

## Using Music to Teach Theories in an Introductory Family Science Course

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**ABSTRACT.** Family theory provides a critical foundation for learning in family science education, but learning about theories can be perceived as difficult and for students. Previous scholarship on strategies for teaching family theories has not included the use of music. Analysis of music could help understanding and application of theoretical content to relationships. This article presents an innovative activity for teaching family theories to major and non-major undergraduates in an introductory family science course. The activity's goal is to engage students in a learning process that supports their abilities to make meaningful connections to the content. Results of a quasi-experimental evaluation suggest that this music activity facilitated student engagement and application. Students who participated in the exercise found family theories more meaningful to their studies and personal lives than did students who did not participate.

*Keywords:* teaching theory, family science, and music

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### **Using Music to Teach Theories in an Introductory Family Science Course**

Undergraduate family science programs typically teach students about a variety of family theories that ground students in an understanding of family and family science scholarship. Although theories of family dynamics have important content, students often see them as very challenging to comprehend. (Daly, 1990). This challenge makes teaching more difficult when instructors strive to increase students' understanding and application of family theory. In the past, scholars suggested various teaching methods to assist students in learning family theory (Daly, 1990; Maynard, 1996; Murray, Lampinen, & Kelley-Soderholm, 2006; Murry, Rosenblatt, & Wieling, 2005). This article expands these methods to include the modality of music, which is absent from previous scholarship. Here, music is used as a means to connect various family theories to relationship dynamics in classroom settings. A quasi-experimental evaluation provides further evidence of the music-based activity's usefulness to providing context for theoretical discussion and engagement connected to deeper understanding of course material among majors and non-majors.

### **Importance of Family Theory in Classroom Settings**

Theories help organize scientific thoughts and are developed to explain social phenomena (Smith & Hamon, 2012). Within family science, theories formulate research questions and drive scholarly inquiry. There are many reasons family theory is important to the field of family science; one of these reasons involves their capacity to help scholars and practitioners frame family processes and interactions by serving as the lenses through which to understand families. Consequently, a grasp of family theory facilitates understanding of families. A foundation in family theory can be a conduit for conducting and evaluating family research and scholarship (Murry et al., 2005). Practitioners can use theoretical understanding to conceptualize their work

with families. Because the aforementioned activities are required of the field's practitioners and researchers, family theory is integral to undergraduate family science education (Gunnell, 2000). A firm grasp of family theory allows students to engage more effectively with other family professionals, whether at professional conferences or during internships, and establishes needed roots for advanced family science study.

### **Teaching Family Theory**

Despite the importance of family theory within a family science curriculum, scholars only began to address how to teach family theory in recent decades. Twenty-five years ago, Daly (1990) noted the dearth of attention to teaching students family theory. Since that time the scholarship of teaching family science has grown and has included more attention to teaching family theory. Much of this scholarship relates to decisions facing instructors of family theory courses, including (a) deciding which theories to teach, (b) getting students to buy into learning

about family theory, (c) choosing textbooks, and (d) considering how instructors' histories influence which theories they teach (Daly, 1990; Fine & Fincham, 2013; Maynard, 1996; Murray et al., 2006; Murry et al., 2005).

Theory serves as a foundation for family science education, providing a structure that academic programs expect students will carry throughout coursework and internships to post-graduation employment experiences. Thus, family theory content must be taught effectively across curricula to ensure concepts are understood and made meaningful in various educational settings. Gunnell (2000) found the strongest predictor of students' uses of family theory was linked directly to their professors' uses of theory. Students' future uses of family theory correlated to their current uses of family theory (Gunnell, 2000). Effectiveness in this area may be essential to positive teaching and learning outcomes.

### **Difficulty of Family Theory**

Many undergraduate students often regard learning about theory as a daunting task (Lowney, 1998). One can say the same about undergraduates in family science courses who are often attracted to the discipline because of its applied nature and interpersonal focus. These students often view theories as abstract and confusing upon their initial exposure, which can make grasping theoretical tenets difficult (West, 2005). Despite roadblocks to student comprehension, family theory remains crucial to family science education; most undergraduate programs require that students take a family theory course (Gunnell, 2000).

