A death in the "family": Community embodiment of tragedy

By: Justin Harmon

Abstract:

This manuscript explores how a tightknit music fan community responds to the suicide of one of its members. During the grieving process the music and music scene of the band Rust Forever are relied on for catharsis and healing, and the memories and legacy of the deceased are kept alive through the community's long-established bonds and commitment to helping one another through hard times. While the power and potential of music has been explored in other areas of healing and life transitions, its use in responding to tragedy is an underdeveloped area of investigation. Because suicide has such a traumatic impact on surviving loved ones, the conflict and blame that often accompany it were also present in this instance. This manuscript highlights the importance of close friends and meaningful leisure, particularly music, in the healing process associated with suicide, but also the ambiguity, stigma, and complicated emotions that accompany it.

Keywords: Suicide | music | coping | leisure | post-traumatic growth

Article:

Mickey and Mallory, a married couple in their early 40s, were the last people I interviewed for a larger study on the role of music in affecting quality of life. It was August of 2014 and we were in Black Water, Montana for the annual 'Smugglers' Run' of the band Rust Forever.[1] They were known to be 'that' couple who were always together. Fittingly, when I asked them if they listened to music more often separately or together, Mallory responded that they, 'were attached at the hip more than most people.' Mickey chimed in, adding, 'People joke about us having separation anxiety. Unless there is a real good reason to be apart, we're together.' Mickey and Mallory married less than three weeks after meeting and had been married for twenty years at the

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[1] A pseudonym.

time of interview. They had overcome some serious hardships in their life, including Mallory's father's passing from Alzheimer's, her slow-growing brain tumour, and the loss of their oldest daughter to leukemia. But through it all, they prevailed, and they did so together. They really did seem like the perfect couple in so many ways. Needless to say it was a shock when Mickey killed himself a little more than two years after that interview. – Vignette from the author's journal.

Introduction

Music consumption and fans' participation in the music scenes that form around a band or a genre have been identified as significant resources in maintaining a high quality of life (Boer et al. 2011; DeNora 2000; Harmon and Kyle 2016b; Moberg 2011; Ruud 1997). Related to this, it has been established that passionate fans of music have spiritual experiences through their personal interactions with music, thus causing them to feel more a part of the bigger picture (Gellel 2013; Harmon and Dox 2016; Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard, and Morgan 2010; Lynch 2006). Music is also known to be a forum ripe for building close-knit platonic friendships (Clay 2003; Harmon and Kyle 2016a; Laiho 2004; Lonsdale and North 2009), as well as romantic ones (Boer et al. 2011; Harmon 2016). Music is closely linked to sense of self and meaning making; many fans construct their identity through music over the course of their life (Bennett 2006; DeNora 1999; Kotarba 2002; Taylor 2010). Music communities have been examined for their potential to establish and reinforce the cultural practices and social processes of devoted music fans to their livelihood, thus bringing together many of the aforementioned singular explorations (Crossley and Bottero 2014; Hesmondhalgh 2005; Spracklen and Spracklen 2012). Bringing together the ephemeral aspects of live music, the nomadic tendencies of devoted music fans, and the self-defining qualities of the music they love, music communities provide a context for personal identity formation and the construction of lasting relationships with likeminded others that can provide a much-needed resource to rely on as one ages and deals with the tragedies, traumas, and hardships of life (Davis 2006; Driver and Bennett 2014; Taylor 2010).

While some studies have explored the negative aspects of music scene participation, whether through the ramifications of drug or alcohol use (Harmon 2017), or issues related to the societal stigma of maintaining participation in music scenes as one ages (Adams and Harmon 2014; Bennett 2013; Davis 2006; Kotarba 2005), there has been little effort to explore how tragedies affect fans and the communities they build through music. This study set out to explore how members of a music fan community responded to the suicide of one of their fellow fans. As part of this unforeseen tragedy, the cohesiveness and collective identity of the fan community was challenged. The question guiding this investigation was, how do community members respond to a tragedy like suicide?

Literature Review

At the 2016-2017 New Year's Eve run in Portland, Oregon, I bumped into Mickey on the first of three nights, and he was his usual inebriated self, but very anxious and melancholic, which was anathema to his usual jovial character. He couldn't really collect his thoughts or get his point across to me, but he kept saying, 'I fucked up. I fucked up.' I was able to decipher that whatever

he had done involved his wife, Mallory, but he wouldn't tell me what exactly. I assumed it was nothing too serious, as he went and stood near her, though she was unresponsive to his presence. On the second night Mallory came up to me and filled me in on the story that Mickey was unable to share: he had set up an alias email account and joined an online dating site; she had caught him red-handed. As far as she was concerned the marriage was over. And while it seems that it would have been better to keep this to themselves, Mallory was making sure that anyone who would listen would know how Mickey has trespassed on her love and trust. This caused much concern in the fan community. – Vignette from the author's journal.

