesbian and gay individuals) or by challenging the binary system in itself (e.g., intersex, bisexual, or genderqueer individuals). (qtd. in Morgenroth and Ryan 3)

This oppression also affects cis women and men who simply do not abide by the archaic gender roles established within patriarchy, for example women that are assertive, loud, and take up

space and men that are sensitive and emotional. Butler notes that these negative reactions to gender that is "incorrectly" performed "serve as tools of a system of power structures which is trying to reproduce and sustain itself—namely a patriarchal system of compulsory heterosexuality in which women serve as a means of reproduction to men, as their mothers and wives" (qtd. in Morgenroth and Ryan 3).

Although it may seem that such strict gender roles are no longer enforced, patriarchal values have been deeply engrained in the individuals of Western society over many generations and the process of separating oneself from the negative associations of performing gender "incorrectly" can be a long and arduous one, especially since gender is just one of the many identities that individuals use to understand who they are. Simon During, currently an honorary professor of culture and communication, states in his 2005 book *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction*, that because identities are based on partial traits (such as skin colour, socio-economic status, gender, etc.), individuals do not have just a single identity (146). Additionally, "not all identities carry equal weight in particular circumstances or have the same social consequences," which results in certain identities having a "low cultural value" and these individuals can and often do "internalise negative images of themselves," causing "psychic damage" during this identification process (During 146). Oppressed identities, in the case of the musical artists analyzed in Chapter 2, that is queer individuals, cis women and cis men that openly express their emotions and vulnerability, have a greater likelihood of suffering from depression and low self-worth, due to the aforementioned internalization of negative views of themselves.

This thesis will predominantly explore what the expectations are of cis women and men regarding the performances of gender that have been defined as "traditional" by patriarchal Western society. Professor of Communication Deanna D. Sellnow, in her book *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture: Considering Mediated Texts*, articulates some of these expectations and the negative consequences of not adhering to them:

> From early childhood, girls are taught to be caring, supportive, and cooperative, whereas boys are taught to be independent, assertive, and competitive. Girls are told, for example, to *look like a lady* and are reprimanded when they don't act *ladylike*. Similarly, boys are told they *don't cry* and *to take it like a man*. Women who are assertive, independent, or competitive are often labeled negatively as a *bitch*, a *lesbian*, or even a *femme-Nazi*. Men who are caring and supportive are often labeled negatively as a *wimp* or *gay*. (The notion that being homosexual is bad is quite frankly another example of masculine hegemony[8].) At any rate, both boys and girls learn that boys are

[8] Sellnow, along with feminist and Marxist critics, uses hegemony "as the term to describe the ideology that simultaneously empowers the elite and disempowers all others" (90). Masculine hegemony, coined in 1987 by Raewyn (R.W.) Connell, is more specific "in that it describes *gender/power inequalities* in ways that account for

> supposed to be subjects in their worlds, whereas girls are *supposed to be objects* who *should* look pretty and act only as supporters of male agents and male agendas. (93-94)

Human beings, however, cannot be categorized into neat, binary boxes. Human beings, regardless of gender, are capable of both "feminine" and "masculine" behaviours and by limiting an individual's experience to one that strictly adheres to what society expects of their gender is to inhibit them from living wholly.

Historically, it is these instances where gender roles have been subverted or rebelled against, that have often led to diagnoses of mental illnesses as a means of social control. If individuals were too difficult, too antisocial or too much of a bother, psychiatrists could recommend to parents or spouses that the asylum is the best option for the problematic person in their lives (Staub 67). A 1957 article in *American Mercury*, a conservative journal, summarizes this sentiment all too well:

> Actually, the goal of some of the most vocal mental healthers is a nation which is made to their ideological image. This social-minded fringe of the mental health army equate mental illness with refusal of the individual to accept the social pattern which they, in their omniscience, seek to impose. To such propagandists, the accusation of mental ill health is a killing weapon with which to destroy a troublesome non-conformist. (qtd. in Staub 95)

Although individuals of all genders have experienced moments where they have been quickly and casually silenced and dismissed by being labelled "crazy," "mad," "nuts," or any variation thereof, it is perhaps women who have most endured this type of censorship throughout the centuries. The silencing of others with the intent of making them doubt their own reality is known as gaslighting. Cynthia Stark, in her article "Gaslighting, Misogyny, and Psychological Oppression," explains that "[g]aslighting occurs when a person (the 'gaslighter') manipulates another (the 'target') in order to make her suppress or doubt her justifiable judgments about facts or values" (224). This is usually accomplished by sidestepping evidence and claiming that "the target's judgment lacks credibility because it is caused by a defect in her" (Stark 224). Whether an individual suffers from a mental health condition or not, it does not invalidate their experience of reality. However, in a patriarchal society that functions most effectively when gender roles are observed and conformed to, women who are unable to adjust to these

multiple masculinities and how hegemonic structures oppress all forms other than heterosexual masculinity" (qtd. in Sellnow 90). Hegemonic masculinity is further clarified by Connell and James W. Messerschmidt when they state that it emphasizes the "most honored way of being a man" at a specific point in history and within a certain culture. It is "not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it [is] certainly normative" (832).

expectations often find themselves publicly gaslit or internally grappling with a crisis of identity, often resulting in depression.

Phyllis Chesler, in her 1972 book *Women and Madness*, argues "that for a woman to be healthy she must 'adjust' to and accept the behavioural norms for her sex" (qtd. in Höhn 75–76). She continues to comment on the specific double bind that women face explaining, "Women are seen as 'sick' when they act out the female role (are depressed, incompetent, frigid, and anxious) and when they reject the female role (are hostile, successful, sexually active, and especially with other women)" (qtd. in Staub 143). The Second World War saw women entering the workforce in large numbers and experiencing what life outside of the private sphere was like. Once the war was over and veterans returned to America, women were encouraged to return to their "rightful" place in the domestic sphere, as mother, wife, and home keeper (Höhn 31). However, with many women having had the experience of a fuller life and a sense of purpose outside of the home, this return to the Victorian definition of womanhood left them with a sensation of despair that they were unable to define. In 1963, Betty Friedan brought this "problem that has no name" to light in her formative book *The Feminine Mystique*. She wrote that American culture "does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role" (qtd. in Staub 154).

Contemporary Western cis women may be living fuller lives in contrast to their ancestors prior to the women's liberation movement emerging in the late 1960s, however, Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian women (including those individuals who are gender non-conforming and who belong to the LGBTQ+ community) are still far from being offered the same opportunities to experience a life comparable to that of a middle-class, white, heterosexual cis man. Aside from holding a position of subordination across a variety of intersections within patriarchal society, another factor that can lead to depression is childhood abuse and trauma. Research collected by Carolyn Quadrio in her book chapter titled "Psychiatry and the Depressed Woman" notes that "[n]ot only does the psychological impact of childhood abuse continue into adulthood, women survivors of childhood abuse are at greater risk for revictimisation in terms of physical and sexual trauma in adulthood" (153). Additionally, female physiology has long been pathologized, particularly in relation to mental illnesses and depression. Quadrio adds that

> [r]esearch continues, however, with every aspect of the menstrual cycle examined, as if somehow the mystery of womankind will be discovered there […] yet there is nothing like the same interest in cyclical changes in the male psyche as with the female. It seems

> that women have a long way to go before shaking off the association between lunar and lunacy. (155)

The influence of hormones on the presence of depression cannot be completely disregarded as there are varieties of depression that are unique to cis women and individuals that menstruate and/or can bear children (Gregory). Aside from the aforementioned, the way that women and men are socialized to cope with distress is perhaps one of the largest differentiating factors between genders in regard to dealing with depression.

Society teaches women from a young age to "internalize distress," which is often "magnified by their willingness to seek medical or psychiatric intervention," resulting in depression being reported more often in women than men. Women are also more likely to "diagnose themselves" and consider professional treatment "an appropriate way to deal with their problems" (Quadrio 156). In contrast, men tend to "externalize distress" and are less likely to seek help. This process of externalizing negative emotions results in men being "more likely to manifest risk taking and antisocial behaviours, which may lead them to the prison or the mortuary rather than the clinic. They are less likely to take medication and more likely to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol and so may obscure their issues with depression or anxiety" (Page and Andrews qtd. in Quadrio 156–157). According to Dr. Ivan Goldberg's *PsyCom*, a few additional examples of the contrasting ways in which men and women deal with depression are: women often feel anxious and scared, while men tend to feel guarded; women often blame themselves for their depression, while men blame others; women tend to feel sad, worthless, and apathetic, whereas men usually feel irritable, angry, and more likely to instigate conflicts (Gregory).

Licensed clinical social worker Katie Hurley adds that men are more likely to have problems sleeping, lose interest in work, family and/or hobbies, and feel irritable and angry. Mental Health America, a community-based non-profit organization, reports that six million men suffer from depression (qtd. in Montero), and according to the fifth volume of the United States' *Behavioral Health Barometer*, depressive symptoms in boys aged 12–17 years old have increased from 5.0 percent in 2004 to 6.8 percent in 2017 (SAMHSA 14). Individuals learn what it means to be a man in Western culture from a young age and this "ideal" version of masculinity is largely defined by "toughness, stoicism, heterosexism, self-sufficient attitudes and lack of emotional sensitivity and of connectedness" (Wall and Kristjanson qtd. in APA Public Interest Directorate). Clinical psychologist Ellen Hendriksen explains in an article published on the *Scientific American* website that

> this scramble for dominance and denial of emotion comes at great cost [sic]. It blunts men's awareness of other people's needs and emotions, drives domestic and sexual violence, makes aggression look like a reasonable way to solve conflict, forbids seeking health care (and even thinking about seeking mental health care), and pours fuel on the fire of drug and alcohol abuse.

This Western version of "ideal" masculinity, which encourages the suppression of emotions and the use of violence and aggression to assert power, was first deemed "toxic masculinity" by Professor of Psychology Shepherd Bliss during the mythopoetic men's movement[9] of the 1980s and 1990s (Salter). As previously mentioned, the idea of a singular masculinity has largely been disputed by sociologist Raewyn Connell and the current view of masculinity is that "the standards by which a 'real man' is defined can vary dramatically across time and place" as multiple masculinities exist and are influenced by various social factors such as class, race, sexuality, and culture (Salter). The distinction must be made that it is not masculinity itself that is inherently toxic. Hendriksen notes, "There is nothing toxic about working hard, providing for one's family, winning at sports, or being loyal to friends. Most importantly, there's nothing toxic about wanting to be respected. All humans want to feel respected—we all want to know we are valued, recognized, and affirmed." However, these ideals "become problematic when they set unattainable standards" and it is when masculine-identifying individuals feel as though they are unable to meet these standards that insecurity, anxiety, and "inner conflicts over social expectations and male entitlement" are triggered (Connell qtd. in Salter). Psychiatrist Anthony Clare, in his book *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis*, highlights the idea that in the twenty-first century the purpose and value of men "is a matter of public debate" leading to a masculinity crisis (qtd. in Gauntlett 6–7). He states that "[m]en renowned for their ability and inclination to be stoned, drunk or sexually daring, appear terrified by the prospect of revealing that they can be—and often are—depressed, dependent, in need of help" (qtd. in Gauntlett 6–7). Although cis men hold a more privileged position in contemporary Western society, they also face the constraints of traditional gender roles and social expectations, which prohibit them from living full and authentic lives with ease.

Aside from gender identity, sexual orientation can also affect the likelihood that some individuals may develop depression. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports that in 2015 "LGB [lesbian, gay, and bisexual] adults are more than twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a mental health condition," while "[t]ransgender

[9] According to Salter's article in *The Atlantic*, this particular men's movement was characterized by "male-only workshops, wilderness retreats, and drumming circles" to promote "a masculine spirituality to rescue what it referred to as the 'deep masculine'— a protective, 'warrior' masculinity."

individuals are nearly four times as likely as cisgender […] individuals to experience a mental health condition" ("LGBTQI"). Although homosexuality is no longer classified as a mental disorder, having been removed from the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual in 1973[10], individuals who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community continue to face many factors that significantly increase their risk for experiencing depression. These factors include: facing rejection from family, friends, their workplace, or faith community upon disclosing their sexual orientation; trauma rooted in discrimination including verbal, mental, physical, and sexual abuse; inadequate mental health care; poverty and unemployment, with LGBTQ+ youth and young adults having "a 120% higher risk of experiencing homelessness" and Black trans individuals being especially affected; and a lack of institutional support and non-discrimination protection ("LGBTQI"; "Mental Health Disparities: LGBTQ" 2). Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to misuse substances as a coping mechanism. NAMI reports that

> LGB adults are nearly twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a substance use disorder. Transgender individuals are almost four times as likely as cisgender individuals to experience a substance use disorder. Illicit drug use is significantly higher in high school-aged youth who identify as LGB or are unsure of their identity, compared to their heterosexual peers. ("LGBTQI")

The discrimination that the LGBTQ+ community has had to endure, although unique in some ways, has also been experienced by many minority groups, leading to the concept of *minority stress*. The main assumptions of this concept are that

> minority stress is (1) unique—that is, minority stress is additive to general stressors […] and therefore that stigmatized people require an adaptation effort above that required of similar others who are not stigmatized; (2) chronic—that is, minority stress is related to relatively stable underlying social and cultural structures; and (3) socially based—that is, it stems from social processes, institutions, and structures beyond the individual (Meyer 243–244).

Being exposed to external stressors stemming from Western society's attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community over a length of time, such as prejudice and discrimination, can trigger internal stressors, such as feelings of internalized homo-, bi-, and/or transphobia (Meyer 244). As previously discussed, these conflicting feelings around their identities can manifest in mental health conditions such as depression.

Although there are many factors that influence an individual's likelihood of struggling with a depressive disorder, this section has identified that the societal pressure to conform to

[10] Homosexuality may have been removed from the *DSM* in 1973, but "sexual orientation disturbance" still existed as a mental condition. It was not until 1987 that homosexuality was completely removed from the *DSM*. It is also worth noting that the World Health Organization only removed homosexuality from its classification system in 1992, but an arguably similar condition titled "ego-dystonic sexual orientation" still exists (Burton).

and perform “traditional” gender roles “correctly,” as well as heteronormative pressure[11] regarding sexuality can have a great impact on mental health. The following chapter will apply this cultural context to the analysis of contemporary songs that deal with the topic of depression. The artists chosen for analysis represent each of the aforementioned demographics, namely: a white, queer cis woman from a religious upbringing; a white, middle-class heterosexual cis woman; and a group of white, heterosexual, cis men who are outspoken about their emotions and vulnerabilities within a genre of music that has historically epitomized “traditional,” if not toxic, masculinity.

[11] In regard to heteronormativity, Simon During notes that “in our society, concepts of the normal and the heterosexual are almost impossible to separate. […] That is, heteronormativity as a concept makes it clear that compulsory heterosexuality is socially invisible because it has embedded itself into the culture’s sense of the normal across so many registers and formations that alternatives look like pathologies rather than viable alternatives” (186).

2 Rhetorical Analysis of Selected Songs

2.1 The "Illusion of Life" Rhetorical Perspective

Music analysis can be approached from a variety of frameworks and fields of interest, having been undertaken by such academic domains as anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and of course, musicology. This thesis utilizes a cultural studies approach to gain a greater understanding of popular music (namely songs by Julien Baker, Paramore, and Architects) and the meanings they convey within the context of contemporary Western Anglophone culture. Throughout the last century, scholars such as Susanne Langer (1953, 1957), James Irvine and Walter Kirkpatrick (1972), Gerard LeCoat (1976), Alberto Gonzalez and John Makay (1983) and Deanna Sellnow (1996, 1999) have recognized the importance of considering both musical score and lyrics when analyzing songs. The following analyses operate within a similar framework, acknowledging that the poignancy of the rhetoric of a song's lyrics is influenced by the accompanying music.