Just as students confront the complexity of learning family theory, faculty face the difficult task of teaching family theory to students in ways to help their understanding (Maynard, 1996). Since family theory serves as the foundation to understanding the discipline and as scaffolding for disciplinary content, the stakes of teaching family theory appear to be higher than for other courses. Consequently, instructors who teach family theory without access to innovative, varied teaching methods risk experiencing instructor fatigue (Maynard, 1996).

### **Methods of Teaching Family Theory**

Family scholars have used various methods to teach family theory (see Daly, 1990 and Murry, Rosenblatt, & Wieling, 2005 for a variety of exercises). These methods reflect influence of a growing body of scholarship related to teaching family science. Using film has been widely popular and frequently suggested way to teach family theories (Maynard, 1996). Murry, Rosenblatt, & Wieling (2005) suggest analyzing specific historical events to emphasize context when teaching family theory. Incorporation of service-learning projects has also been purported to support the teaching of family systems theory (Murray et al., 2006). More recently, Fine and Fincham (2013) suggested a content-based approach as a means to deeper understanding of family theory. Despite past contributions of family scholars, there has been no explicit

exploration of the medium of music as a conduit toward student comprehension and application of family theory in the undergraduate classroom.

### **The Potential Use of Music to Connect Students with Theory**

Music has been a mainstay in popular culture; research shows music has positive benefits in a host of environments (Allen & Wood, 2013). Recently, science has given more serious consideration to the impact music has on the mind (Simmons-Stern, Budson, & Ally, 2010). Moreover, music has been called a universal and culturally specific experience (Allen & Wood, 2013) with a unifying component that can serve to bridge differences. The use of music as a teaching tool has promise to fill increasing diversity gaps present in college classrooms (Johns & Sipp, 2004).

Today, classrooms today include many millennial students whose existence often centers on audio and visual technology (McGlynn, 2012). Music and song lyrics are more accessible to them than they were to past generations. In particular, the Internet has allowed access to music genres outside the mainstream or host culture, allowing instructors and students to become more globally connected. Equipment used for listening to and storing music is also much more affordable and accessible than it was in the past. Integrating music into the classroom in meaningful ways can address the diversity and needs of auditory learners effectively.

However, there has been no empirical exploration of music as a means to teach family theory. In fact, family science educators seldom view music as a “go-to” strategy, relying instead on films, case studies, and other application exercises. More broadly, music is not fully integrated into higher education settings as a teaching method, outside of specific courses in music or music theory (Biamonte, 2001). Contrasting with its lack of representation in family science, music is documented as a strategy for teaching theory in other social sciences (Ahlkvist, 1999; Ahlkvist, 2001; Walczak & Reuter, 1994; Elterman, 1983), most recently in criminal justice (Hinds-Aldrich, 2012; Lenning, 2012; Rothe & Collins, 2013). Lenning (2012) found students could understand theory more effectively and had improved abilities to apply theory to “everyday experience” by using various popular music genres to teach sociology and criminology theories (p. 261). Furthermore, Rothe and Collins (2013) observed that students experienced increased levels of positive engagement and enjoyment when instructors used music as a pedagogical tool to teach theory:

Many students felt that having media examples made the material more relatable to them, and aided in their understanding of the material. This would suggest that by bringing theory in from the realm of the abstract, students not only grasp its meaning more readily, but can better see its use through its application (p. 236).

In these examples, music facilitated theory comprehension and use beyond the classroom – a goal of family theory instruction within family science programs. Given increased diversity within higher education and greater access to a variety of musical genres, using music as a

teaching tool could prove a valuable resource in family science classrooms. This literature shaped development and conducting of a classroom exercise using music analysis with mixed-major undergraduate students. The purpose of this study was to explore the potential use of music to connect undergraduate students with theoretical principles in an engaging, meaningful way.

### **Theoretical Analysis of Music Exercise**

In addition to detailing the theories and music class exercise, this section reports on a quasi-experimental multi-classroom evaluation study of the activity.