Leisure and negative life events

Literature on the intersection of leisure and negative life events exists, but is limited in depth. Studies have been conducted on the ramifications of divorce (Iwasaki 2006), spinal cord injury (Iwasaki and Mannell 2000), cancer diagnosis and recovery (Glover and Parry 2008), and childhood trauma (Arai, Mock, and Gallant 2012), to name just a few. Kleiber, Hutchinson, and Williams (2002) put forth many questions regarding the implications of leisure in tragic and traumatic incidents, suggesting that there is much to be learned, though this remains an underdeveloped area of investigation. Kleiber et al. said that one's perception plays a powerful role in defining how a negative life event affects the trajectory of one's life course development going forward, and that restorative leisure activities may help to 'facilitate hope and alleviate depression' that comes with tragedies and traumas.

Janke and Jones (2016) said that leisure is a significant resource in the development and reconstruction of an individual's life stories in the coping and grieving periods following a trauma. Leisure can serve as a reminder of the good aspects of one's life, as well as signal the potential of the good that lies ahead (Kleiber and Hutchinson 2010). Kleiber, Hutchinson, and Williams (2002) outlined four propositions of leisure-based coping methods, two focusing on self-protection, and two focusing on self-restoration: leisure as a distraction; leisure as optimism; leisure as reconstruction; and leisure as a vehicle for personal transformation. These four functions will be drawn on to establish the importance of leisure as a resource for navigating traumatic life events.

Suicide's effect on family and friends

Suicide is often associated with feelings of guilt, personal failure and responsibility, and a sense of abandonment and rejection for the survivors. It can be inferred that these conflicting emotions are also struggled with by the person who chooses to take their own life (Ratnarajah and Schofield 2008). The quality of the relationship pre-death between the suicide victim and their family and friends is often difficult to fully decipher, thus impacting the implications of the death on loved ones, both in the short-term and the long-term (Cerel, Jordan, and Duberstein 2008; Zhang and Jia 2010). The mourning process that follows suicide is complicated, and bereavement is a 'sufficiently distinct' form of grief from other manners of death (Jordan 2001). The process of grieving that follows suicide is more complex than simply 'making peace' or 'letting go' of the deceased; the endpoint of the grieving process is never definitive (Sands and Tennant 2010). It has been suggested that there are two distinct emotions that must be confronted in the aftermath of a suicide: grief and trauma (Groos and Shakespeare-Finch 2013). Grieving is

believed to be a multidimensional process (Callahan 2000) where the inability to find meaning in a loved one's suicide further complicates the healing process (Groos and Shakespeare-Finch 2013).

In addition to the devastation felt by friends and family of a loved one's suicide, it is quite common for there to be a stigma associated with the loss (Jordan 2001). Ratnarajah and Schofield (2008) termed these related pains and defeats 'secondary losses' to indicate the great potential associated with residual suffering, such as stigma, social isolation, or family fracturing. Goffman (1986) said that stigma was a social discrediting of one's reputation, a classification as 'undesirable' by other individuals or groups. Stigma can come in the form of self-stigmatization in the 'social aftermath' of suicide where loved ones blame themselves for the victim's suicide (Jordan 2001). Similarly, in-group stigma in the family and friend network can occur if some members find another to be complicit in the victim's suicide either by apathy or the instigation or encouragement of negative behaviours (Range 1998). Stigma can also be imposed from outside the social network by the uninformed or biased members of society who view living family and friends as broken by the tragic event (Barlow and Coleman 2003). The social isolation and stigmatization cast upon the bereaved can make the healing process even more difficult. Because of this, scholars have suggested that the treatment and healing process is often multifaceted and lengthy (Andriessen and Krysinska 2012).