It is worth clarifying, as musicologist and co-founder of the International Association of the Study of Popular Music Philip Tagg so eloquently notes, that "no analysis of musical discourse can be considered complete without consideration of social, psychological, visual, gestural, ritual, technical, historical, economic and linguistic aspects relevant to the genre, function, style, (re-)performance situation and listening attitude connected with the sound event being studied" (40). Due to the limited scope of this thesis, however, many of these aspects will have to remain undiscussed. By focusing on the lyrics, music, and the recorded vocal performance found on the album releases of the aforementioned artists, with consideration for the socio-cultural context in which the selected songs have been created and are being consumed, this chapter will discuss some of the rhetorical meanings that are being conveyed.

Deanna Sellnow and Timothy Sellnow's (2001) "illusion of life" rhetorical perspective is the methodological framework that will be used in the following analysis. Although it is grounded in Susanne Langer's (1953, 1957) theory of aesthetic symbolism, it extends into a methodology which assists in finding the persuasive purpose of some music (Chuang and Hart 186). As assistant professor of communication Lisa Chuang and professor of communication John Hart explain, "Langer argued that music helps one come to know through an aesthetic symbol system that is nondiscursive, and thereby music is a significant form that can express a virtual experience that language is unfit to express" (185). Although this sentiment describes music without lyrics, it aids in understanding how nondiscursive and discursive elements work together to convey meanings in popular songs. Langer explains that

"[d]iscursive symbol systems include linguistics and mathematics," where "separate words [or numbers, respectively] are assigned to separately conceived items in experience on a basis of simple one-to-one correlation" (qtd. in Sellnow and Sellnow 397). Deanna Sellnow adds that "[n]ondiscursive symbols are not units (like words) with fixed meanings. Rather, a nondiscursive symbol is emotional matter that is *felt* as a *quality*" (115) and it is precisely this lack of fixed meanings that allows for greater freedom of expression, making music a useful rhetorical tool. In addition, "when [meanings] are 'couched in music […] listeners do not ordinarily anticipate persuasion and, as a result, [may not be] aware of its complete implications'" (Irvine and Kirkpatrick qtd. in Sellnow 116), which differentiates certain songs from other popular culture texts that are more explicit in their persuasive purposes, such as advertisements.

The "illusion of life" perspective focuses on the relationship between lyrics and music and how that relationship affects the persuasive power of a song. Ultimately, the goal is to determine whether the cognitive content (lyrics) and emotional content (music) are congruent or incongruent (Sellnow 10–11). A useful example of the relationship between lyrics and music is that of a lullaby. The slow and calm music combined with lyrics about falling asleep can be considered congruent. However, if the lyrics of a lullaby are combined with the upbeat, fast-paced music of a school cheer, the relationship would be incongruent, and the rhetorical meanings of the song could become less clear to interpret (Sellnow 10–11). Incongruency alters the meanings of songs from what can be "understood from the lyrics or the music alone" (Sellnow 119).

As much as certain lyrics or music can evoke very real memories or feelings, ultimately music creates an "illusion of life" for listeners since how an event is represented is influenced by the artist's perspective (Sellnow 117). According to Sellnow and Sellnow, "[B]y combining the forces of music with the poetry of the lyrics, the artist is able to slow or even arrest a story for a period in order to intensify a particular image or mood. The artist can also move quickly through several stanzas, or even slow down and broaden the story through imagery and detail to allow several complex actions to intertwine" (398). It is the responsibility of the critic to analyze the interaction between *virtual experience* (lyrics) and *virtual time* (music) to acknowledge the meanings that a song is communicating to audiences. The following analyses will examine "what the lyrics are saying and how" and "what the music is communicating and how" to determine what meanings are being put forth based on the congruent or incongruent interaction between these two aspects (Sellnow 117).

According to Langer, music symbolizes or represents the intensity and release rhythms of daily human life. These intensity patterns can represent the feelings of shock or instability that human beings experience, while the release patterns represent calm or resolutions (qtd. in Sellnow 117). Music that has a fast tempo and/or a high volume represents intensity, while music that is slower and/or quieter represents release. Sellnow explains that "these patterns are communicated in music via rhythm, harmony, melody, phrasing, articulation, and instrumentation" (117). These aspects work to convey emotion, much like the nonverbal elements that accompany a person speaking, such as pitch, volume, rate, and emphasis (Sellnow 117). Karen Rasmussen, professor emeritus of communication, notes that music helps listeners to make sense of "stresses involved in living that defy linear, discursive expression" (qtd. in Sellnow 117).

Since the content of a song can capture and represent a particular moment, experience, or feeling, it has the ability of suspending time. It is the intensity and release patterns of music that create this sense of *virtual time* (Sellnow 118). Table 2.1 lists some of the musical elements that identify whether the predominant pattern of a song is that of intensity or release.

Table 2.1

Representative Intensity and Release Patterns in the Musical Elements

	Intensity	**Release**
Rhythmic structure	Fast/driving tempo Changing meter Syncopated/unpredictable	Slow tempo Consistent meter Predictable
Harmonic structure	Dissonant/harsh Avoids tonic (home) tone	Consonant/mellow Frequent tonic tone
Melodic structure	Ascending Disjunct (sporadic) Short-held tones	Descending Conjunct (smooth) Long-held tones
Phrasing	Staccato (separated) Accented (punched) Crescendos (gets louder) Loud Accelerando (gets faster)	Legato (connected) Legato (smooth) Decrescendos (softer) Soft Ritardando (gradually slower)
Instrumentation	Many Amplified	Few Acoustic

Source: Deanna D. Sellnow, *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture: Considering Mediated Texts* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2010), p. 118.

Although there may be elements that represent both intensity and release in the course of one song, it is the predominance of one over the other that characterizes music as representative of intensity or release (for example, a rock song with a fast tempo, dissonant harmony, and many instruments that are largely amplified would be representing intensity, while a ballad with a slower tempo, long-held notes, and acoustic instrumentation would be representative of release) (Sellnow 118).

The lyrics of a song represent a *virtual experience* and can be either comic or tragic in terms of focus. Intensity patterns tend to be represented by comic lyrics, which focus on "self-preservation and capitalizing on opportunities to beat the odds" (Sellnow 119). In contrast, release patterns tend to be represented by tragic lyrics, which focus on "self-consummation, dealing with great moral sacrifices [which is not necessarily a calming experience], and coping with fate" (Sellnow 119). Additionally, Sellnow notes that

> [c]omic or tragic lyrics can be embellished when situated within a poetic illusion (backward-looking into the virtual past, which cannot be altered) or dramatic illusion (forward-looking into the virtual future, which offers a sense of uncertain destiny). Because one cannot typically change the past, lyrics set in a poetic illusion tend to be resolved and representative of release, whereas lyrics set in a dramatic illusion tend to offer a sense of suspense-seeking resolution and tend to represent intensity. (119)

When comic lyrics are combined with dramatic illusion and intensity musical patterns and when tragic lyrics are combined with poetic illusion and release musical patterns, Sellnow states that is when the meanings of a song are most poignant (119). Although this may be the case in terms of clarity, the incongruency of the lyrics and music can impart additional meanings and impact, as will be discussed in the analyses that follow. To begin, the next section will describe and explore three songs featured on Julien Baker's 2017 full-length release, *Turn Out the Lights*, using the "illusion of life" rhetorical perspective that has been described above.

2.2 *Julien Baker,* Turn Out the Lights *(2017)*

Hailing from Memphis, Tennessee, queer singer-songwriter Julien Baker's sophomore album, *Turn Out the Lights*, was released on October 27, 2017 by independent record label Matador Records. According to *New York Times* popular music critic Jon Pareles, Baker's "lyrics chronicle sadness, doubts, self-destructive urges, frail physical and mental health and a constant reckoning with faith." With Tennessee situated in one of the most Christian parts of the United States, Baker was "raised in a deeply Christian household" (Syme), "soaking up evangelical doctrine and participating in church music" (Pareles). Having watched friends of hers cast out of the church community after not conforming to its strict standards, including being shipped

off to camps "designed to 'cleanse homosexuals' of their queerness, through Bible study," Baker herself experienced "clammy palm anxiety" at 17, when she came out as queer to her parents (Syme). However, "Baker found that her family was suddenly, [*sic*] radically accepting" and, as reported in an article in *The New Yorker*, "[i]t was in that moment that Baker confirmed her belief in God, though not in the judgmental being she had been raised to fear and hide herself from" (Syme). Although finding acceptance within her family, and also within her church community, Baker still "struggled to reconcile her queerness with her upbringing" and "needed an outlet 'to cope with all these feelings of loneliness, of feeling liminal and never grounded'" (Baker qtd. in Syme). Additionally, Baker mentions that she has struggled with perhaps being perceived as "too gay":

> [W]hen I'm in the south, I wonder if all these people know I'm gay, and I wonder if I'm at liberty to make a comment about it. Ultimately, I'm not going to change my behavior to accommodate that fear. I would rather be authentic and risk making people uncomfortable. That's a boldness engendered in me by the people I'm surrounded by. I have this rainbow guitar strap, and I used to switch guitar straps when I played at church, and now I know I have a home there—they don't care. But it was an internal fear […]. (qtd. in White).

This internal conflict between one's sexual orientation and the pervasive societal expectations of heteronormativity can create an immense amount of stress and pressure, which can in turn lead to depression, as discussed in section 1.4.

Baker's debut album, *Sprained Ankle*, tackled this internal conflict by covering the topics of substance abuse, depression, and crises of faith from a personal perspective (Tully Claymore). *Turn Out the Lights*, in contrast, takes a more comprehensive approach "drawing on the experiences of her friends and loved ones in its character-based vignettes" (Anthony). When discussing her debut album, Baker says, "I felt like that was sad and kind of self-involved. So a lot of these songs are about other people and how to deal with grief and healing and coping in the context of knowing you're not the only person in your sphere" (qtd. in Anthony).

Beyond the artist's biography or life experience, however, there is a greater context from which the motivations and meanings of songs can be considered. In an interview with Quinn Moreland, assistant editor of American online music publication *Pitchfork*, Baker notes that in relation to *Turn Out the Lights*,

> [w]riting from life is how I feel most comfortable. Especially if we're talking about this record, the thing that insulates me from having to be so close to talking about the subject matter is understanding that the narrator of the record can be just that—a narrator. But the songs are autobiographical. These are real experiences in my own life.

Although the analysis of a cultural text, such as a song, acknowledges that the narrator can be an actor within the story, the fact that Baker admits her songs evolved out of her own experiences links together the psychosocial factors underlying an individual's depression (in Baker's case, reconciling her queerness with her religious upbringing and a heteronormative society, for example). This depression is then used as inspiration for her songs. These expressions of her experiences with mental distress will be discussed in greater detail in the following rhetorical analyses of three songs featured on *Turn Out the Lights*.

2.2.1 "Appointments"

The first single released from the album, "Appointments," opens with the sound of a finger-picked electric guitar building the foundation for the sparse instrumentation that will be layered overtop. A second guitar progression of simple chords sparingly punctuates Baker's stream-of-consciousness lyrics. The guitar is looped, repeating consistently throughout the song, and it is only after the end of the first verse, comprised of 14 phrases (which are considered by musicologists to be the complete musical thoughts where a natural pause occurs), that the piano is introduced. The loop can be interpreted as representing the ruminating and cyclical thoughts that depression feeds. The form of the song is not that of the typical contrasting verse-chorus, but instead is more similar to the musical structure of a church hymn, which is often illustrated by a verse-repeating or strophic form, also common in folk songs, ballads, and 12-bar blues (Kirby).

The formal comparison to a hymn evokes Baker's upbringing within the church community and early musical experiences performing in a church band (Sackllah). According to Baker, "Many of my songs just come together in quatrains because that's how a hymn goes […] All of my favourite hymns are admissions of faults and finding redemption even in those" (qtd. in Pareles). In addition, the lyrical structure is reminiscent of a diary entry, without a conventional rhyme scheme and traditional chorus. "Appointments" is not the only track to flout popular music conventions, with the remainder of the songs on *Turn Out the Lights* following a similar stream-of-consciousness structure, where the emphasis is placed on the story and emotion that is being expressed, as opposed to aiming for a catchy, radio-friendly hit.

The music aligns with that of a release pattern, as defined by the "illusion of life" perspective above. The rhythmic structure is characterized by a slow tempo and consistent meter, the harmonic structure by a frequent tonic tone that is mellow and consonant, and the melodic structure is predominantly smooth with long-held notes. Rachel Syme writes in her article about Baker in *The New Yorker*, "[t]hat [Baker's] voice is tonally bright and free of

flourish (she has no vibrato, no scale runs), but also forceful enough to trumpet the high notes without ever breaking, and the combined effect can sound like someone pleading for answers at the top of her lungs." It is exactly this pleading effect that helps Baker to express the intense feelings of frustration and exasperation that depression can evoke. When struggling with depression, individuals can feel extremely frustrated that their experiences feel so much more difficult than "normal" people and that their minds function in a way that clouds their perspective and makes life more challenging. The fact that this negative experience tends to be for a prolonged period of time or chronic makes one feel as though the depression will last forever and that, no matter how hard they try, nothing will change, which is often why suicide begins to feel like the only option for relief. The overwhelming feelings of sadness and hopelessness can leave individuals pleading for some sort of reprieve[12].

Lyrically, the first verse conveys the guilt that those suffering from depression feel when they are unable to live up to the expectations of others or function "normally." Baker sings, "I'm staying in tonight / I won't stop you from leaving / I know that I'm not what you wanted, am I? / Wanted someone who I used to be like," which exemplifies the resignation that can be felt within a relationship when one person is struggling with a mental health condition. When a relationship begins, or in the case of first impressions in general, those who are depressed often put in a large amount of effort to mask their negative inner feelings (Labeaune). As time progresses, it can become difficult to maintain the façade, leaving the partner seemingly longing for the "happier" times or the version of the person that they originally met, at least from the perspective of the depressed individual who operates from a place of low self-worth that makes them feel like a burden to others (Brenner). Baker continues, "You don't want to bring it up / And I already know how it looks / You don't have to remind me so much / How I disappoint you." Depression has the tendency to enhance negative self-talk and to cloud perceptions, and although in reality one's partner, or other loved ones, may not actually be feeling resentful or disappointed, depression often causes the sufferer to feel like they are a burden and to feel ashamed of themselves and their condition. In an episode of musical podcast *Song Exploder*, Baker states about this song that "the lyrical content is derived from actual

[12] Grant H. Brenner's article on the *Psychology Today* website, "10 Key Areas Not to Miss When Dealing with Depression," offers an extended list of emotions and experiences that depressed individuals contend with outside of the clinically recognized symptoms. This list helps to inform large parts of the analyses in this chapter. For a further understanding of what depression is like taken directly from the lived experiences of individuals, as well as mental health professionals, there is a wealth of corroborating information on social media platforms, namely Instagram. Accounts such as @theheavymentalpodcast, @realdepressionproject, @sadgirlsclub, and @thelovelandfoundation are excellent starting points for further research and discussion. Tim Lott's article in *The Guardian* titled "What does depression feel like? Trust me – you really don't want to know" is another useful source.

conversations that I had with loved ones about feeling the immense isolation that results from living inside your own head and fear that you'll always feel isolated and not being able to express that to another person" (3:57–4:16).

The last phrase group of the first verse is where the title of the song is drawn from. Baker sings, "Suggest that I talk to somebody again / That knows how to help me get better / And 'til then I should just try not to miss any more / Appointments," which expresses the perspective of the narrator's partner. Supporting someone with depression can at times be overwhelming. Without the proper training, it can be difficult to feel as though one can provide sufficient help, despite having the best intentions. Baker explains the nuanced sentiment behind this lyric stating,

> The line 'you should try not to miss anymore appointments' was something that was said to me […] Having someone say that and that being the only thing that can be offered in the way of comfort or encouragement, felt like empty and very fragile and I remember being disappointed in that phrase and thinking it's so detached and sterile and has nothing in the way of empathy attached to it. It was intended to be caring but I think also when you're in that isolated mindset it's difficult to not view things as a personal attack. And of course, now that I'm two years removed from that, I understand how nuanced and delicate those situations are and how no one really knows what to offer another human being, and that's the crux of the whole record. But for this song, it's still in a place where neither person is being understood." (*Song Exploder* 4:32–5:48)

Due to the effect depression has on an individual's perception, misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the actions and words of loved ones are common. It is, as Baker mentions, this tendency to feel as though everything is a personal attack or criticism, that upholds the stigma around mental illnesses and the desire to keep them hidden. The invisibility of the condition is what makes it as dangerous as it is.