### **Sampling**

Data collection for this inquiry took place in the spring of 2015 in a family science department at a four-year university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. In this family science department, seven different full and part-time faculty members taught 12 sections of an introductory family science course. Upon approval by the university's Institutional Review Board, one faculty member teaching four sections of the introductory course agreed to participate. Two sections were identified as the experimental group for participation in the music exercise; altogether, 70 students were enrolled in those courses and eligible to participate. The other two sections were identified as the control group; the control group also included 70 students for a total possible participation rate of  $n = 140$ . Designation of the experimental and control groups was based on the primary instructor's preferred timings for the courses.

The principal investigator joined students in their classrooms during their regularly scheduled class meetings to provide a brief description of the project. Consent forms were not required because this project included only students age 18 or older and guaranteed anonymity of participant responses. However, students were reminded that, as with any in-class activity, their participation was voluntary and they were free to decline participation without penalty. Students in the experimental group were told in advance to expect a guest lecturer who would cover basic theoretical concepts during two class meeting times. To decrease the possibility that students would perceive coercion, the course's primary instructor was not invited to attend lectures. Ultimately, the study included 118 participants with 64 students in the experimental group and 54 students in the control group.

### **Study Design**

The course instructor and the principal investigator for this project had several conversations about the use of theory in class, including the topic of when and how the course instructor typically introduced theory to students. There was agreement that the principal investigator would use the music activity to supplement two 50-minute lectures about six different kinds of family theory: (a) structural functionalism, (b) family lifecourse development, (c) social exchange, (d) symbolic interactionism, (e) conflict, and (f) feminist. The primary

instructor identified these theories as integral to her typical course delivery. The experimental group received a lecture about theories delivered by the principal investigator and supplemented by the music activity during two fifty-minute class periods. The primary instructor integrated theory for the control group over the course of the semester, introducing key terms and concepts when these were most applicable to the course content.

Pre-test questionnaires for students in the experimental group included closed-ended demographic items on sex, age, race/ethnicity, class standing, and major. Students also were asked whether they had completed the reading assignment before participation. Students identified how important they thought theories were for understanding relationships (ranging from 0 = not at all important to 4 = extremely important) and were asked to indicate all that applied to the statement *I anticipate that learning about family theories will be* 1) boring, 2) difficult, 3) exciting, 4) confusing, 5) fun, 6) interesting, 7) a waste of my time, 8) easy, 9) meaningful for my major, and 10) meaningful for my life.

After completing pre-test questionnaires, students engaged in the exercise; post-test questionnaires were completed at the end of the second day of the activity. The post-test questionnaire included open and closed-ended questions that asked students to (a) rate their enjoyment of the activity (ranging from 0 = not at all enjoyable to 4 = extremely enjoyable), (b) to state how helpful the activity was for understanding theoretical concepts and (separately) for applying theoretical concepts to relationships (ranging from 0 = not at all helpful to 4 = extremely helpful), and (c) to state how important they thought theories were for understanding relationships (ranging from 0 = not at all important to 4 = extremely important). They were also asked to indicate all that applied to the statement *Learning about family theories was* 1) boring, 2) difficult, 3) exciting, 4) confusing, 5) fun, 6) interesting, 7) a waste of my time, 8) easy, 9) meaningful for my major, and 10) meaningful for my life. Finally, students were asked whether they would recommend this activity for other introductory family science courses and why or why not.

Students in the control group completed questionnaires in the fourteenth week of the semester, after the primary instructor for the course had finished lecture topics that infused theory throughout the semester. Students in the control group answered the same closed-ended demographic items. Control group students were also asked to indicate all that applied to the statement *Learning about family theories was* 1) boring, 2) difficult, 3) exciting, 4) confusing, 5) fun, 6) interesting, 7) a waste of my time, 8) easy, 9) meaningful for my major, and 10) meaningful for my life.

### **The Exercise**

The music exercise was conducted with the experimental group over the course of two fifty-minute class meeting times. This activity began with a brief introduction defining the term *theory* and description of the use of basic assumptions, concepts, and propositions in theories. The next 30 minutes included description of central tenets, distinguishing features, and abbreviated criticisms of structural functionalism, family lifecourse development, and social

exchange theories (with each theory receiving about 10 minutes of attention). Next was an explanation that the class was going to practice identifying theoretical concepts by analyzing music. Students used note-taking sheets distributed at the beginning of the lecture to record thoughts as they listened.