Callahan (2000) said that 'suicide bereavement should not be considered a unique type of grief, but rather a combination of grief and posttraumatic stress' (121). As grief is a complex and oftentimes non-linear emotional process, it requires additional healing interventions and strategies than post-traumatic stress. Elsewhere, Jordan (2001) indicated that traumatic grief is a syndrome that is distinct from depression and anxiety, and thus needs to be isolated as the unique set of emotions that it is in order to help people begin the healing process. It is only once the trauma has been worked through that the grieving process can be isolated, and healing begin, with the desired outcome of post-traumatic growth (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2006; Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996, 2004). Post-traumatic growth (PTG) has been defined as a 'positive psychological change experienced as a result of a struggle with highly challenging life circumstances' (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004, 1). It is through the gaining of new insights and the development of new narratives that more clarity can be found in the loss. This often involves help from support groups focusing on grieving and overcoming the trauma of suicide (Groos and Shakespeare-Finch 2013). As will be displayed, one significant avenue to PTG is meaningful leisure (Janke and Jones 2016; Kleiber, Hutchinson, and Williams 2002). This much-needed social support is often found in the close-knit friendships and meaningful activities that are used as a conduit to healing. There is great necessity for those bereaved by suicide to have positive interactions and outlets for release during their healing process.

One of the most necessary manners of dealing with the pain and ambiguity that comes from the loss of a loved one to suicide comes in the form of support groups focusing on 'postvention' (Andriessen and Krysinska 2012). Postvention includes such 'activities developed by, with, or for suicide survivors in order to facilitate recovery after suicide and to prevent adverse outcomes including suicidal behavior' (26). As suicide survivors are a group with an increased chance of suicide, intervention is imperative. An effective mode of curtailing further instability or loss is the creation of a 'death story' to restructure the story of the deceased's life and the bereaved

person's relationship to the deceased (Sands and Tennant 2010). Since there is often a search to restore the quality of life before the loss (Ratnarajah and Schofield 2008), it is through the ability to reconstruct one's understanding of the tragic loss of a loved one by suicide that friends and family are able to find catharsis (Sands and Tennant 2010). Therefore, when a tightknit community can rely on one another for support and release through group interactions in meaningful environments like music scenes, the potential for effective processing and healing has a greater chance of success (Harmon 2017).

Methods

On the third and final night of the New Year's Run, Mickey did not make it to the concert. Mallory didn't seem to care; in fact, if anything, she was relieved that he wasn't there. I wish I had made the decision to reach out to Mickey, because clearly he was in a bad place. Selfishly, I was too concerned with my own fun. I figured it was the couple's problem and the couple needed to handle it. After Mallory had made every effort to tell others in the music scene about their 'dirty laundry,' I think most were comfortable letting sleeping dogs lie. Little did I know I would never see Mickey again. – Vignette from the author's journal.

The research relied on Gonzalez (2000) Four Seasons ethnographic approach to data collection. The Four Seasons include: pre-ethnography (developing a narrative plan and organizing non-traditional data including text messages and efforts to raise money for Mickey's family for funeral expenses), ethnography proper (immersion in the subculture, textual analysis, informal communication, and semi-structured interviews), the thorough analysis of journal and field notes, and the reflexive process of writing. The Four Seasons approach has four principles: (1) opportunities are not missed, only postponed; (2) everything that transpires within the music scene is relevant data; (3) the need to allow participants to take the lead of the storytelling to yield the richest data; and finally, (4) to develop a representative balance showing the contradictions and dualities that take place within the music scene. This methodological approach was appropriate because it involved reflection and reinterpretation of older data, as well as weaving it together with newer data that presented itself over several months following Mickey's suicide. In order to cultivate the richest data, I had to contact participants in the days and weeks following the passing of Mickey, thus conjuring up cherished memories alongside their grief at having lost their friend. As fellow fans made sense of the loss, including through their continued participation at Rust Forever concerts, unknown facts and different interpretations of the events preceding the death, and behaviours following it, as well as the evolution of the grieving process, added to the tragedy of Mickey's suicide.

Study participants

There were eleven participants, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identity of the informants. The data collection methods deemed most appropriate for this investigation were semi-structured interviews, various forms of informal communication including text messaging and phone calls, and textual analysis of posts to the unmoderated fan listserv and Facebook page. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling (Patton 1990) and based on my pre-existing knowledge of their friendship with Mickey and Mallory. Most interviews lasted about an

hour, as did many of the phone calls. There were several text message threads, both with individuals and groups of fans who were friends of Mickey.

Author's journal

Since I first started conducting research on the fan community of Rust Forever in December of 2012, I have kept a journal related to my interactions with the music scene and the fans, both formally and informally. The journal also comprises jottings, field notes, and any notes taken during formal interviews, all in attempt to process and 'make sense' of what takes place in this intimate collection of music fans. Vignettes from the journal are used as narratives throughout to provide context and colour to the manuscript, allowing readers unique insights into the complex and tightknit friendships and interactions of the fanbase, as well as how they make meaning through their experiences (Tracy 2013).