The end of each phrase group in the first verse has Baker harmonizing with herself, as if reaffirming the importance of those lyrics for the narrator. As the second verse moves towards the bridge of the song, the piano quickens in pace with each key seemingly pressed more forcefully, increasing the emotional tension. Baker sings, "I think if I ruin this / That I know I can live with it / Nothing turns out like I pictured it," once again expressing the feeling of resignation that comes with depression. There is a sense that the negative feelings will last forever and that one should just become accustomed to being disappointed or feeling as though one ruins everything they attempt. However, by the end of the second verse, a shift becomes noticeable. Baker sings, "Maybe it's all gonna turn out all right / And I know that it's not, but I have to believe that it is." It is the first instance where a glimmer of optimism appears. The following bridge reiterates the contradictory statements. The guitar cuts out and only the piano

is left to add weight to the thought process being expressed, as if the swirling thoughts finally pause allowing clarity and hope to push through. Repeating, "I have to believe that it is / I have to believe that it is / (I have to believe it, I have to believe it) / I have to believe that it is / (Probably not, but I have to believe that it is)," multiple versions of Baker's vocals harmonize together to mimic the sense of ambivalent voices and self-talk that occurs in the mind of an individual with depression. Baker acknowledges that "[s]ongs like 'Appointments,' and 'Happy To Be Here,' and 'Claws In Your Back' are about inhabiting paradoxes of thought—feeling like there is no hope, but choosing to believe that there must be" (qtd. in Anthony).

The song's climax is the chorus, which is also the conclusion. This structure is repeated throughout most of the album's songs and can be seen as representing the downward spiral of negative self-talk that depressed individuals experience. In a desperate plea for acknowledgment and affirmation, Baker howls, "And when I tell you that it is / Oh, it's more for my benefit," as the narrator attempts to convince their partner, and predominantly themselves that despite everything, it will all be all right. Baker explained that her motivation for such a delivery is because "that's something that I'm pretending to be more confident about and so I want to convey it in a more dramatic way" (S*ong Exploder* 11:34–11:54). For those struggling with depression, it is often the case that they need to assure those around them that everything is fine, even if they do not necessarily believe it themselves, but in doing so, it helps to activate fledgling feelings of optimism and hope. The final phrases of "Appointments" are once again, "Maybe it's all gonna turn out all right / Oh, I know that it's not, but I have to believe that it is." These lyrics are emphasized by overlapping harmonies singing the different sentiments. According to Baker,

> You've got affirmation, 'yes it will be ok,' 'no it won't be ok' and then you've got uncertainty. All of those things being spoken simultaneously, they're all located at different places. The speaking voice changes its location in the mix to give you the sense that all of these thoughts are happening concurrently, fighting for attention and competing to be heard. (*Song Exploder* 10:30–11:15).

The harmony is composed of vocals of contrasting volumes and tones. A calm, soothing voice enhances the main vocal that seems to be nearly shouting, representative of the external façade of an individual with depression attempting to hold themselves together while internally struggling to feel seen and accepted. The song ends with the calm vocal overpowering and subduing the pleading one, providing a sense that order and respite can ultimately be attained, even if momentarily.

The lyrics of "Appointments" are sad, slow, and self-consumed giving the impression that they are tragic or backward-looking into the virtual past. However, upon closer inspection,

the lyrics are forward-looking as they cling to a sense of hope and an uncertain future. Therefore, the lyrics are ultimately representative of an intensity pattern. Although there are moments where tension builds within the music and the lyrics, overall the song is one of release, making the lyrics and music incongruent. In this particular instance, the incongruency can cause the meanings of the music to be unclear, since the elements representing release can overpower the intensity elements. The provisional hope that this song expresses may require repeated listening to fully grasp. However, the incongruency of the music and lyrics is an additional representation of overall feelings of resignation and pessimism, but where moments of hope ultimately pierce the darkness.

"Appointments" describes a scenario that is all too familiar for individuals who have struggled with depression, which provides a sense of comfort, empathy, and connection. Listeners are confronted with the reality that they are not alone in their suffering, that someone else has felt the same and has written a song about it. Baker explains that "Appointments" "is about the isolation of thinking that you're incapable of communicating the emotions in your head while you're also trying to exert the effort to be there for someone else, and to be what they want" (qtd. in Moreland). Depression makes balancing the perceived expectations of others and the inability to express one's self seem like a necessary but overwhelming task. But Baker acknowledges that it is helpful to change one's perspective on what defines "normal" and accept that the seemingly "ugly" parts of oneself can and should be embraced. She notes that "the existence of anxiety and depression does not negate my own capacity for joy, or my intelligence. […] when I can embrace those things, I can have power over them" (Baker qtd. in Moreland). "Appointments" reminds listeners that by accepting the complexity of the human experience, with its full spectrum of emotions, one regains their agency and can look towards a future that holds the possibility of joy.

2.2.2 "Hurt Less"

The instrumentation on "Hurt Less", the ninth track on *Turn Out the Lights*, consists almost solely of piano. The first verse of the song finds the narrator expressing their apathy about attempting to protect themselves with a seatbelt should a car accident occur. Baker sings, "I used to never wear a seatbelt / 'Cause I said I didn't care / What happened / And I didn't see the point / In trying to save myself / From an accident." Feelings such as these are a form of suicidal ideation. When a person desires death but does not have a specific plan to commit suicide it is considered passive suicidal ideation. This form of suicidal ideation sees individuals fantasize about "dying in [their] sleep or having a fatal accident" and they "may believe that the world

would be better off without [them]" (Angel). It is important to note that passive does not necessarily mean that it is harmless and "[t]his train of thought has the potential to make you more likely to put yourself in harm's way" (Angel).

Baker continues the suicidal ideation as she describes the car accident in greater detail singing, "And when I'm pitched through the windshield / I hope the last thing that I felt before the pavement / Was my body float / I hope my soul goes too." The accompanying piano music simplifies in structure and slows in tempo as the last two lines of this verse are sung. This creates an illusion of time standing still, capturing the moment that one's body would seemingly float, in contrast to the reality of how quickly an accident takes place. Baker references her religious background when she mentions the soul. As she sings, "I hope my soul goes too," the musical accompaniment cuts out and the vocal notes lift, delivering the lyrics with a buoyancy that evokes the sense of a soul ascending into heaven.

Following the first verse, a violin, played on the album by Camille Faulkner, weaves in and out for the remainder of the track. Musicologist Robert Walser, in his chapter of Allan Moore's book *Analyzing Popular Music,* asserts that "[s]trings are often used in popular music as a means of adding poignancy, grandeur or affective depth" (29). The violin functions to add an emotional intensity to the second verse. The strings express the tension between the narrator and what is potentially a romantic partner or close friend that begins the second verse. Baker sings, "I shouldn't have let you leave / I should have called you twice / But I didn't / 'Cause there's always something else," which indicates a disagreement or at least a sense of regret about not reacting appropriately. Depression is often linked to rumination, which is the act of repetitively thinking about a situation, thought, or problem. By dwelling on negative thoughts or past regrets, depression can intensify (Sansone and Sansone 30; Wehrenberg).

In addition to the violin, the sonic landscape is broadened from this point by the presence of backing vocals from an old bandmate of Baker's, Matthew Gilliam. Harmonizing with Baker, Gilliam punctuates nearly every second line, withdrawing during the first time the chorus is sung, and returning to add an extra emotional layer as Baker repeats the chorus once more. Baker expresses the feelings of guilt that an individual experiencing depression has when reaching out for help, their cognitive distortions convincing them they are a burden (Brenner), when she sings, "And I know it's a bad time / But there's no one left for me to call / And I was wondering if you would be my ride." Before the verse concludes, the tone of the lyrics shifts to one of motivation as Baker declares, "And damn it, we are gonna figure something out / If it takes me all night to make it hurt less." The narrator states the intention to find a way to cope

with the depression, for the sake of both the sufferer and the person who is supporting them, indicating that together they will find a "solution."

The chorus once again finds the accompanying music pared down to just the piano, highlighting Baker's voice soulfully delivering the lines, "Leave the car running / I'm not ready to go / It doesn't matter where / I just don't want to be alone / And as long as you're not tired yet / Of talking, it helps to make it hurt less." Depression is an isolating condition, both as a result of the societal stigma attached to mental illnesses and the cognitive distortions that arise in the mind, convincing the sufferer that they should withdraw from other people (Brenner). Acknowledging that one is struggling with depression and confiding in another person can help to make the pain more manageable and to "hurt less." Clinical psychologist Rita Labeaune explains,

> Choosing one close family member, friend, or confidant, and making it a practice to discuss feelings and concerns can help alleviate symptoms. It's important not to be concerned about being a burden. Sometimes we forget that those around us are happy to support us in the same way we would for them. Opening up and sharing feelings is a key element in coping with depressive thoughts.

As Baker repeats the chorus once again, Gilliam joins her and they sing the chorus as a duet, much like the team that is established when a depressed individual finds a confidant to face the mental health condition with. The harmonized chorus, with the reappearance of the violin, is the fullest sounding part of the song and recalls the feeling of being supported and feeling less alone in one's struggle.

An outro concludes the song, leaving Baker's voice accompanied only by a softly played piano, as she sings, "This year I've started wearing safety belts / When I'm driving / Because when I'm with you / I don't have to think about myself / And it hurts less." The narrator acknowledges that their perspective has shifted and their desire to die has subdued, largely due to the support they have received from their confidant. They identify that the connection has helped relieve some of their pain and has given them something positive to keep on living for.

The stripped back instrumentation, slow tempo, smooth and long-held notes, mellow harmonic structure, and soft phrasing indicate that "Hurt Less" represents a release pattern. Although the lyrics begin by reflecting on the past, predominantly the lyrics are forward-looking, that is they are situated within a dramatic illusion. Additionally, the lyrics focus on self-preservation and, therefore, according to the "illusion of life" perspective are considered comic. Once again there is an incongruency between the music and lyrics. Depression can feel as though it is all-consuming and never-ending, and despite the intensity of the emotions that depression brings forth, there is also a heaviness and slowness that comes along with the

condition. Having both intensity and release patterns existing within one song is another representation of the complexity of depression.

"Hurt Less" is explicit in its discussion of suicidal ideation, but the way that it ultimately reverses the sentiment encourages listeners who may have similar feelings to find a healthy way of coping with their pain. Specifically, the narrator of the song reaches out to someone for support and to share their experience with depression, which helps them realize that it is possible to lighten the burden of their condition. The song reminds listeners that feelings do not last forever, that there is no shame in asking for help, and that there are reasons to care about staying alive.

2.2.3 "Claws in Your Back"

The final track on the album, "Claws in Your Back," is perhaps the "saddest" sounding song on the record. Aside from the instrumental opening song, "Over," it is the only song on the album that is written predominantly in a minor key. In Western culture, the minor key has often been equated to feelings of sadness (Williamson). Music psychologist Vicky Williamson explains that this connection is largely the result of "cultural conditioning," and

> [w]hen we listen to tunes we rely heavily on our memory for the body of music we've heard all our life. Constantly touching base with our musical memory back catalogue helps to generate expectations of what might come next in a tune, which is an important source of enjoyment in musical listening. The downside of this over reliance on memory is that our musical reactions are frequently led by stereotypes.

Songs utilizing the minor key are often used to indicate mourning, such as Chopin's "Funeral March," and despair, such as Johnny Cash's "Hurt" (Williamson). By being exposed to many similar musical examples over the course of our lifetimes, Western listeners almost instinctually make the connection between negative emotions and music in the minor key (Schellenberg qtd. in Spiegel).

From the first piano key being played, the emotional intensity and sombreness of the song is evident. Once again, the piano is the primary instrument used to accompany Baker's vocals. The sparseness of the instrumentation, as well as the occasional use of what seems like a reverb effect, accentuate a sense of isolation, as if standing alone in a large, empty space (perhaps like a church). The listener is left feeling as though they are intruding on a private confession. In the first verse, Baker seems to describe someone who has attempted suicide but is in a treatment facility, when she sings, "Wearing a purple badge to prove what I did / Pump the vitals out of my wrist / 'Cause I'm conducting an experiment on how it feels to die / Or stay alive." The lyrics are sung softly and slowly, with Baker elongating the notes as she sings "how

it feels to die," and after a short pause to add tension, "Or stay alive." With the piano being stripped back significantly as these two lines are sung, the sentiment is left momentarily lingering, which creates a haunting effect.

The remainder of the lyrics are structured as one large section, advising the person suffering with depression that they should stay calm despite the demon they carry around. When discussing the inspiration for this song, Baker explains, "It's a composite of some stories of friends of mine that were in in-patient treatment for some very severe traumas. I remember one of my friends personifying their depression as this unnameable entity that implants itself in your consciousness, digs in with painful claws, and won't let you go" (qtd. in Moreland). Baker sings, "So try to stay calm, 'cause nobody knows / The violent partner you carry around / With claws in your back, ripping your clothes / And listing your failures out loud." Although depression is an "invisible" illness, the struggle to cope with all of its symptoms is not an easy one. These lyrics equate it to defending oneself against a constant physical attack, as well as the constant mental strain of self-criticism and low self-worth (Brenner).

At this point in the song, the violin appears and adds another layer of sonic texture, increasing in intricacy but remaining mellow as Baker slowly wails, "When it won't leave me alone / I'm better of learning / How to be." This is the thematic turning point of the song, where the narrator decides to embrace their condition and the piano is once again the sole instrument. Baker lifts the notes as she softly sings, "Living with demons I've / Mistaken for saints / If you keep it between us / I think they're the same / I think I can love / The sickness you made." Describing "Claws in Your Back," Baker says that it "is supposed to distill the idea that maybe our negative and positive qualities don't have to be so evil when we can hold them up to the light and see them for what they are, which is just another element of our person" (qtd. in Moreland). Individuals who have depression often lack self-compassion and are frustrated with their inability to function "normally," feeling as though they are somehow "broken." Self-compassion can be fostered through being patient and understanding with oneself and with self-talk being similar to how one would speak to a close friend. In their book chapter, "Self-Compassion: Embracing Suffering with Kindness," Kristin Neff and Oliver Davidson describe self-compassion as "offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience" (38). By acknowledging that depression is merely one part of an individual's experience and does not define their whole existence, it can help them gain a wider perspective and to lessen some of the pain. Additionally, when Baker sings "The sickness you made," she references the Christian belief that God is responsible for creating human beings and the adversity they endure. This

belief can help those suffering with depression to have faith that perhaps their condition is an important part of their journey, even though it does not always feel that way in the midst of a depressive episode.

The increasing tension throughout the entire song culminates in the last few lines when Baker finally howls, "'Cause I take it all back, I changed my mind / I wanted to stay / I wanted to stay." The word "stay" explodes from her mouth on both occasions with such force. It is as if the narrator has finally pierced through the thick veil of darkness that has long enveloped them and is exorcising their demons. Proclaiming the desire to stay alive is the ultimate release. Although Baker's debut album ends with a sense of resignation, on *Turn Out the Lights* she leaves listeners with a message of hope:

> I wanted to redress that feeling and say, "I changed my mind. There's so many things that can still be beautiful." That was the last sentiment that I wanted to leave on the record. When something's wrong, or you make a mistake building something, you don't just leave that project and totally abandon it with screws on the ground and your tools laying everywhere. You take it back apart and then you build it again. You don't just leave it. You stay. (Baker qtd. in Moreland)

Depression nurtures the feeling of hopelessness and it can be difficult to believe others when they list the reasons why life is worth holding onto. However, when an artist articulates the mental health condition so eloquently and accurately, it indicates an understanding and shared experience, which imbues the request to stay with more authority.