Several songs were pre-selected for use along with the six theories presented during the two-day exercise. These songs were selected for (a) potential relatability to each family theory, and (b) their diverse stylings including folk, soul, rhythm and blues, indie, pop, reggae, and rock designations. Four songs were pre-selected for the first day of the activity: “Cat’s in the Cradle” (Chapin & Chapin, 1974), performed by Harry Chapin; the radio-edited version of “Forget You” (Hernandez, Callaway, Lawrence, Brown, & Levine, 2010), performed by Cee-Lo Green; “Bills Bills Bills” (Knowles et al., 1999), performed by Destiny’s Child; and “Family Portrait” (Moore & Storch, 2001), performed by Pink. Students were invited to select which songs they were most interested in exploring with the use of theory.

The first song students selected for analysis was “Cat’s in the Cradle” (Chapin & Chapin, 1974); the majority of students had heard the song before but said they could not recall what it was about. The song is sung in the first-person by a father who is too busy with work to spend time with his young son when he asks his father to play; undeterred, the young son begins modeling his father’s parenting style. In the third verse of the song the father describes his desire to spend time with his son, who has recently returned home from college; his son declines. The family storyline advances a number of years in the final verse, to the point when the father describes his life in retirement. He calls his son, now a grown man with a wife and child of his own, on the telephone and asks his son to visit him; the son answers that he will visit when he can find the time. At the end of the song, the father reflects on how his son, whom he loves and who loves him, has grown up to be “just like” him. The song was accessed via YouTube; the investigators used a video version of the song that included lyrics so that students could listen to and read the words as the song played.

Students were prompted to consider which of the three theories described earlier in the class (structural functionalism, family lifecourse development, and social exchange) could be used to interpret “Cat’s in the Cradle” (Chapin & Chapin, 1974). First, students identified central elements of family life course development, which emphasizes how families change over time through predictable stages. Listeners witnessed several stages of the Family Life Cycle in the song’s story as the young son grows up and moves away from home and his father retires. Student applications of this theory also incorporated analysis of different meanings that father and son attached to their individual and family changes. Discussion then shifted to structural functional interpretations of the song. Students maintained that although the father was emotionally unavailable to his son during childhood, this was not, theoretically, the father’s family role. Instead, the father was best serving his family and society as a whole by working in an instrumental capacity. Structural functional family theory would have listeners presume that the son’s mother is present and fulfilling her gender-ascribed role as an expressive, nurturing caretaker, so there should be no concerns about the son’s emotional needs going unmet. From a

structural functional perspective, the family dynamics the song described were healthy and functional.

During the time remaining in the lecture hour, students were asked to pick a second song from the pre-determined list and to consider once again which of the three theories described that day could be used for analysis. Students selected “Forget You” (Hernandez et al., 2010), the radio-edited version that does not include the original track’s expletives; every student in the class had heard the song before. The lyrical story is told in the first-person by a man who has recently experienced the breakup of a heterosexual romantic relationship. He describes his former girlfriend as someone who had more expensive preferences and expectations for the relationship than he was able to provide, indicating that his inability to meet her expectations was why she ended the relationship. Again, this involved using an open-access version of the song via YouTube that included lyrics so students could listen to and read the song’s words.

Students were able to connect social exchange theory to “Forget You” quickly (Hernandez et al., 2010), identifying that the theoretical goal of interactions between people is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. The ex-girlfriend the singer described must have determined that the resources he brought to the relationship were insufficient, that she was losing out as they traded resources in their interactions, and therefore decided to end the relationship. Students described the ex-girlfriend as the one with power in the situation because she had resources (presumably, according to students, youth and good looks) that the singer wanted but could not match with his resources. The girlfriend used her power to break up with him and move on to someone else with more/better/different assets that she found commensurate with hers. Students were also able to apply structural functional family theory to the song successfully. From a structural functional perspective, the couple central to the song appears to be married. The singer is ostensibly performing his ascribed functional role but the wife is not; she has neglected her functional expressive role by leaving the family unit and by not supporting her husband’s attempts to provide for his family. According to student analyses, the wife the song’s narrator describes needs to set aside her preferences for a more extravagant lifestyle and to maintain a home that is within the family provider’s financial means.