Baker's vocal delivery of the lyrics of "Claws in Your Back" has power and intensity, but the long-held notes, majority of consonant tones, consistent meter, and legato or connected phrasing indicate that the music is representative of a release pattern as defined by the "illusion of life" theory. Regarding the lyrical content, as with the other two examples in the analyses of Julien Baker's songs, it is predominantly focused on self-preservation and is forward-looking to an uncertain future, representing an intensity pattern. The result is an incongruency between the music and lyrics. Similar to "Hurt Less," this incongruency represents the co-existence of intensity and release within the condition of depression, and more generally the human experience. Although release is often associated with moments of calm, in the context of this song and depression in general, it can also be associated with lethargy, which is itself a form of release (i.e. from productivity). With the lyrics representing intensity and culminating in a statement that seemingly breaks free from the clutches of depression, the incongruency can be seen as another representation of the song's narrative.

"Claws in Your Back" foregrounds the idea that it is possible to embrace one's depression and understand it as one of the many facets that makes a person unique and valuable.

It encourages listeners to not give up despite the hardships that they have to face on a daily basis. Baker notes that she wants to use the platform that she has acquired as a musical artist "to do something positive." She adds, "It's important to me to provide a catalyst for improvement, not just a bulletin for suffering" (Baker qtd. in Moreland). Hence the undertone of hope that runs through *Turn Out the Lights*. Baker elaborates on this idea saying,

> Writing songs was part of the healing process itself. I mean for a while, I felt like I was in a fish tank, because I was just experiencing this sadness and constant anxiety that I wasn't dealing with but I was just living inside of and it felt like I could do nothing else but inhabit it. The music is supposed to be a vehicle for expelling those things from my mind or at least just admitting them. I don't purport to have everything figured out and that's why singing about hopefulness on this record is very tentative. It's like a provisional hope. No matter how small the pinhole of light is, it's entirely possible that within the next day or the next week or the next month, we could feel closer to something like joy. (*Song Exploder* 12:27-13:27)

By writing an album that articulates the experiences of depression so explicitly, Baker has created a safe space for listeners who may feel similarly to find comfort, to feel less alone, and to be presented with a glimmer of hope for a life beyond the mental health condition.

The following section will explore the more upbeat songs of Paramore from their 2017 album *After Laughter* and discuss the meanings that they convey within the framework of the "illusion of life" perspective.

2.3 Paramore, After Laughter *(2017)*

Forming in 2004 in Franklin, Tennessee, Paramore originated as a pop-punk band (Nelson). Having cemented themselves as mainstays of the emo music[13] scene that entered mainstream culture in the 2000s, Paramore has released five albums to date, with *After Laughter* being their most recent. Over the course of their career their sound has migrated further away from their early punk influences and has embraced the danceability of pop music, which is particularly highlighted on the 2017 release. The band has changed their lineup many times since they began, with singer and main lyricist Hayley Williams remaining constant. In the band's most recent iteration, she is joined by guitarist Taylor York and drummer Zac Farro. *After Laughter* was released on May 12, 2017 by their long-time label Fueled By Ramen.

According to Maura Johnston's review of the album for *Rolling Stone*, "The tension between sugar-spun pop hooks, the acrobatic soprano of lead singer Hayley Williams and an

[13] According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, emo is a "subgenre of punk rock music that arose in Washington, D.C., in the mid-1980s" and the focus of the music and lyrics was on "personal pain and suffering." Additionally, "[t]he lyrics in emo songs dealt primarily with tales of loss or failed romance, and they were often characterized by self-pity. The stories in emo music strongly resonated with teenage fans" ("Emo").

arm’s-length take on the world has placed Paramore at the head of music’s post-millennial class.” The album’s upbeat music mitigating lyrics that reference mental health struggles is a startingly accurate representation of the instability that Western culture, if not the world, is currently facing and will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections. Johnston’s review continues in describing Paramore as embracing “‘pop’ as a musical vibe, with a record that’s so sunshine-bright it gives off a glare at times, rooted in fleet basslines and beats made for open-road drives and solo bedroom dance parties. The hooks are big and the detailing is sublime” (Johnston).

However, *After Laughter*, is the record that almost never was. In an interview with Zane Lowe for Apple Music, Williams “revealed that Paramore was on the verge of collapse in 2016” (qtd. in Sherman). Although the band had encountered their share of “ongoing legal battles, subsequent lineup changes and fractured friendships,” 2016 was when Williams debated her own role in the band (Sherman). According to Williams in her conversation with Lowe, “I think that if it weren't for Taylor [York], the band would be over. I'm tired of losing friends; I'm tired of doubting myself. Maybe if I'm not doing it at all there won't be anything to doubt. My heart is tired” (qtd. in Sherman). Aside from the growing pains that come from spending most of your teen years and young adulthood in a touring band, in a male-dominated music scene, Williams’s tumultuous personal life provided a wealth of inspiration for Paramore’s lyrics, while simultaneously fuelling her struggle with her mental health (Sherman). One of the experiences at the root of her depression and anxiety had been her nearly decade-long relationship with a fellow musician. She has since admitted that their relationship had begun as an extra-marital affair when she was 18. “I felt shame for all of my twenties about it,” Williams explains in an interview with Brittany Spanos for *Rolling Stone*, stating that the shame “put a wedge” between her and the rest of the band. “We literally grew up together […] We went through everything together. Suddenly, I couldn’t talk to them” (Williams qtd. in Spanos). Shame is one of the more dangerous feelings that surround depression, since it often leads to feeling the need to withdraw from the world around you, and as discussed in Chapter 1, the link between loneliness and depression can create a negative feedback loop (Kämmerer).

Williams and her then partner got married in 2016, but finalized their divorce in 2017, shortly after the release of *After Laughter*. Having, at a young age, experienced the trauma of her own parents divorcing, Williams had grappled with the societal expectations of domesticity and family life being at the foreground of the female experience since the beginning of her relationship. “I think for a long time I wanted to create what my parents didn’t create for me,” she is quoted as saying in Caryn Ganz’s article for *The New York Times*. The whirlwind of

drama that defined the few years prior to the release of *After Laughter*, including a crumbling relationship and the departure of another band member followed by court proceedings regarding money and writing credit, took its toll on Williams's mental health:

> I woke up from that crash with one less bandmate... another fight about money and who wrote what songs. And I had a wedding ring on, despite breaking off the engagement only months before. A lot happened within a short time. But then I didn't eat, I didn't sleep, I didn't laugh... for a long time. I'm still hesitant to call it depression. Mostly out of fear people will put it in a headline, as if depression is unique and interesting and deserves a click. Psychology is interesting. Depression is torment. (Williams)

Williams's depression exemplifies the kind of pressure that women in Western society endure, particularly in terms of gender roles. As mentioned in the previous chapter, women tend to internalize their distress, which was something that Williams discovered as she navigated her depression, anxiety, and PTSD with the help of professionals following the conclusion of the tour cycle for *After Laughter*. "One of my biggest healing moments was realising that a lot of my depression was misplaced anger. I really forced it inward, on myself, and it made me feel shame all the time" (Williams qtd. in Snapes). Aside from her own experiences which resulted in suppressed emotions, Williams discovered that generational trauma was also at play. In the aforementioned *The New York Times* article, she reveals that "'[e]very woman in my family on my mom's side' — a line of strong, impressive figures, she stressed — 'they've all been abused in almost every sense of the word.' She realized that pain underpinned everything in her life: 'I've always felt like something was wrong with me or I was an underdog [*sic*] or I had something to prove'" (qtd. in Ganz). The feeling of having "something to prove" is relatable for many marginalized groups, including women trying to assert themselves within a patriarchal society.

Although the intention behind the lyrics that a songwriter creates is neither completely knowable, nor is it essential to the meanings that songs convey, this brief biographical context helps to inform aspects of the following analyses of songs from *After Laughter*.

2.3.1 "Hard Times"

"Hard Times" is the first track on the album and the first single released by the band following a three-year hiatus (Nelson). The song structure is that of verse-chorus, which is one of the most commonly used structures in "pop songs, rock songs, and the blues" (MasterClass). It is most often defined by an alternating verse and chorus, sometimes including additional elements such as an intro, pre-chorus, or bridge (MasterClass). Opening with upbeat percussion instruments, presumably bongos and marimba, "Hard Times" is the listener's first taste of how

the band has embraced musical experimentation on this album. After a few seconds the drums and electric guitars kick in, reminding listeners of Paramore's rock music origins.

"All that I want / Is to wake up fine / Tell me that I'm all right / That I ain't gonna die," are the first lyrics delivered by Williams and set the tone for what can be lyrically expected from the remainder of the song. Although this lyric is more expressive of the constant worry that constitutes an anxiety disorder, it can also be understood as representative of how exhausting and overwhelming struggling with depression can be. For individuals experiencing depression, it can be helpful to be reminded and reassured that life will work out, that depression is treatable, and that there is something to look forward to on the other side of the suffering, since it can be difficult to hold onto such hope when overcome with feelings of sadness and unworthiness (Schimelpfening). Williams continues, "All that I want / Is a hole in the ground / You can tell me when it's all right / For me to come out." When depressed, it is common to want to withdraw due to the amount of energy it requires to function "normally," as well as due to not wanting to be a burden for friends and family. Additionally, these lyrics articulate the instinct of self-preservation, which in this instance is to hide away when the world is in a state of crisis, whether environmentally, politically, economically, or as a result of other factors, until the chaos is over.

A few synthesizer keys are played, and the tempo increases signalling the chorus. Williams, accompanied by additional backing vocals, sings the song's title, "(Hard times) / Gonna make you wonder why you even try / (Hard times) Gonna take you down and laugh when you cry / (These lives) And I still don't know how I even survive / (Hard times)." Containing the hook of the song, that is "the catchiest part of the song" (MasterClass), the chorus channels the seeming ease and nostalgia of the 1980s with its danceable melody. With the verses working to build up to the chorus, each time "hard times" is sung, the tension of the song is released (MasterClass). The acknowledgement of the existence of hard times and the overall difficulty of the human experience can provide comfort. Depressed individuals often feel as though their experience is a unique one and that they are the sole sufferers, which is an isolating feeling. To be reminded that others are also experiencing hard times can provide some relief. Including a variety of backing vocals to sing those particular words, is a reminder that hard times (or in this case depression) do not discriminate and are experienced by many people from a variety of backgrounds. The lyrics "[g]onna make you wonder why you even try" and "[g]onna take you down and laugh when you cry," articulate the hopelessness that depression evokes, as well as the sense that the world is somehow working against you when you are struggling with your mental health.

The tempo of the song decreases as the second verse is performed. Williams sings, "Walking around / With my little rain cloud / Hanging over my head / And it ain't coming down." Clouds, rain, and generally gloomy weather are often used to symbolize sadness and depression. The link potentially stems from rain's similarity to human tears, crying being one of the more well-known symptoms of depression (particularly in women), or the movement and types of clouds being similar to the duration and intensity of depressive episodes (see, for example, The Depression Project's "Storm to Sun Framework"). Whatever the origins of this symbolism, in Western culture, depression has become almost analogous to rain clouds and it is this common knowledge that Williams draws upon in this verse. She continues singing, "Where do I go? / Gimme some sort of sign / You hit me with lightning! / Maybe I'll come alive." Depression can be disorienting as one withdraws into their mind and loses touch with "reality." Tim Lott writes about his own experience with depression in *The Guardian*, stating that depression "can produce symptoms similar to Alzheimer's – forgetfulness, confusion and disorientation. Making even the smallest decisions can be agonising. It can affect not just the mind but also the body […] I am more clumsy [*sic*] and accident-prone." When Williams asks "[w]here do I go?" she is not only expressing the confusion that depression can cause, but also the existential crisis that is magnified by depression and the pessimism that accompanies it. The lyrics "[y]ou hit me with lightning / Maybe I'll come alive" reflect how individuals with depression lose interest in things that once brought them joy and can become numb to their environment. It is as if they need to be shocked in order to feel alive once more. This is also reminiscent of the use of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) to treat mental illnesses. In contemporary times ECT is used in cases of treatment-resistant depression, but it was a popular treatment during the '40s and '50s (Kneeland and Warren 51), particularly for women suffering from "the problem that has no name" as a result of the limited opportunities they were afforded from being relegated almost solely to the domestic sphere (Kneeland and Warren 59; see also, for example, *The Bell Jar* (1963) by Sylvia Plath).

Once more the song's tempo increases to accompany the chorus. This is followed by the bridge, which is often used to "jolt the listener out of [their] reverie and remind [them] that there's more to this song than just repetition" (MasterClass). Williams liltingly sings, "Tell my friends / I'm coming down / We'll kick it when I hit the ground," which repeats once more before the chorus is performed for the last two times. The way the lyrics are sung by Williams evokes the sensation of floating as she effortlessly fluctuates the notes in the phrase from high, as she sings "[t]ell my friends," to low when singing "hit the ground." Depression can stem from a traumatic event and often accompanies post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Consequently, a sense of disconnection or dissociation from one's reality and body can occur as a means of coping with the trauma and subsequent depression (Bates). Additionally, depression's tendency to incite rumination, negative self-talk, and clouded perceptions, keeps individuals trapped in their minds and disconnected from the world around them. Williams's lyrics express the intention to reconnect with friends once the fog of depression has lifted.

As described in a review of the song for music publication *SPIN*, "The song then ends with an outro that pushes the guitars into the background in favor of synths and unintelligible vocoder scribbles" (Sargent). Musical influences from the 1980s are once again drawn upon for the song's outro. "Hard Times" is characterized by multiple layers of amplified instruments, a fast tempo, staccato and accented phrasing, a syncopated rhythm, and predominantly short-held notes, which are all indicative of an intensity pattern according to the "illusion of life" perspective. The lyrics focus on self-consummation and the narrator's "struggle to survive" when facing a future that has up until this point been characterized by negative feelings and difficulty. In addition, the lyrics are actually backward-looking, since the narrator's perspective is rooted in their past experiences, ultimately leading to a negative outlook. These attributes indicate that the lyrics represent a release pattern. The music and lyrics are therefore incongruent. The contrasting emotional tone of the lyrics and the "happy" musical accompaniment creates a juxtaposition that is reminiscent of the pressure on women to outwardly remain smiling, accommodating and polite, despite feeling negative emotions internally. This particular interpretation will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis of the song "Fake Happy."

"Hard Times" subverts the traditional negativity that defines depression and makes it difficult to avoid the song's call to dance. Creating a moment of joy from a painful condition that many individuals are able to relate to, allows for a brief reprieve and a grounding reconnection with the body. Ryan Dombal writes in his review of *After Laughter* for *Pitchfork*, "Instead of going to war with Williams' [*sic*] words, the music acts as a gleaming counterpoint, a nostalgic lifeline from one friend to another." "Hard Times" and the juxtaposition that it presents between light and dark, positive and negative, body and mind, is an anthem for contemporary times.

2.3.2 "Rose-Colored Boy"

The album's second track, "Rose-Colored Boy," continues the '80s influenced, dance-pop that "Hard Times" introduced. The song begins with a short intro where the vocals are layered and additional backing vocals are added to give the illusion of a group chanting, "Low-key, no

pressure / Just hang with me and my weather.” Once again weather is used to allude to mental health and changing moods. A steady but quick rhythm creates the musical backbone, with syncopated guitars punctuating the staccato lyrical phrasing that weaves in and out of the song.

In the first verse, the object of the song is introduced: “Rose-colored boy / I hear you making all that noise / About the world you want to see / And oh, I'm so annoyed / 'Cause I just killed off what was left of / The optimist in me.” The rose-coloured boy is on the receiving end of Williams’s lyrics as attention is brought to a person that is perceiving an idealized version of the world. The narrator states an opposing position noting that any remaining optimism that they may have had has been extinguished. This sentiment is particularly apt in the current climate of “toxic positivity” that is present in Western culture. Natalie Dattilo, a clinical health psychologist, explains the danger of too much positivity in an article in *The Washington Post*:

> While cultivating a positive mind-set is a powerful coping mechanism, toxic positivity stems from the idea that the best or only way to cope with a bad situation is to put a positive spin on it and not dwell on the negative […] It results from our tendency to undervalue negative emotional experiences and overvalue positive ones. (qtd. in Chiu)

The origin of the term “toxic positivity” is unclear but according to Stephanie Preston, a professor of psychology, American culture values positivity, which can become counter-productive “when people are forced to seem or be positive in situations where it’s not natural or when there’s a problem that legitimately needs to be addressed that can’t be addressed if you don’t deal with the fact that there is distress or need” (qtd. in Chiu).

The song then leads into a pre-chorus where the strumming of one of the guitars is muted, and the emphasis is placed on a lead guitar riff as its notes repeatedly descend down the neck of the fretboard. The tempo feels as if it slows slightly due to the notes of the lyrics being held longer as Williams sings, “But hearts are breaking, and wars are raging on / And I have taken my glasses off.” The narrator lists ways in which the world is not a perfect place, such as the existence of heartbreak and war. They no longer see the world through a filter of positivity, as they have “taken my glasses off,” which is a reference to the English idiom of rose-coloured glasses being indicative of a positive but not necessarily authentic perspective. Individuals that have experienced depression and the way in which it shifts one’s point-of-view, can find it difficult to see the world as a positive place, arguably leaving them cynical. However, in his article for *The Guardian*, Tim Lott acknowledges that “repeated studies have shown that mild to moderate depressives have a more realistic take on life than most ‘normal’ people, a phenomenon known as ‘depressive realism.’” He references a point made by Neel Burton, author of *The Meaning of Madness*, who states that depressed individuals grasp “the healthy suspicion that modern life has no meaning and that modern society is absurd and

alienating," which Lott notes is a "deeply threatening" premise in a capitalistic culture that emphasizes productivity and consumption.

The climax of "Rose-Colored Boy" is the chorus that is sung with agency and assertion as the narrator states their need to feel negative emotions without external criticism: "Just let me cry a little bit longer / I ain't gon' smile if I don't want to / Hey, man, we all can't be like you / I wish we were all rose-colored too / My rose-colored boy." As previously discussed, a culture of forced positivity and the stigma that is attached to depression often elicits shame in depressed individuals for being unable to view the world as "normal" people do ("I wish we were all rose-colored too"). After an additional verse, pre-chorus, and chorus, the song turns to its bridge, which begins with Williams softly vocalizing and the tempo once again decreasing. Williams sings, "Leave me here a little bit longer / I think I wanna stay in the car / I don't want anybody seeing me cry now / You say 'We gotta look on the bright side' / I say 'Well, maybe if you wanna go blind' / You say 'My eyes are getting too dark now' / But boy, you ain't ever seen my mind." Once again referencing the shame that is felt when suffering from depression, the narrator asks to stay hidden away a while longer so that no one will see their low mood and tears. As mentioned earlier, this "feeling bad about feeling bad" is what drives withdrawal and isolation during depressive episodes (Preston qtd. in Chiu). The last phrases of the bridge also draw attention to how difficult it can be to understand depression if you have never experienced it before. Although everyone feels sad upon occasion, the negative feelings that define depression are at a level of intensity and duration that significantly impair daily functioning (Truschel). The rose-coloured boy attempts to view the "dark side" of life but admits that his "eyes are getting too dark now." He has the "benefit" of switching his perspective back to an optimistic one when the "real world" gets to be overwhelming. The narrator replies, "But boy, you ain't ever seen my mind," divulging that the extent of the "darkness" with which they experience the world is far greater and more difficult to escape since it is a part of their being.

The entire song features multiple layers of amplified instrumentation creating a dense sonic landscape. The tempo is predominantly fast, with short-held notes. However, longer notes appear scattered throughout, particularly in the chorus. With many structural elements including an intro, verses, chorus, pre-chorus, bridge, and an outro, the song is energetic and busy, but in a way that once again encourages listeners to engage with it and move or sing along. Musically "Rose-Colored Boy" represents an intensity pattern. The lyrics explore a confrontation between opposing viewpoints, while also expressing a frustration with the pressure that those with depression feel to supress their negative feelings. Although the feelings present in such a situation are usually those of intensity, within the framework of the "illusion

of life” theory, the lyrics to this particular song are representative of release. Since the narrator is resigned to their fate and perspective, the lyrics are tragic. Additionally, they are situated within a poetic illusion even though they seem at first to be forward-looking. The narrator’s present and future are coloured by the negative experiences of their past that have stimulated their pessimism. The future does not look optimistic to the narrator and the difficulty of life seems inevitable and fixed. Incongruency between the music and lyrics is the resulting effect. Once again, the contrast between an internal struggle and external expectations is highlighted by this misalignment.

Paramore took to social media themselves—specifically Twitter—to explain the significance of this song stating,

> Rose-Colored Boy is a song about feeling pressured to look at the world with blind optimism when you actually feel very hopeless about the world & your part in it. there is so much social pressure to be (or appear to be) “happy” that we can actually feel shame when we aren’t. 1/3
>
> Adding shame to sadness is a pretty toxic cocktail. It’s hard enough to deal with sadness, depression, or any type of anxiety without the added societal expectations. It’s important & more healing to meet ppl [*sic*] where they’re at - EMPATHY - than to try & paint everything rosy. 2/3 (@paramore)

As this section has discussed, the song points out how harmful “toxic positivity” can be for individuals suffering from depression. The song calls for empathy and to eliminate the tendency to judge others and pressure them to ignore their negative feelings. Ultimately, the societal pressure to remain optimistic at all costs, does not allow for problems to be acknowledged and the journey toward healing to begin.

2.3.3 “Fake Happy”

Situated nearly at the midpoint of the album, the fifth track is “Fake Happy.” Accompanied only by an acoustic guitar, Williams softly, slowly, and dejectedly sings the song’s intro: “I love making you believe / What you get is what you see / But I'm so fake happy / I feel so fake happy / And I bet everybody here / Is just as insincere / We're all so fake happy / And I know fake happy.” The theme of the song couldn’t be clearer. As much as the sentiment of being “fake happy” can apply to anyone in a culture that puts increased value on positivity, it is perhaps more prominent for women contending with stereotypes and expectations regarding “traditional” womanhood and femininity, which this analysis will foreground.

A synthesizer interlude leads into full instrumentation as the first verse begins. Williams sings, “So I been doin' a good job / Of makin' 'em think / I'm quite alright / Better hope I don't blink / You see, it's easy when I'm stompin' on a beat / But no one sees me when I crawl back

underneath." The song's narrator admits that they have been pretending to the people around them that they are fine, when in actuality they are quite the opposite and their secret could be exposed at any moment ("better hope I don't blink). The narrator seems to also be a performer or musical public figure since it is easy for them to hide their negative feelings "when I'm stompin' on a beat." However, when they are left alone and out of the spotlight, they are able to drop the act ("but no one sees me when I crawl back underneath). Individuals living with depression, as discussed in the previous sections, often feel ashamed of their condition and their low mood, which is why they try to mask their feelings when around other people. As Brenner has listed in his article, individuals with depression often worry that they are a burden for their friends and family and worry about dragging down the moods of other people with their sadness.

The bass guitar is the rhythmic focal point during the verses. However, the sonic landscape expands to include synthesizer and more pronounced guitar during the pre-chorus. As Williams sings, "Hey, if I smile with my teeth / Bet you believe me / If I smile with my teeth / I think I believe me," the drums punctuate the word "teeth," creating the illusion that the word is ejected from behind the closed teeth of a fake smile. The narrator also suggests that by feigning happiness for others, they are also doing so in an attempt to comfort themselves. There is a common English aphorism stating, "fake it until you make it," which conveys the idea that if you keep acting a certain way, even if it is not genuine at first, eventually it will transform into a genuine behaviour (Morin). Aside from the psychology behind smiling, there is a cultural connotation that smiling equals femininity and "traditional" womanhood. According to JR Thorpe's article, "Why Do People Expect Women to Smile?", "a woman's smile is rarely allowed to be just a smile; it's often taken as a sign of submission, docility, agreeableness, cooperation, and/ or a lack of female anger and other 'problematic' emotions." Since advertising started gaining momentum in the late nineteenth century, women have been encouraged to smile, and more often than not by men attempting to assert their dominance (Thorpe). Beginning in the 1950s, "smiling women were commonly thought to be safe, happy, subservient, and exemplars of capitalism" (Thorpe). Just as men have traditionally been discouraged from showing emotions, namely crying, women have been unable to outwardly express feelings of frustration and anger, since to do so would be "unladylike." Williams singing about smiling to mask negative feelings is relatable to those living with depression, but also (predominantly white) women. It is worth noting that Black women have long contended with the stereotype of the "angry Black woman," as well as a long history of being made to

smile to "perpetuate the myth that white oppression is not hurtful, damaging or dangerous" (Thorpe), therefore, their relationship with smiling includes more complexity.

The frustration of having to pretend to be fine culminates in the chorus as Williams passionately sings, "Oh please, don't ask me how I've been / Don't make me play pretend / Oh no, oh what's the use? / Oh please, I bet everybody here is fake happy too." The narrator begs to be spared from having to answer incessant queries into their wellbeing and having to pretend that their feelings are more positive than they really are. There is also an acknowledgement that a collective hopelessness exists and that most people are feigning positivity. In addition, the mention of this collective façade calls for empathy and recalls the sentiment that one should always be kind to the people they encounter, since it is often impossible to know exactly what others are experiencing or struggling with.

The song returns to a consistent rhythm during the second verse, as Williams further explores the pressure that women face to make themselves seem agreeable and docile. Williams sings, "And if I go out tonight / And dress up my fears / You think I look alright with these mascara tears? / See, I'm gonna draw up my lipstick wider than my mouth / And if the lights are low, they'll never see me frown." Although it is anyone's choice whether or not to wear makeup, the history of women wearing it has been to increase desirability, specifically in the eyes of men (see Naomi Wolf's 1991 book *The Beauty Myth*). In general, unattainable beauty standards rooted in Eurocentrism have long plagued women around the world. "According to a [2004] survey of 3,300 girls and women across 10 countries, 90 per cent of all women aged 15 to 64 worldwide want to change at least one aspect of their physical appearance, with body weight ranking the highest" (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D'Agostino qtd. in Calogero, Boroughs and Thompson 259). As a result of the inability to meet these unrealistic ideals, mental health conditions such as eating disorders, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, and social anxiety disorder can arise (ADAA). Eurocentric beauty standards are another layer of oppression that women of colour face. Leah Donnella, in her article "Is Beauty in the Eyes of the Colonizer?" notes,

> That association between beauty and whiteness has proved hard to shake. There's a reason that so many people still think of an 'all-American beauty' as a thin, blonde, blue-eyed white woman. It wasn't until 1940 that the rules were changed to allow women of color to enter the Miss America pageant. Before that, the official rules stated that contestants had to be 'of good health and of the white race.' (Donnella)

Williams herself falls under the above description of "all-American beauty," offering her "pretty privilege," which writer, TV host, and activist Janet Mock says

> can give way to more popularity, higher grades, more positive work reviews, and career advancement. People who are considered pretty are more likely to be hired, have higher salaries, and are less likely to be found guilty and are sentenced less harshly. Pretty people are perceived as smarter, healthier and more competent, and people treat pretty people better. Pretty privilege is also conditional and is not often extended to women who are trans, black and brown, disabled, older, and/or fat.

That is not to say that the pressure on appearance that white, cis women face is less destructive, but again, it is important to differentiate that there is a discrepancy in the lived experience of oppressive beauty ideals across the spectrum of women. Nonetheless, the result is often the same, in that low self-worth festers in many women from a very young age, inciting feelings of internalized misogyny, self-loathing, and anger. Since women are not always free to express these negative emotions outwardly, or at least without judgment, drawing on a fake smile and pretending to be all right are the remaining options.

The song begins to draw to a close with another pre-chorus and chorus, followed by a bridge that is comprised largely of vocalization ("Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba"). The tempo slows and the instrumentation pares back so that the synthesizer is the primary accompaniment. Williams sings, "I know I said that I was doing good and that I'm happy now / Ooh ooh / I shoulda known when things were going good / That's when I'd get knocked down," providing a reminder that moments of happiness are fleeting, which can leave those living with chronic and cyclical depression unable to enjoy feeling good without waiting for their depression to return. In 2013, researchers in New Zealand and England measured to what extent people presumed that feeling happy caused something negative to happen (qtd. in Lambrou). It was reported that

> people with depression often steer away from activities that could bring about feelings of happiness. A sort of spiral develops in which the social withdrawal that's a common symptom of depression can reinforce the worry that if they experience some joy, fun, or happy feelings from a holiday party or summer barbecue, it will inevitably lead to a disappointment, a recognition of loneliness, or other letdown [*sic*]. (qtd. in Lambrou)

It is also common for a "happiness hangover" to occur after joyful moments, which can also exacerbate symptoms of depression (Lombardo).

Following a drum crescendo, the aforementioned vocalization is repeated for eight measures and the song ultimately ends with one more chorus. The song's tempo is quick with a changing meter, accented and loud phrasing, and many amplified instruments. Although the notes are held longer when compared to the previous Paramore songs analyzed in this section, they are not smooth or long enough to be considered representative of release. Taken together, the above factors indicate that "Fake Happy" is another song that is musically representative of an intensity pattern. Once again, the lyrics are focused on self-consummation, and a resignation when it comes to coping with what life has to offer, which is indicative of a release

pattern. The incongruency of the music and lyrics, in this song particularly, is an expression of the complexity of womanhood. The song articulates “smiling depression,” defined as “appearing happy to others, literally smiling, while internally suffering with depressive symptoms” (Labeaune). Additionally, it articulates the expectations that women should present themselves as accommodating and pleasant, even if they are experiencing a wide range of emotions internally, including sadness and anger. The song is another reminder that “toxic positivity” is not the solution to depression that it presents itself as, and that empathy and self-compassion are more useful behaviours to engage in. Mostly, it acknowledges that listeners are not alone in their unhappiness as “we’re all so fake happy.”

The next section of analyses will turn to the songs of English metalcore[14] band Architects, particularly as they relate to grief, depression, masculinity, and how they reflect on the values of Western society as a whole.

2.4 Architects, Holy Hell *(2018)*

Architects was formed in Brighton, UK in 2004 by twin brothers Tom and Dan Searle playing guitar and drums, respectively. The current band lineup consists of vocalist Sam Carter, bassist Alex Dean, and guitarists Adam Christianson and Josh Middleton. *Holy Hell* is the band’s eighth studio album, but the first without principal songwriter and guitarist Tom Searle. After many years “slogging away on the metal circuit,” 2016 saw the band with “two Top 20 albums under their belt” (Aroesti). However, underneath all of their hard-earned success, the band was attempting to cope with Tom’s skin cancer diagnosis. After three years living with the condition, at the age of 28, Tom Searle passed away in August of 2016 (Aroesti).

Journalist Rachel Aroesti remarks in *The Guardian* that “Holy Hell acts as a [*sic*] both a meditation on grief and a tribute to Tom: his fingerprints are all over it.” As the principal songwriter, bits and pieces of music and lyrics that Tom had been working on prior to his death served as inspiration for his brother, as he stepped in to help navigate the band’s uncertain future. Acting as a glue for the record, and ultimately for the band itself, the band spent six months building upon Tom’s ideas, resulting in the 11-song album that was released on November 9, 2018 by Epitaph Records. According to Searle, “broadly speaking Holy Hell is about pain: the way we process it, cope with it, and live with it. There is value in pain. It’s where we learn, it’s where we grow” (qtd. in Epitaph). This sentiment underscores the record’s relevance—its emphasis on embracing challenging emotions and learning from the process.

[14] Metalcore “combines heavy metal with hardcore. They use the musical style of heavy metal, especially melodic death metal, and the shouting vocal style of hardcore. Breakdowns are also heavily utilized” (Bowar).