The next time the class met was for a second 50-minute session in which three new family theories were introduced: symbolic interactionism, conflict, and feminist. Again, a short list of songs was pre-selected for potential relevance to theories presented: “Sorry” (Hemphill, 2006), performed by SOJA; “Pumped Up Kicks” (Foster, 2010), performed by Foster the People; and “Runaway Love” (Bridges, Davis, Hilson, Jones, & Walters, 2006), performed by Ludacris featuring Mary J. Blige. Students decided to analyze “Sorry” (Hemphill, 2006) first; this song is a first-person plea for forgiveness from the male singer to his lover. The singer repeatedly apologizes to his lover “...for whatever it was I always did...” to upset their relationship. Students debated and determined collectively that symbolic interaction was the best theory to apply. They noted that the theory’s emphasis on subjective meaning and on how individuals convey meaning could be helpful for understanding how the couple in the song had miscommunicated. The lover must not have communicated what s/he was upset about and the singer was unsure of what he was supposed to be apologizing for. Because the two lovers lacked

shared meaning about the trigger that caused the relationship disruption, they were unable to define the situation clearly. The resulting plea for forgiveness was heartfelt but empty because the singer could not identify what the initial problem was in the first place.

“Pumped Up Kicks” was the second song students chose to analyze (Foster, 2010). This song’s particularly upbeat tempo masks lyrics that provide a third-person description of youth violence. The narrator describes a boy, Robert, as someone who struggles in family and peer relationships; lyrics allude to late nights alone at home when Robert, who may have mental health problems, finds a gun he plans to use on “all the other kids.” Students interpreted the song using conflict theory most often, noting that Robert’s decision to harm his peers was influenced by external societal forces such as stigma associated with poverty and mental health, over which he may have no control. They described a boy who plans to use violence on “all the other kids” (noting that Robert is not included with the *other* kids) wearing “pumped up kicks,” or fancy shoes, that he does not have. Students also realized that the shoes symbolically represented a higher socio-economic situation that was out of Robert’s reach. Using conflict and feminist family theories, students concluded that Robert’s experience of oppression as a social and economic minority exacerbated the situation.

The exercise concluded with group analysis of “Settle Down” (Tetaz & Johnson, 2010) performed by Kimbra. The principal investigator pre-selected “Settle Down” specifically as the ideal finale for the activity because students could have analyzed the song using all six of the theories described during the two-day lecture. Song lyrics were distributed to students in advance because unlike other songs used in the activity, the official music video accompanying the song provided additional meaningful content open to theoretical interpretation.

Analysis of “Settle Down” (Tetaz & Johnson, 2010) proved the most complex because students critiqued the lyrics and music video using structural functionalism, family lifecourse development, social exchange, symbolic interactionism, conflict, and feminist family theory. This song presents a first-person narrative by a woman describing for her male counterpart her desire to solidify their relationship via marriage and childrearing. As the song progresses the singer warns the object of her affection to run from “Angela Vickers,” described as someone who has a fancy car and the ability to separate the male from the singer. Next, the singer uses a nursery rhyme to allude to wishing on a star that her lover will stay with her in lieu of running away with Angela Vickers. The singer concludes with a request that her lover propose to her on bended knee so they can make their vows and settle down together. The song expresses reverence for marriage and childrearing without indicating explicitly whether the singer and her male counterpart are already married, or whether the song is a plea for them to return to the marriage and behave more as she feels married couples should.

The music video for “Settle Down” (Tetaz & Johnson, 2010) begins with a distinctive male voice-over narrator asking, “*Is the sweetheart you married the husband you expected him to be?*” The singer is introduced with descriptions of her wearing a little black dress, standing on a stage with red curtains; in the background are three rows of shelves on which porcelain dolls are displayed. Next, a young, well-dressed and groomed girl appears, sitting at a dining room table

and mouthing the singer's request for her male counterpart to "settle down." The male is depicted at the other end of the table; he poses mannequin-like, unresponsive to her request with his face looking away from hers. Next, viewers see the young girl brushing her hair, looking in a mirror and daydreaming about raising a child while her male counterpart sleeps in a bed behind her. The scene changes to the singer standing onstage; the camera focuses on three of the porcelain dolls on the shelves.