After experiencing such a significant loss and the resulting grief, the band found itself at a crossroads when looking towards their next steps:

> 'Ultimately, there were two choices,' Dan says. 'Feel sorry for yourself, [*sic*] and believe the world to be a horrible place and let it defeat you. Or let it inspire us to live the life that Tom would have wanted us to live. I was very worried about people taking away a despondent message from the album. I felt a level of responsibility to provide a light at the end of the tunnel for people who are going through terrible experiences.' (qtd. in Epitaph)

Additionally, the band felt the pressure of making an album "impressive enough to ward off any patronising well-wishers" (Aroesti). Carter adds, "We didn't want the sympathy likes—we didn't want people to be like, 'You've been through so much, good work for trying'" (qtd. in Aroesti). The result is a record that builds on the legacy of "one of modern metal's more enduring figures" and confronts the "certainty of mortality" with a level of reverence and respect (Connick). Ben Tipple summarizes the album concisely in his review for music magazine *DIY*:

> Rather than hiding the unavoidable sadness in hyperbolic positivity, Architects fully embrace pain. There's no false hope, instead the album's eleven tracks journey through fear, anger, frustration, and confusion. Acceptance, itself a fragile term and one too finite, is replaced by respect for truth.

The following analyses of a selection of songs from *Holy Hell* express loss, grief, depression, disillusionment, and showcase that there is strength in vulnerability and in allowing oneself to feel the full spectrum of human emotions.

2.4.1 "Hereafter"

"Hereafter" is the second track on the album and the single used to herald the release of *Holy Hell*. The song begins with music programming and faint keyboard accompanying Carter's clean vocals[15] as he sings, "Now the oceans have drained out / Can I come up for air? / 'Cause I've been learning to live without / And I'm fighting with broken bones," which later repeats throughout the song as the first section of the chorus. This is immediately followed by the introduction of the double-bass drum, bass guitar, and electric guitars, which provide the driving tempo and syncopated rhythmic structure that characterize the music of Architects. Lyrically the song's narrator asks for a reprieve from a struggle that they feel they cannot win when Carter sings "Can I come up for air?" and "I'm fighting with broken bones." One can interpret the lyrics as referencing the loss of Tom and the adjustment of living a life without

[15] Clean vocals describe vocals that do not have any distortion (i.e. regular singing), in contrast to harsh vocals that are growled or screamed in metal music.

him. Although grief is often considered an exception when discussing depression, as "bereavement is a necessary aspect of living" in response to feeling loss, it is possible for grief to become prolonged or to transform into depression (Nowinski). Assistant Professor of Psychiatry Dr. Michael Miller "points out that for some people who have previously struggled with acknowledged or unacknowledged depression, the death of a significant other can be the catalyst that brings depression to the foreground" (qtd. in Nowinski). Death is a traumatic event that can "trigger depression in the same way that other major stresses—such as being raped or losing one's job—can bring about the condition" (Hughes). It is worth considering, as Virginia Hughes writes in her article "Shades of Grief: When Does Mourning Become a Mental Illness?", that "[i]n many ways, parsing the differences between normal grief, complicated grief and depression reflects the fundamental dilemma of psychiatry: mental disorders are diagnosed using subjective criteria and are usually an extension of a normal state." The blurred line between grief and depression is a reminder of the relative subjectivity of mental illnesses when compared to what a culture or society deems "normal."

Carter's vocals transform into coarse screams as he sings the first verse: "I wasn't ready for the rapture / We're only passing through / But these words, they mean nothing to me / I know that time will mend this fracture / I've been lost in a maze / And every route I take, leads right back to you." According to Roisin O'Connor in her article for *The Independent*, "Themes of heaven and hell, angels and demons run like a strong current through the record. Religion is one of the 'big questions', [Searle] notes, even if none of them practise, and it was a theme they wanted to continue from Tom's earlier lyrics, as part of the album's aesthetic." When Carter sings "I wasn't ready for the rapture," the song's narrator is likely referring to a Christian belief that describes "when both living and dead believers ascend into heaven to meet Jesus Christ," as a result of the "end of days" (Stefon). When you lose a loved one or experience a life-changing loss, it often feels as though it is the "end of days," since something that is familiar is suddenly gone, and one must adjust to a new version of life. Additionally, individuals living with depression often feel hopeless, as if there is no future worth waiting or fighting for, resigned to a life that feels as if the "end is nigh." The first verse continues with Carter singing, "I know that time will mend this fracture / I've been lost in a maze / And every route I take, leads right back to you," indicating that the narrator is aware that grief has no timeline and is not a linear process. When one is grieving and also when one is depressed, there may be a logical understanding that eventually time will minimize the pain. However, it is often very difficult to ignore the overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, even if there is a rational awareness that feelings are fleeting. Depression and grief are disorienting, much like being lost

in a maze. When mourning the loss of someone, it can be difficult to think of anything else aside from the person who has passed, with every path being taken, leading back to being reminded that the deceased is gone forever.

The chorus releases the tension of the verses, with the instrumentation slowing down and easing in intensity, creating a sense of finally being able to catch one's breath and to process the heavy emotions being conveyed. Carter continues to sing with distorted vocals, but the notes are smoother and held longer. It is difficult to ignore Searle's drumming throughout the song. With every cymbal crash and double-bass drum kicked, the emotional intensity is palpable. The instrumentation is heavy, fast, loud, and in the case of this particular record, cathartic. The second verse highlights the complex and technical guitar skill that Architects have become known for because of Tom, but which is now the successful contribution of Middleton. Carter sings, "Some things are broken beyond repair / This is my cross to bear / My own meaningless catastrophe / I never had the time to prepare / Because I never knew that all my nightmares could come true." Grief and depression are such personal experiences and often feel very isolating ("This is my cross to bear"—again referencing religion and Christ carrying his own cross to his crucifixion), as if the pain that one is encountering could never be understood by another person ("My own meaningless catastrophe"). Although death is an inevitable aspect of life, it is an event that can never fully be prepared for, even if the cause of death is not sudden. For Searle, losing his twin brother is likely one of the nightmares being referenced in the last phrase of this verse.

After another chorus where Carter's clean and distorted vocals harmonize together, the song builds up to a breakdown, a musical element that is a mainstay of metalcore music and is usually characterized by being "heavily percussive and rhythmic in [its] delivery. This means the entire band is in lockstep with the same groove-based and sometimes staccato-sounding pattern. The result is a very precise, tight and often catchy section to a song, which can even eclipse the main chorus" (Breen). As the instrumentation begins its crescendo into the breakdown, Carter sings the bridge of the song: "I've spent my fair share / In the deepest depths of despair / 'Cause I was too lost down there to care / I wasn't braced for the fallout." The song's narrator expresses their depression, which is one of the stages of grief, but as discussed previously, can become prolonged or transform into clinical depression. Feeling as though one is in "the deepest depths of despair" is one of the symptoms of depression, as well as feeling so overwhelmed by negative emotions that one no longer cares about the things that used to provide pleasure. Living with depression is an experience that involves a variety of facets and varying degrees of intensity, that it can never truly be "braced for."

With a fast and driving tempo, syncopated and unpredictable rhythm, dissonant melody, and loud, amplified instrumentation, "Hereafter" is musically representative of an intensity pattern. The lyrics describe the emotional aftermath of a devastating loss and although there are hints at overcoming the odds, such as when Carter sings "I've got to find my way," in the second half of the chorus, they are generally backward-looking and focused on self-consummation as the narrator grapples with their grief. The incongruency between the music and lyrics adds another layer of meaning to the song, as it represents the conflict that men face between expressing their vulnerability and the societal expectations of only being permitted to express the emotion of anger. An in-depth exploration of musical genres, particularly metal, and their relationships with gender would be of great benefit, but unfortunately will remain undiscussed due to the limited scope of this thesis. According to Simon During, individuals in Western society have been living under "a gender regime in which men increasingly were required to control their emotions, especially their spontaneous feelings of suffering and empathy" (180). "Hereafter" works to present an alternative option, by showcasing men expressing their grief and feelings of depression. As Searle discusses in an *NME* article, "On one hand you feel obligated to make a perfect, polished record. On the other, we're a metal band, which is a music that is predominantly used to convey anger and sadness, which we weren't in short supply of making the record. I think we just wanted to capture something real and to do justice to the emotions we were feeling at the time. We were looking for some vulnerability…" (qtd. in McMahon). By articulating these "sensitive" feelings via a metal song, the option of owning one's emotions is more accessible to those living within an environment that has historically emphasized "toxic masculinity" and the repression of feelings.

2.4.2 "Doomsday"

Originally a stand-alone single, "Doomsday" was released in 2017 and was the first new music from Architects after the death of Tom. Elements of the track had been written by Tom prior to his passing and the song was completed by his brother. It is the penultimate song on *Holy Hell* and deals with the most immediate feelings following a significant loss. The intensity of the song hits with full force from the very beginning, with an introduction utilizing full instrumentation: racing drums, intricate and quick guitar, and embellished with ethereal-sounding synthesizer. As Carter sings the first verse with clean vocals, the instrumentation recedes, leaving just an echoing guitar to highlight the lyrics: "Remember when Hell had frozen over? / The cold still burns underneath my skin / The water is rising all around me / And there is nothing left I can give." Once again referencing the religious concept of hell, this first phrase

recalls the English idiom “when hell freezes over,” which is used to indicate that something will never occur. In the context of this lyric, something that the narrator never thought would happen has indeed come to pass (e.g., the death of a loved one). The grief is so overwhelming, the narrator feels as though they are drowning, and they do not have the strength to keep carrying on. This sense of overwhelm and hopelessness is also present in depression. The drums return, creating a pulsating backdrop for Carter’s increasingly anguished and distorted vocal delivery of the lyrics: “All these tears I’ve shed / I saw the wildfire spread / You said you cheated death / But Heaven was in my head.” These particular lyrics can be interpreted as directly discussing Tom’s cancer, which spread much like a wildfire, and although he had been in remission, it ultimately returned (“You said you cheated death”).

After a brief breath, the chorus begins, with the same instrumentation as the intro increasing the intensity level. Carter howls, “They say ‘the good die young’ / No use in saying ‘what is done is done’ ‘cause it’s not enough / And when the night gives way / It’s like a brand new doomsday.” With Tom passing away at only 28, the commonly uttered sentiment of “the good die young” becomes incredibly poignant for his family, friends, and fans. As with any loss, and also with depression, external support is sometimes offered in the form of seemingly empty platitudes in an attempt to provide comfort (“what’s done is done”), but these are rarely helpful or enough to ease the distress. The apocalyptic reference to a doomsday appears in the chorus and is where the title of the track is drawn from. When in the midst of a depressive episode, it often feels as though the following day will be just as painful as the last, as if it is just another “brand new doomsday.” Carter holds the final note of “doomsday” as he transitions to the post-chorus, singing “No matter what they say / It’s like a brand new doomsday.” His screams are coarse, strained, and convey the anger and pain that come with grief.

Carter continues screaming the lyrics of the second verse as the narrator acknowledges their plans for the future: “I have to rebuild, now it’s over / Maybe now I’m lost, I can live / Souls don’t break, they bend / But I sometimes forget / I have to do this for you.” The song is a lament to the deceased, a private conversation that is being overheard, as the narrator expresses their sorrow and struggles to move forward in honour of the person they lost. The bridge of the song sees the narrator concerned that they might forget the deceased, or that they may never be able to accept the loss (“What if I completely forget? / What if I never accept?”). The anger and sadness that the song chronicles, culminates in a long-held scream from Carter at the end of the bridge. The sincerity and vulnerability with which Carter delivers the lyrics, particularly during this moment of release, make the collective grief of Tom’s death tangible. When describing *Holy Hell*, Sam Law writes in rock and metal music magazine *Kerrang!* that

it is “an album that’s by turns gut-wrenching, hauntingly desolate and emotionally devastating. It’s also one that demands end-to-end attention to impart its most poignant lesson: the only way out is through.”

“Doomsday” is another song that musically represents an intensity pattern with its fast tempo, changing meter, short-held tones, staccato and accented phrasing that gets louder and faster. Once again, the lyrics are incongruent to the music since they represent a release pattern, being predominantly focused on self-consummation, feelings of all-consuming grief, and coping with a tragic twist of fate—the loss of a loved one. The juxtaposition between the vulnerable lyrical content and its aggressive musical delivery highlights the complexity of grief, depression, and the stereotypically contradictory relationship that men have with their emotions. Vocalist Sam Carter often speaks openly about the culture of “toxic masculinity,” which the songs on *Holy Hell* help to counter:

> I think, especially I find in men there's a real stigma around being vulnerable and open and honest and even crying. I think that needs to change because suicide is one of the biggest killers in the whole world. If you don't open up about these things, I can completely see how they'd swallow you. (qtd. in Full Metal Jackie)

Psychiatrist Anthony Clare also acknowledges that men face a “crisis” in contemporary times, which he describes as more of “a set of changing circumstances,” where

> men, most certainly, need to renegotiate their place within this new culture […] Emotional communication, and the expression of love and vulnerability, are important. Men don’t need to become ‘like women’ but can develop a new form of masculinity which places ‘a greater value on love, family and personal relationships and less on power, possessions and achievement. (qtd. in Gauntlett 7)

With “Doomsday” expressing feelings of grief that are often heightened directly following a loss, the song is useful in connecting with individuals going through a similar experience or living with clinical depression where the feelings of sadness can be similar in intensity. For Searle, *Holy Hell* became a tool to cope with his sadness: “Listening to it now, it’s almost like a tool I needed to bring out the sadness in me. There’s a lot of value in sitting with a feeling. Sometimes it’s just hard to get those feelings out. Making an album to do that was a gift really. Not everyone has something like that” (qtd. in McMahon). By setting an example regarding the importance of connecting with one’s feelings and processing them, the songs on *Holy Hell* assist in dismantling the stigma surrounding mental health conditions, especially for men who are encouraged to repress their emotions and to externalize distress by engaging in unhealthy coping mechanisms.

2.4.3 “Modern Misery”

Near the midpoint of *Holy Hell* is the track “Modern Misery,” which shifts the band’s focus away from the personal and towards the political/environmental commentary that Architects has cultivated a reputation for over their last few albums. One of the heavier songs on the album, “Modern Misery” immediately builds towards a breakdown as Carter screams the intro: “Seven billion hungry ghosts / Just a parasite killing its host […] But we’re buried in modern misery.” The lyrics reference the state of planet earth. Populated by over seven billion people, many of whom are facing food scarcity and all of whom are facing climate change, humanity is on a path to extinction due to its disregard for the environment (“Just a parasite killing its host”). With such a bleak view of the future, the song’s narrator argues that the result is a collective misery. Statistics on mental health disorders, namely depression and anxiety, seem to support the idea that contemporary Western society has created an environment that most human beings are no longer able to thrive in, socially, politically, economically, and environmentally. Section 1.3 has previously discussed the external elements that impact the psychological well-being of individuals, such as a disconnection from nature and the pursuit of superficial values, both of which are fostered by contemporary capitalism.

The chugging instrumental breakdown leads into the first verse where Carter screams “There’s not enough water in the world / To wash the blood from our hands / We planted a seed, its roots will suffocate the soul […] Hell must be empty, all the devils are here.” The drumming and guitars are fast and syncopated, as the lyrics express how human beings are responsible for the destruction of the planet, alluding to being unable to wash the crime off of our hands. Humanity has planted seeds of imperialism, colonialism, industrialization, and capitalism, which have resulted in the exploitation of resources and people around the world, creating the illusion that human beings are superior to and disconnected from the environment. The narrator comments about how humanity is filled with devils, which is perhaps a hyperbolic reaction to the selfishness and greed that is exemplified by many human beings, particularly world leaders and policy makers. Carter pierces the song’s overwhelming heaviness when he sings with clean vocals, “I won’t go to the grave with the song still in me,” indicating a resolve to use one’s voice to create change, as well as a provisional hope for the future.

Once again, the chorus provides a relief from the song’s overall intensity. The instrumentation slows and softens, leaving ambient programming to accompany a delicate guitar riff as Carter coarsely and steadily sings, “What are we hiding in the rain? / This is a prison for lost souls / Another life circles the drain / We used to run with the wolves / Now we

can't see the forest / 'Cause there's no light in the black hole / Don't try and tell me we are blessed / We used to run with the wolves." The narrator is describing the depression that results from living in a world that seems to be slowly getting worse. They acknowledge the feeling of being lost that many individuals with depression experience due to a disconnection from their surroundings and a lack of purpose ("This is a prison for lost souls"). The common imagery of depression as being in a state devoid of hope or light is also evoked ("'Cause there's no light in the black hole"). In addition, the narrator comments on the culture of "toxic positivity" that was discussed in greater detail in section 2.3.2, when Carter sings "Don't try and tell me we are blessed." Finally, by remarking that "we used to run with the wolves," the narrator recalls the freedom that early humanity had when it worked in conjunction with the environment, as opposed to attempting to control and take ownership of it. It is well documented that re-establishing a connection with nature can help to alleviate some symptoms of depression (F. Williams).

A second verse, chorus, bridge (which includes another instrumental breakdown), and outro complete "Modern Misery." With its many amplified instruments, changing meter, unpredictable rhythmic structure, crescendos, staccato phrasing, and overall heaviness, "Modern Misery" is musically representative of intensity. The lyrics are backward-looking and although the song thematically discusses self-preservation when faced with a dying world, according to the "illusion of life" perspective, the lyrics focus more on self-consummation and commenting on an unwelcome fate. This incongruency exemplifies the disconnection between the idyllic world that some human beings believe they are living in and the harsh reality of the state of the planet as it responds to humanity's dreams of "innovation and progress." The song is a reminder that depression can also be a symptom of a world that is not functioning in a way that allows human beings to thrive. "Modern Misery" discusses the environmental and political factors that contribute to mental health conditions, but, as explored in the analyses of the other songs from Architects, pressure regarding gender roles and the expectations around emotional expression are some of the social factors that contribute to depression. Dave Simpson summarizes the impact of *Holy Hell* in *The Guardian* when he says that "[t]he songs' difficult birth has given them a bracing, anthemic, heartfelt and occasionally even eerily dreamlike quality. Architects aren't a band for anyone with sensitive hearing, but it's hard not to be moved by this loud, cathartic howl."

The following chapter will very briefly discuss the audience response to the musical albums presented in this analysis, allowing for a partial sense of the impact that songs expressing depression may have.

3 Audience Response

Although audience response is its own area of cultural criticism, this thesis would be remiss for completely omitting how audiences have responded to the albums analyzed in the previous chapter. According to During, "[Popular culture]'s the mirror in which the culture recognises itself. It peoples the world: for many, celebrities and fictional characters are like distant acquaintances. It draws national—and international—communities together, dotting conversations and private and communal memories" (During 193). In short, popular culture has the ability to create community and connection, which in the case of individuals living with depression, is of great benefit. This chapter briefly discusses the relationships between celebrities and fans, and how the digital age and social media have transformed them. In addition, a collection of audience responses is presented to emphasize the impact that Julien Baker, Paramore, and Architects have on their respective fanbases.

3.1 Social Media and Changing Celebrity–Fan Relationships

Traditionally the consumption of popular culture by fans has resulted in one-sided relationships called parasocial relationships, "where one party knows a great deal about the other party, but the other does not" (Brooks qtd. in Sellnow 165). These relationships most often occur between celebrities and fans but can also be present between TV or film characters and viewers (Brooks qtd. in Sellnow 165). A bond of intimacy is the driving force behind parasocial relationships and is created "when a viewer [or listener] begins to feel he or she *really* knows the celebrity or character" (Sellnow 165). This is often achieved through realism and privacy. "Realism has to do with how *believable* the characters and their encounters are perceived to be," while privacy "refers to the fact that [audiences] often *get to know* the characters personally as they watch them privately in the comfort of their own homes. Showing small, personal encounters and experiences of characters may make the characters seem more like friends" (Sellnow 165). Characters, in the case of this thesis, can also refer to the public persona of musicians and artists. Fans do not know them as they would close friends, but due to the intimacy that is created through their personal lyrics, one can easily feel that a deep connection is created and that the artists' true motivations are known, based predominantly on the listeners' personal and subjective experience of the music.

With the introduction of social media, however, the nature of celebrity–fan relationships have been transformed by the increased possibility of interaction. The microblogging platform Twitter has proven particularly useful for celebrities to manage their

online presence and interact with their fanbases. "Twitter lets people post quick [280]-character updates, or 'tweets,' to a network of followers […] resulting in a constantly-updated stream of short messages ranging from the mundane to breaking news, shared links, and thoughts on life" (Marwick and boyd 141–142). Due to Twitter's dialogic nature, it "disrupts the expectation of parasociality between the famous person and fan" and "creates a new expectation of intimacy" since celebrities are now expected to maintain connections with their fans "rather than seem uncaring or unavailable" (Marwick and boyd qtd. in Baym 288). Parasocial interactions largely take place in the minds of fans, but Twitter "de-pathologizes the parasocial and recontextualizes it within a medium that the follower may use to talk to real-life acquaintances," resulting in conversations between fans and celebrities being public and visible (Marwick and boyd 148–149). Public collections of social interactions found on online platforms such as Twitter create a community within which fandom can thrive and individuals from around the world can connect over their shared passions and interests. The next section will provide some concrete examples of how fans are utilizing social media to connect with celebrities after hearing their music.

3.2 Fan Tweets and Community-building

A selection of tweets directed to or about Julien Baker, Paramore, and Architects, respectively, have been collected to gain an insight into the impact that their most recent albums have had on fans. They are predominantly characterized by gratitude, sentiments expressing the relatability of their lyrics to the personal experiences of individual fans, and appraisals of the accuracy of descriptions of living with depression.

Media scholar and Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts, Henry Jenkins, highlights that "fans consume texts as part of a community. Fan culture is about the public display and circulation of meaning production […]. Fans make meanings to communicate with other fans. Without the public display and circulation of these meanings, fandom would not be fandom" (qtd. in Storey 154). Social media fosters an online community for fandom to function across time zones and international borders. Individuals are able to come together to communicate their personal experiences with various popular culture texts, such as songs or music albums, in a public forum that allows for replies and validation from like-minded peers, ultimately creating a sense of community. According to sociologist Jeffery Weeks, these communities can be considered emotional ones and "whether they are produced by similarities based on sex, gender, race or class—serve as centres of identification: spaces where individuals realize that there are others like themselves and that provide a counter to the

alienation caused by rejection and discrimination" (Kirsch 264). For individuals living with a mental health condition such as depression, the ability to connect with other individuals who are enduring or have endured a similar experience can help to alleviate the feelings of isolation that depression often evokes. The songs discussed in this thesis help to create a bridge towards connection as fans tweet about their experiences on a public platform where other individuals can read and interact with their comments.

When David Anthony describes the music of Julien Baker for *AV Club* saying, "And it's there in her music, which gives its listeners the chance to hear their own struggles reflected in hers, to find some levity in their shared experiences, which is something that can so often give them a lifeline," he inadvertently describes the music of many other artists, such as Paramore and Architects. Many fans of all three artists have publicly commented on the relatability of their lyrics, expressing sentiments such as:

> "Appointments by @julienrbaker. Pretty sure I haven't listened to a song that speaks to me and what I struggle with more. Thank you [Smiling cat face with heart-shaped eyes emoji]" (@mollyelsbeth).
>
> "@julienrbaker provides heartbreaking and bittersweet comfort when it's 3am and you can't sleep. As a Queer christian [*sic*] raised fundamentalist in a rural town, her music makes me feel seen. I'm grateful for it" (@MxMaegen).
>
> "I've found myself in many of the lyrics and also between the lines too. I've found it very comforting, healing, empowering. It makes me want to dance and cry, sometimes at the same time. It's one of my top favorites of the last decade" (@anecdxche -replying to @nicolestamand).
>
> "11. After Laughter by Paramore / Boy, I love it. It put a lot of emotions I've been feeling lately right in front of me. Very therapeutic. [Purple heart emoji]" (@diana_alexa14).
>
> "after laughter: upbeat, happy music with deep/sad lyrics aka it's the epitome of my existence in an album. #paramore" (@zoee_cochran).
>
> "Wow... what a cathartic 42 minutes. Thanks @Architectsuk for Holy Hell, the perfect album for a hard couple of months of grieving losing my friend from primary school. Your music means the world and always will..." (@shep_5879).
>
> "I want to thank you, @Architectsuk for the perspective on your loss as an engine of rebirth through music. My sister is battling cancer right now, so Holy Hell has profound meaning to me and digs deep, gives me fuel in a time I need it most" (@TavuPR).

For other fans, the songs have reminded them that they are not alone during the difficulties that they experience, and the songs provide comfort in dark moments:

> "sometimes I feel like my soul will never heal from all the trouble it's been through, and then I remember @julienrbaker exists and for a moment this life doesn't seem so lonely" (@ChelleBelle825).
>
> "@julienrbaker just wanted to reach out to you... going through a tough time and your music is one of the only things at the moment that puts things into a perspective I am able to process. Thanks for sharing your gift. Your music is beautiful. You are beautiful. Stay beautiful" (@chnll_sgn).
>
> "It's been 3 years since #afterlaughter came out. This album changed my entire life. It came in a time I needed it the most to learn to smile and find happiness in the darkest of times. I traveled more and danced more than I knew I could. Feeling thankful" (@hiamberlynn).
>
> "shoutout to after laughter for being an album that i [*sic*] can dance to while crying about my depression lmao" (@eauxh).
>
> "Can I just say that @Architectsuk have inspired me over the last few years. The songs that you release help me deal with my own problems. Listening to Holy Hell from start to end made me cry. Certainly [*sic*] the best work you boys have released to date. I cannot thank you all enough. [Black heart emoji]" (@InvertedJames).
>
> "Looks like @architectsuk are the ones I listened to the most this year. You guys really helped me cope with what the shit I had to go through in the past two years. Love you, guys. See you in January. [Red heart emoji]" (@moreriotspls).

While some fans also recognize that the songs from these artists provide an accurate portrayal of living with a mental health disorder:

> "Claws in Your Back by @julienrbaker is, without a doubt, the best depiction of living with mental illness and surviving and carrying on" (@itsflanagain).
>
> "if you struggle with depression or anxiety, please listen to @julienrbaker. She's such an amazing lyricist and her music has helped me when I'm at my worst" (@lil_gay_snail).
>
> "After Laughter? Did you mean Depression™ The Album" (@ATLliv98).

By catalyzing a discussion around mental health and creating an environment where individuals feel safe to disclose their experiences, the music of Julien Baker, Paramore, and Architects, has helped in part to destigmatize mental health conditions such as depression. They have also provided an avenue for connection, both privately through listening to the music on one's own, and publicly, whether it is in the form of an online discussion about the impact of the songs or when attending a live performance from the aforementioned artists. When reflecting on her concerts, Baker remarks, "For an hour during my set, there are a whole bunch of strangers and we're all singing the same thing […] My hope is that it emboldens those people to feel supported and encouraged to go out after the show and make themselves available to

the change happening around them" (qtd. in Geffen). Sasha Geffen, in their magazine article about Baker for *The Fader*, highlights that "[her] words are a reminder that while music itself won't save the world, it can provide a space to practice the kind of human connections that might." Sam Carter from Architects reinforces this sentiment saying, "[E]veryone in the world who has been to our shows is going to suffer grief at some time in their life. It's a given that we all die eventually. It is important that people can feel that they can be themselves, come and cry, come and be happy. If they want to use that as an escape or some kind of catharsis that's fantastic. We just want people to know that they are not alone in what they have been going through" (qtd. in Full Metal Jackie). By providing a means for connection, either with the music that fans are listening to or with each other, the songs of Julien Baker, Paramore, and Architects assist in providing some relief during moments of overwhelming distress, loneliness, and hopelessness.

Conclusion

With mental health conditions affecting increasing portions of Western society, this thesis has acknowledged that popular culture is a site for understanding one's own mental health and the state of society as a whole. Expressions of depression were investigated in a selection of songs from musical artists Julien Baker, Paramore, and Architects. By utilizing Sellnow and Sellnow's "illusion of life" rhetorical perspective, the songs have been analysed in regard to the congruency or incongruency between the music and lyrics and their respective representations of intensity or release patterns, which give an illusion of life from the music artist's perspective. All of the songs analysed have exemplified incongruency between the music and lyrics, which has added an additional layer of meaning to the many meanings that these cultural texts present.

In the case of Julien Baker, her music has been representative of release patterns while her lyrics represent intensity, which can be interpreted as portraying the complexity of depression, the inner conflict between one's sexual orientation when contradictory to Western society's heteronormative standards, as well as exemplifying the existence of a provisional hope, even when in the depths of depression. Paramore, in contrast, present music that is representative of intensity and lyrics, that upon closer inspection, are representative of release patterns. This particular incongruency is useful in understanding the opposing forces that cis women face in a patriarchal society. Namely, the expectation to repress difficult emotions in favour of appearing docile, polite, and accommodating. Additionally, the songs from Paramore encourage listeners to approach depression and mental health conditions with empathy and to combat a culture of "toxic positivity" that can make one feel shame for feeling depressed. The music and lyrics of the songs from Architects were also found to be incongruent, with the music representing intensity and the lyrics representing release. The incongruency here can be considered representative of the complicated relationship that men have with their emotions within a culture of "toxic masculinity" that patriarchy helps to perpetuate. Although their songs focus predominantly on grief, it has been established that experiencing a significant loss may also lead to depression, and the line may blur between the two conditions. In addition, Architects' songs highlight the collective depression that can be felt globally as a result of a disconnection from the environment and a focus on superficial values.

Perhaps of the greatest benefit, however, is music's ability to mitigate feelings of disconnection, isolation, and loneliness that are often symptomatic of depression. Aside from connecting with songs on an individual level, by having personal experiences mirrored in the

lyrics, these songs aid in creating an environment of acceptance and safety to publicly disclose and discuss personal struggles, for example on social media. Being able to relate to a song allows the listener to feel less alone in their experience, and the ability to express their own or read the opinions of others regarding the musical outputs of these artists, results in the dangerous stigma that surrounds mental health conditions, such as depression, losing some of its power.

Lastly, depression, like many other mood disorders such as anxiety, are increasingly being recognized as symptoms of a larger societal problem. This thesis has attempted to address some of the psychosocial factors that can influence the onset of depression, specifically the dangerous ideas about gender and sexuality that have historically dominated Western culture. Although the experience of living with depression is an unpleasant one, author Johann Hari explains it best when he remarks, “You need your pain. It is a message, and we must listen to the message. All these depressed and anxious people, all over the world—they are giving us a message. They are telling us something has gone wrong with the way we live” (318-319).