The next scene depicts Angela Vickers and the male sitting on a blanket in a field having a picnic. The young girl describing her desire to settle down watches the interaction between Angela and the male from behind a tree in the distance; again, the male is depicted as a mannequin, disconnected from his surroundings. Time has passed since viewers first met the couple because the young girl poses in front of a blue stroller as she watches the interaction. Angela Vickers is well-dressed and fingers the pearl necklace she wears as the singer describes her as having a fancy car. The girl mouthing the lyrics (still unnamed) and Angela Vickers look quite similar; both are young girls with long, light hair and similar facial features. Viewers then see the young girl at home scrubbing floors, vacuuming, dusting, feverishly reading a cook book, and preparing dinner; the scene is set against a lyrical nursery rhyme where the singer wishes upon a star for the male to stay in the relationship. Again, the young girl sits in front of a mirror, putting on a pearl necklace like Angela Vickers's.

The scene shifts to the young girl seated at the same dinner table depicted at the beginning of the video, but this time she expresses her desire to settle down to a full dinner plate and empty chair at the table, because her male counterpart is not present. Viewers next see the singer onstage. Both young girls depicted in the story join the singer onstage. They are dressed in white nightgowns, no longer in adult attire. The girls and the singer dance to lyrics that once again describe the young girl's desire to settle down and her wish for the couple to remain together. As the two girls and the singer dance, the porcelain dolls on the shelves in the background burst into flames. The video ends with the three women standing onstage, no longer dancing, as the dolls continue burning.

Students engaged in lengthy, fruitful discussions of many possible theoretical interpretations of the lyrics and music video for "Settle Down" (Tetaz & Johnson, 2010). The following descriptions highlight some of the most frequent applications. Students first used structural functionalism to describe the video's depiction of an idealized heterosexual married couple, where the wife performs her ascribed functional role as homemaker and caregiver to a child. Using this theoretical perspective, students presumed the husband also performed his ascribed functional role as breadwinner. Students described the young girl as striving to maintain conformity for the good of her family and society, desiring that her husband remain in their relationship and avoid adultery with Angela Vickers. Students also noted that lifecourse development theory helped them understand the song's emphasis on a nuclear, heterosexual family. Audiences witness the singer's desire to move through various developmental stages (i.e., marriage and childrearing) with her male counterpart. Using social exchange theory, students concluded that the male in the video conducted a cost-benefits analysis and determined that benefits of remaining committed to the young girl did not outweigh rewards of straying from

the relationship with another female. Students presumed that the other female, Angela Vickers, had more and/or better and/or different resources that the male found desirable.

The issues of resources and of how resources result in power differentials also led students to apply conflict theory. They found that each of the video's three characters had different goals and values and that the resources they brought to their interactions resulted in unequally distributed power. The male had the power in his relationship with the young girl depicted as his wife; Angela Vickers had the power in her relationship with the male. Students also applied symbolic interactionism to describing the video's use of a mannequin to represent the male. The song focuses on a young girl's interpretation of what it means to settle down, including marriage and childrearing. As she describes what their child would be named and what she would look like, she adds "...just so you know"; students interpreted this statement as reflecting the young girl's inability to imagine what her male counterpart might be desiring in the relationship, and how he may interpret the meaning of settling down differently. That is, the song represents only the female interpretation of settling down and ignores the male perspective; the male's depiction as a mannequin is emblematic of his lack of engagement in envisioning the family's future. According to students, the mannequin's lack of eye contact and position away from the conversation about settling down symbolized his lack of interest and shared meaning in the relationship. Visually, students interpreted the burning dolls as representative of the death of a young girl's childhood vision of what it means to be in a marriage. Ultimately, students used feminist family theory to interpret the song as a harsh critique of traditional marriage. Some highlighted potential radical feminist applications, contending that the male's dominance in the depicted family, and in society generally, was a major cause for oppression that both young girls experienced. They also noted that the song and video framed Angela Vickers as blameworthy for the extramarital relationships. The lyrical warning for the male to run from Angela Vickers implies she is at fault and the male is not responsible for his actions. Heard from a feminist perspective, the song stigmatizes Angela's use of resources to gain the male's affections as villainous

## Results

The final sample for the study included 118 participants with 54 participants in the control group and 64 students in the experimental group. Ninety-six participants were female (81.4%) and 22 were male (18.6%). Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 27 with 89% of students falling between 18 and 22 years of age. Of the 118 participants, 39 were freshmen (33%), 24 were sophomores (20.3%), 32 were juniors (27.1%), and 23 were seniors (19.5%). The highest percentage of students, 44.9% (53 students), were enrolled in majors in the College of Liberal Arts; only 25 participants (21.2%) identified majors or minors in the family science department. The remaining 65 students (78.8%) came from other colleges: 5 students (4.2%) were from the College of Business and Economics, 8 students (6.8%) were from the College of Science and Math, 11 students (9.3%) were from the College of Fine Arts and Communication, 12 students (10.2%) were from the College of Education, and 28 students (23.7%) were from the College of Health Professions. These demographics match typical demographics of the lower-

level introduction to family science course taught at the institution. The racial breakdown of the sample coincides with racial demographics of the larger campus community, with 65 participants (55.1%) identifying as White/non-Hispanic, 34 as Black or African-American (28.8%), 6 as Hispanic or Latina/o (5.1%), 6 as Asian, non-Hispanic (5.1%) and 6 identifying as multi-racial (5.1%).

The post-survey indicated that students generally found the music activity to be (a) enjoyable, (b) helpful in understanding theoretical concepts, (c) helpful for applying theoretical concepts to relationship dynamics, and (d) important for understanding relationships. In each area, all students indicated the activity was at least moderately, very, or extremely enjoyable, helpful, or important, while no students indicated the activity was not at all enjoyable, helpful, or important. Table 1 (p. 20) reports these results. A very large majority (61 of 64) of students indicated they would recommend the activity for other introduction to family science courses; only three students indicated that *maybe* they would recommend the activity, and no students indicated they *would not* recommend the activity.

Significant differences between the experimental group and the control group were found across several indicators. Pearson's Chi-square tests were used to determine the likelihood that students who participated in the music activity would indicate more positive perspectives on use of theories. There was significant association between the type of learning activity and whether or not students reported that learning about theories was boring ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 37.60, p < .001$ ). Students who participated in the music activity were 5.28 times more likely to indicate that learning about theories was exciting ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 9.27, p < .001$ ), 22 times more likely to indicate that learning about theories was fun ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 42.68, p < .001$ ), and 18.83 times more likely to find learning about theories interesting ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 29.84, p < .001$ ). Similarly, students in the control group who did not experience the music activity were 6.4 times more likely to indicate that learning about theories was confusing ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 9.39, p < .01$ ). No significant associations were found between the teaching method and students' perception of difficulty ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 2.586, p = .108$ ) or ease of learning theoretical concepts ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = .497, p = .481$ ).

While no one in the experimental or the control group indicated that learning theories was a *waste of their time*, significant association between the teaching method and students' perception of importance of theories was found. Students who participated in the music activity were 4.15 times more likely to indicate that theories are meaningful for their major ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 13.657, p < .001$ ) and 8.13 times more likely to indicate that theories are meaningful for their life ( $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 23.102, p < .001$ ). Considering that almost 40% of students in the experimental group were not social and/or behavioral science majors, finding family theories meaningful to their major and life is noteworthy.

A secondary analysis was conducted to determine whether there was significant association between whether students completed the assigned reading before class and any of the above indicators. No significant associations were found (Boring  $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = .752, p = .386$ ,

Exciting  $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = .963, p = .326$ , Fun  $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 3.047, p = .081$ , Interesting  $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 1.638, p = .201$ , Confusing  $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 1.494, p = .222$ , Important for their major  $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 1.663, p = .197$ , and Important for their life  $\chi^2(1, N = 118) = .120, p = .729$ ). Prior preparation for the class session did predict outcomes on these measures.