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Appendix A: Julien Baker Lyrics

“Appointments” Lyrics

[Verse 1]

I'm staying in tonight
I won't stop you from leaving
I know that I'm not what you wanted, am I?
Wanted someone who I used to be like
Now you think I'm not trying
I don't argue, it's not worth the effort to lie
You don't want to bring it up
And I already know how it looks
You don't have to remind me so much
How I disappoint you
Suggest that I talk to somebody again
That knows how to help me get better
And 'til then I should just try not to miss any more
Appointments

[Verse 2]

I think if I ruin this
That I know I can live with it
Nothing turns out like I pictured it
Maybe the emptiness is just a lesson in canvases
I think if I fail again
That I know you're still listening
Maybe it's all gonna turn out all right
And I know that it's not, but I have to believe that it is

[Bridge]

I have to believe that it is
I have to believe that it is
(I have to believe it, I have to believe it)
I have to believe that it is
(Probably not, but I have to believe that it is)

[Chorus]

And when I tell you that it is
Oh, it's more for my benefit
Maybe it's all gonna turn out all right
Oh, I know that it's not, but I have to believe that it is

“Hurt Less” Lyrics

[Verse 1]

I used to never wear a seatbelt
'Cause I said I didn't care
What happened
And I didn't see the point
In trying to save myself
From an accident
'Cause if somebody's gonna help me
What's this fabric gonna help?
And when I'm pitched through the windshield
I hope the last thing that I felt before the pavement
Was my body float
I hope my soul goes too

[Verse 2]

I shouldn't have let you leave
I should have called you twice
But I didn't
'Cause it's always something else
And I know it's a bad time
But there's no one left for me to call
And I was wondering if you would be my ride
And damn it, we are gonna figure something out
If it takes me all night to make it hurt less

[Chorus]

Leave the car running
I'm not ready to go
It doesn't matter where
I just don't want to be alone
And as long as you're not tired yet
Of talking, it helps to make it hurt less

[Chorus]

Oh, leave the car running
I'm not ready to go
And it doesn't matter where
I just don't want to be alone
And as long as you're not tired yet
Of talking, it helps to make it hurt less

[Outro]

This year I've started wearing safety belts
When I'm driving
Because when I'm with you
I don't have to think about myself
And it hurts less

“Claws in Your Back” Lyrics

[Verse]

Collecting the circles that tell us
How old we are beneath our eyelids
Wearing a purple badge to prove what I did
Pump the vitals out of my wrist
'Cause I'm conducting an experiment on how it feels to die
Or stay alive

[Verse]

So try to stay calm, 'cause nobody knows
The violent partner you carry around
With claws in your back, ripping your clothes
And listing your failures out loud
It's more than the skeleton next to my coat
The black that I held in the back of my throat
Follows you straight into the dark;
The easy way out and the hardest part
When it won't leave me alone
I'm better off learning
How to be
Living with demons I've
Mistaken for saints
If you keep it between us
I think they're the same
I think I can love
The sickness you made
'Cause I take it all back, I changed my mind
I wanted to stay
I wanted to stay

Appendix B: Paramore Lyrics

"Hard Times" Lyrics

[Verse 1]

All that I want
Is to wake up fine
Tell me that I'm all right
That I ain't gonna die
All that I want
Is a hole in the ground
You can tell me when it's all right
For me to come out

[Chorus]

(Hard times) Gonna make you wonder why you even try
(Hard times) Gonna take you down and laugh when you cry
(These lives) And I still don't know how I even survive
(Hard times)
(Hard times)
And I gotta get to rock bottom (Oof!)

[Verse 2]

Walking around
With my little rain cloud
Hanging over my head
And it ain't coming down
Where do I go?
Gimme some sort of sign
You hit me with lightning!
Maybe I'll come alive

[Chorus]

(Hard times) Gonna make you wonder why you even try
(Hard times) Gonna take you down and laugh when you cry
(These lives) And I still don't know how I even survive
(Hard times)
(Hard times)
And I gotta hit rock bottom (Oof!)

[Bridge]

Tell my friends I'm coming down
We'll kick it when I hit the ground
Tell my friends I'm coming down
We'll kick it when I hit the ground
When I hit the ground
When I hit the ground
When I hit the ground
When I hit the ground

[Chorus] x2

(Hard times) Gonna make you wonder why you even try
(Hard times) Gonna take you down and laugh when you cry
(These lives) And I still don't know how I even survive
(Hard times) Hard times
(Hard times) Hard times

“Rose-Colored Boy” Lyrics

[Intro]

Low-key, no pressure
Just hang with me and my weather
Low-key, no pressure
Just hang with me and my weather

[Verse 1]

Rose-colored boy
I hear you making all that noise
About the world you want to see
And oh, I'm so annoyed
'Cause I just killed off what was left of
The optimist in me

[Pre-Chorus]

But hearts are breaking, and wars are raging on
And I have taken my glasses off
You got me nervous
I'm right at the end of my rope
A half empty girl
Don't make me laugh, I'll choke

[Chorus]

Just let me cry a little bit longer
I ain't gon' smile if I don't want to
Hey, man, we all can't be like you
I wish we were all rose-colored too
My rose-colored boy

[Post-Chorus]

Low-key, no pressure
Just hang with me and my weather

[Verse 2]

I want you to stop insisting that I'm not
A lost cause, 'cause I've been through a lot
Really all I've got is just to stay pissed off
If it's all right by you

[Pre-Chorus]

But hearts are breaking, and wars are raging on
And I have taken my glasses off
You got me nervous
And you're turning it into a joke
A half empty girl
Don't make me laugh, I'll...

[Chorus]

Just let me cry a little bit longer
I ain't gon' smile if I don't want to
Hey, man, we all can't be like you
I wish we were all rose-colored too
My rose-colored boy

[Bridge]

(Hm, hm, hm, hm)
(Hoo-hoo-hoo)
Leave me here a little bit longer
I think I wanna stay in the car
I don't want anybody seeing me cry now
You say “We gotta look on the bright side”
I say “Well, maybe if you wanna go blind”
You say “My eyes are getting too dark now”
But boy, you ain't ever seen my mind

[Chorus]

Just let me cry a little bit longer
I ain't gon' smile if I don't want to
Hey, man, we all can't be like you
I wish we were all rose-colored too
My rose-colored boy
Just let me cry a little bit longer
I ain't gon' smile if I don't want to
I know we all can't be like you
I wish we were all rose-colored too
My rose-colored boy

[Outro]

Low-key, no pressure
Just hang with me and my weather
Low-key, no pressure
Just hang with me and my weather

“Fake Happy” Lyrics

[Intro]

I love making you believe
What you get is what you see
But I'm so fake happy
I feel so fake happy
And I bet everybody here
Is just as insincere
We're all so fake happy
And I know fake happy

[Verse 1]

So I been doin' a good job
Of makin' 'em think
I'm quite alright
Better hope I don't blink
You see, it's easy when I'm stompin' on a beat
But no one sees me when I crawl back underneath

[Pre-Chorus]

Hey, if I smile with my teeth
Bet you believe me
If I smile with my teeth
I think I believe me

[Chorus]

Oh please, don't ask me how I've been
Don't make me play pretend
Oh no, oh what's the use?
Oh please, I bet everybody here is fake happy too

[Verse 2]

And if I go out tonight
And dress up my fears
You think I look alright with these mascara tears?
See, I'm gonna draw up my lipstick wider than my mouth
And if the lights are low, they'll never see me frown

[Pre-Chorus]

Hey, if I smile with my teeth
Bet you believe me
If I smile with my teeth
I think I believe me

[Chorus]

Oh please, don't ask me how I've been
Don't make me play pretend
Oh no, oh oh, what's the use?
Oh please, I bet everybody here is fake happy too

[Bridge]

I know I said that I was doing good and that I'm happy now
Ooh ooh
I shoulda known when things were going good
That's when I'd get knocked down
Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba
Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba
Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba
Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba
Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba
Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba
Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba
Ba-da-ba-da-ba-ba

[Chorus]

Oh please, just don't ask me how I've been
Don't make me play pretend
Oh no, oh no
Oh, what's the use?
Oh please, I bet everybody here is fake happy too
Oh please, I bet everybody here is fake happy too

[Outro]

Carlos

Appendix C: Architects Lyrics

"Hereafter" Lyrics

[Intro]
Now the oceans have drained out
Can I come up for air?
'Cause I've been learning to live without
And I'm fighting with broken bones

[Verse 1]
I wasn't ready for the rapture, we're only passing through
But these words, they mean nothing to me
I know that time will mend this fracture, I've been lost in a maze
And every route I take, leads right back to you

[Chorus]
Now the oceans have drained out
Can I come up for air?
'Cause I've been learning to live without
And I'm fighting with broken bones
Now the skies have been blacked out
I've got to find my way
'Cause it's been raining but there's a drought
And I'm fighting with broken bones

[Verse 2]
I've been searching through the wreckage
But it's like standing in the eye of a storm
When will I finally get the message?
Some things are broken beyond repair
This is my cross to bear
My own meaningless catastrophe
I never had the time to prepare
Because I never knew that all my nightmares could come true

[Chorus]
Now the oceans have drained out
Can I come up for air?
'Cause I've been learning to live without
And I'm fighting with broken bones
Now the skies have been blacked out
I've got to find my way
'Cause it's been raining but there's a drought
And I'm fighting with broken bones

[Bridge]
I've spent my fair share
In the deepest depths of despair
'Cause I was too lost down there to care
I wasn't braced for the fallout
I wasn't braced for the fallout
I've been searching through the wreckage
But it's like standing in the eye of a storm

When will I finally get the message?
Some things are broken beyond repair

[Chorus]
Now the oceans have drained out
Can I come up for air?
'Cause I've been learning to live without
And I'm fighting with broken bones
Now the skies have been blacked out
I've got to find my way
'Cause it's been raining but there's a drought
And I'm fighting with broken bones

“Doomsday” Lyrics

[Verse 1]
Remember when Hell had frozen over?
The cold still burns underneath my skin
The water is rising all around me
And there is nothing left I can give
All these tears I've shed
I saw the wildfire spread
You said you cheated death
But Heaven was in my head

[Chorus]
They say "the good die young"
No use in saying "what is done is done" 'cause it's not enough
And when the night gives way
It's like a brand new doomsday
What will be will be
Every river flows into the sea, but it's never enough
And when the night gives way
It's like a brand new doomsday

[Post-Chorus]
No matter what they say
It's like a brand new doomsday

[Verse 2]
The embers still glow when I'm sober
The gold in the flame burns brighter now
I have to rebuild, now it's over
Maybe now I'm lost, I can live
Souls don't break, they bend
But I sometimes forget
I have to do this for you
And the only way out is through
Yeah, death is an open door

[Bridge]
Words the prophets said
Still swimming through my head
Now there's no stars left in the sky
'Cause this well will never run dry
What if I completely forget?
What if I never accept?
'Cause when you fade away
It's like a brand new doomsday
Yeah

[Chorus]
They say "the good die young"
No use in saying "what is done is done" 'cause it's not enough
And when the night gives way
It's like a brand new doomsday
What will be will be

Every river flows into the sea, but it's never enough
And when the night gives way
It's like a brand new doomsday

[Post-Chorus]
No matter what they say
It's like a brand new doomsday

“Modern Misery” Lyrics

[Intro]
Seven billion hungry ghosts
Just a parasite killing its host
The emperor wears no clothes, I see those brittle bones
But we're buried by modern misery
Modern misery

[Verse 1]
There's not enough water in the world
To wash the blood from our hands
We planted a seed, its roots will suffocate the soul
It grows without light and feeds from our bones
Hell must be empty, all the devils are here
Singing us the Lord's Prayer; finally, something that we all share

[Pre-Chorus 1]
I won't go to the grave with the song still in me

[Chorus]
What are we hiding in the rain?
This is a prison for lost souls
Another life circles the drain
We used to run with the wolves
Now we can't see the forest
'Cause there's no light in the black hole
Don't try and tell me we are blessed
We used to run with the wolves

[Verse 2]
Are these our new messiahs?
'Cause the saviour has a gun to my head
Don't be fooled by Maya, the kings are all thieves
And the serpents will bite as they please
How has it come to this?

[Pre-Chorus 2]
I won't go to the grave with the song still in me
And I won't live like a slave begging from my knees

[Chorus]
What are we hiding in the rain?
This is a prison for lost souls
Another life circles the drain
We used to run with the wolves
Now we can't see the forest
'Cause there's no light in the black hole
Don't try and tell me we are blessed
We used to run with the wolves

[Bridge]
Seven billion hungry ghosts
Just a parasite killing its host

The emperor wears no clothes, I see those brittle bones
But we're buried by modern misery
Modern misery
I won't live like a slave, I won't beg from my knees
I will not go to the grave with the song still in me

[Outro]
We used to run with the wolves
We used to run with the wolves
We used to run with the wolves
We used to run with the wolves

Appendix D: Abstract

Popular music's broad reach in contemporary Western society is undeniable, making it a particularly useful tool for cultural commentary and for facilitating changes in perspective. This thesis investigates popular music's role within mental health discourse. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), about 17.7 million adults in the United States have experienced at least one major depressive episode in 2018. The prevalence of depression in the West is already alarming but is oftentimes underreported due to the associated stigma. Although scholarship already exists on the relationship between music and mental health, contemporary popular music and its connection with depression, particularly from a gender studies perspective, has yet to be explored in greater detail. This thesis will attempt to bridge this research gap. Sellnow and Sellnow's (2001) "illusion of life" rhetorical perspective will be utilized to explore expressions of depression in the music and lyrics of selected songs from three popular music artists: Julien Baker, Paramore, and Architects. The analyses reveal the ways in which these songs function to mitigate the stigma around depression, as well as consider the effects that societal expectations and "traditional" gender roles have on mental health. By representing depression in a realistic and relatable way, encouraging empathy and hope, and providing a sense of connection, these songs can act as therapeutic tools. In addition, a brief discussion of the audience response to the songs, with examples collected from Twitter, provides another example of the ways in which popular music can provide comfort in times of hardship.

Keywords: Depression, illusion of life, popular music, Julien Baker, Paramore, Architects, gender roles

Appendix E: Zusammenfassung

Die Reichweite zeitgenössischer Populärmusik in der modernen westlichen Welt ist unbestreitbar groß, wodurch die in den Songs häufig transportierten Kommentare zu Kultur und Gesellschaft besonders weite Verbreitung und auch Anerkennung finden können, um auf diese Weise sogar die Sichtweisen des Hörers/der Hörerin zu schärfen oder gar zu verändern. Diese Arbeit soll die Rolle und den Einfluss der Populärmusik auf den gesellschaftlichen Diskurs über die seelische Gesundheit und psychische Erkrankungen untersuchen. Laut der National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) haben in den Vereinigten Staaten allein im Jahr 2018 17,7 Millionen Erwachsene zumindest eine Episode einer Major Depression durchgemacht. Auch in der restlichen westlichen Welt ist die Prävalenz dieser psychischen Erkrankung ähnlich alarmierend hoch, und das obwohl es gleichzeitig wegen des noch immer verbreiteten gesellschaftlichen Stigmas eine noch viel höhere Dunkelziffer zu geben scheint. Zwar wurden bereits einige Studien über das prinzipielle Verhältnis und den Zusammenhang von Musik und seelischer Gesundheit veröffentlicht, eine genauere Analyse von Populärmusik und ihres Konnexes zu Depressionen, insbesondere mit einem dezidierten Gender-Ansatz, fehlte jedoch bis dato. Mit dieser Arbeit soll daher auch dieser bisher blinde Fleck erschlossen werden. Mithilfe des im Paper „illusion of life“ von Sellnow und Sellnow (2001) postulierten rhetorischen Ansatzes, Musik als Form der Kommunikation zu verstehen, werden in dieser Arbeit unterschiedliche Arten für Ausdruck, Wiedergabe und Zur-Sprache-Bringen von Depression durch Musik und Text in ausgesuchten Liedern der drei Populärmusikkünstler Julien Baker, Paramore und Architects analysiert. Dabei werden die Art und Weise präsentiert, mit denen durch diese Songs das Stigma der Depression abgemildert und der Einfluss von gesellschaftlichem Druck, kollektiver Erwartung und traditionellen Rollenbildern auf die seelische Gesundheit aufgezeigt werden. In diesen Liedern wird die Depression realistisch und nachvollziehbar dargestellt, wodurch dem/der Hörer*in Empathie entgegengebracht und Hoffnung gegeben werden, sie fühlen sich verbunden und verstanden. Insofern können diese Songs therapeutisch wirken, beziehungsweise einen therapeutischen Effekt haben. Die entsprechende Rezeption durch das Publikum wird durch Auszüge aus beispielhaften Postings auf der Plattform Twitter untermauert und auf diese aufbauend jene Möglichkeiten diskutiert, durch die Populärmusik in schwierigen Zeiten Trost spenden kann.

Schlagwörter: Depression, illusion of life, Popmusik, Julien Baker, Paramore, Architects, Geschlechterrollen