### Discussion

Theory is well understood to be an important topic in family science curricula. Its inclusion in a mixed-major lower-level survey course is important not only for introducing key theoretical terms and assumptions, but also for facilitating early understanding of theory's use in guiding research and practice. This article presents a classroom exercise that allowed students to apply theoretical constructs to relationships described in recent and contemporary music.

None of the students surveyed in either group reported that learning about families was a waste of time, which implied they generally understood theory's importance minimally to the course and potentially to the field at large. Students who participated in the activity, however, reported significantly more engagement in the learning process, and stated that the use of music made learning course material more fun and interesting. They also reported the activity to be helpful on one hand for understanding theoretical concepts and on the other for applying those concepts to relationships. Students who participated in the activity were also less likely to indicate that learning about theories was confusing. They were able to connect relatively abstract theoretical principles to relationships described in songs without having to rely on personal experiences or histories to illustrate important course content.

Students who participated in the music activity were four times more likely to report that theories are meaningful to their major, and eight times more likely to report that theories are meaningful to their lives, than were students who did not participate. This finding was particularly interesting in this sample, where almost 80% of participants were not in family science majors and 40% were not in social or behavioral science fields. Therefore, using music could be a helpful tool for reaching non-majors, especially those who may only have been interested in taking introductory courses to fulfill general education or minor requirements. If a student's ability to connect to and find meaning in course material indicates interest in the field of study, a music activity like the one described here could be a helpful recruitment tool. Students who feel engaged with and connected to course material may be more likely to enroll in additional family science courses. Moreover, when debate about relevance of family science as a field of inquiry occurs within contemporary academe, helping non-major students connect to family science content in meaningful ways could increase acceptance of the discipline among future professionals.

Although this study contributes to understanding of to use music to teach family theories in a multi-major introductory course, one should consider a possible limitation associated with delivery of content in the control group. Here, the experimental group received theory content

over the course of two days, while theoretical content was interspersed throughout the semester for the control group. Future scholars exploring the use of this activity or a similar one may want to deliver the control group's theoretical content over the same two-day period without the music element. Learning outcomes in lower-level family science courses also often include general reference to learners' abilities to demonstrate understanding of relevant methodologies, and/or more specifically, to articulate relevant basic assumptions, concepts, and theoretical constructs within the discipline. Music could serve as a useful conduit for connecting undergraduate students to roles that family theory has in understanding relationships and other social phenomena. Although assessment of learning outcomes was not a goal in this study, future exploration of music as a pedagogical tool for teaching family theories could focus on outcome measures of more specific learning goals in upper level courses.

The evaluation this article describes suggests that the music exercise provided valuable context for (a) applying theoretical concepts, (b) increased student engagement, and (c) discussing application in classroom environments. Students representing a variety of colleges found family theories meaningful for their majors and personal lives. Students found the exercise helpful and enjoyable, reporting they would recommend its use in other courses. Faculty may find the use of this music activity a helpful addition or alternative to more traditional teaching methods.

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Table 1

*Experimental Group's Post-Survey Frequencies*

How enjoyable was the activity? (N=64)	Not at all enjoyable 0	Somewhat enjoyable 0	Moderately enjoyable 8(12.5%)	Very enjoyable 42(65.6%)	Extremely enjoyable 14(21.9%)
How helpful was the activity for understanding theoretical concepts? (N=64)	Not at all helpful 0	Somewhat helpful 0	Moderately helpful 5(7.8%)	Very helpful 33(51.6%)	Extremely helpful 26(40.6%)
How important to do you think theories are for understanding relationships? (N=64)	Not at all important 0	Somewhat important 0	Moderately important 13(20.3%)	Very Important 30(46.9%)	Extremely important 21(32.8%)
How helpful was the activity for applying theoretical concepts to relationships? (N=64)	Not at all helpful 0	Somewhat helpful 0	Moderately helpful 9(14.1%)	Very helpful 30(46.9%)	Extremely helpful 25(39.1%)