In-depth interviews

I constructed a short list of open-ended questions that were used as a template to prompt participants to respond about their relationships with Mickey and how they have responded to his passing. I encouraged participants to elaborate and introduce relevant topics that I had not mentioned, and I built off their responses to ask further related questions. I kept notes during the interview to prompt further questions and document physical or emotional reactions displayed by the interviewee. Interviews were conducted in April and May of 2017. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participant. This method of data collection was especially fruitful in capturing the sentiment of the complex understanding and grieving process associated with the loss of their friend. Some of the questions from the interview guide include: What did you know about Mickey and Mallory's marital problems before his death? What was your relationship to Mickey and Mallory before their marital problems? How has your memory of Mickey been affected by his suicide? And, how has the music and the music scene of Rust Forever been useful in coming to terms with this tragedy?

Textual analysis

There is an un-moderated email listserv and a Facebook page dedicated to the band. After the death of Mickey I began to copy text and take notes on what was posted by the fan community for a period of roughly four months. This practice often led to specific questions in the phone calls, text messages, and interviews conducted with fans. Babbie (2010) stated that textual, or content, analysis involves who says what and why, and to what extent it has an effect on others. In line with Gonzalez (2000) Four Seasons methodology, all forms of communication involving the topic of Mickey's suicide were relevant to this investigation.

Data analysis and interpretation

The foundation of data analysis was grounded theory as demonstrated by Glaser and Strauss (1999) and Charmaz (2006). An understanding was reached through an inductive process which captured the realities of those participating in the research. The analysis process involved the use of a primary and secondary coding technique which commenced with multiple, thorough

readings of the interview transcripts, field notes, text messages, and selected excerpts of fan postings on the internet discussion board, Facebook, and other social media sites. Information deemed important based on its relevance to the research question was highlighted. I assigned primary codes using, when possible, in vivo terminology (the language of the participant) as part of the initial coding process. Subsequently I grouped primary codes into specific categories through focused coding (Tracy 2013). The data was managed by first establishing which content speaks to the research question, and then delineating hierarchically the most appropriate material. Once the categories were created, themes emerged that displayed the context and content of the phenomenon being considered (Saldaña 2012). These data provided the foundation of this paper exploring how fans reacted to the suicide of Mickey, how they interacted with his wife, Mallory, and how the fans found release and healing in the music community of Rust Forever.

Results and discussion

Rust Forever played six consecutive nights in Portland, Oregon between 31 January and 05 February, 2017, a tradition they had started several years ago. Mallory made the trip with some friends from the Pacific Northwest, but Mickey stayed behind. I hadn't had any interaction with either between the New Year's Eve run and that weekend. On the day after the concert series was over, I received a call from a friend and fan of Rust Forever. We had only ever communicated by text in the years that I had known her, so I knew something was off. She said to me, 'Mickey died.' I asked immediately, 'Did he kill himself?' She replied that he had shot himself in the couples' bedroom, and Mallory was on her way back home. The conversation was short and I sat there in silence, not really sure what to make of it or what to do next. After a few moments I texted Mallory, expressing my sincere heartbreak, and telling her I would call her soon. I knew she would be overcome by grief and shock and likely unable to talk. I suddenly reflected on my quick deduction that Mickey had killed himself, and then to my failure to reach out on New Year's Eve. I felt sick. – Vignette from the author's journal.

Social support

A few days after Mickey's suicide, one fan orchestrated a GoFundMe account to pay for Mallory and her daughter to take a trip to Hawai'i. Rust Forever were to be playing four nights there that April and the community agreed it would be nice to provide an opportunity for the small family to find some rest and relaxation. Within twenty-four hours, the goal of US$3,500 was met, with each donor adding a little note to their contribution, even if they asked to remain anonymous. This thoughtful act was not new to the music scene or even to Mallory. When her oldest daughter was dying from leukemia, another fan organized a fundraiser with the band so that she and Mickey and their two daughters could go to Paris, France; it was the daughter's last wish before she died. This communal offering of a 'family' vacation served as a healthy distraction for Mallory and her daughter, and is in line with Kleiber, Hutchinson, and Williams's (2002) first proposition of leisure as a coping mechanism, buffering by distraction. The fans' intent was to divert their friend's attention from the traumatic incident and help them to stimulate growth and recovery through positive life events.

Cerel, Jordan, and Duberstein (2008) stressed the importance of social support in determining the bereavement outcome after any death. The concept of postvention, as illustrated by Andriessen

and Krysinska (2012), demonstrates that social support following a suicide includes 'activities developed by, with, or for suicide survivors in order to facilitate recovery after suicide and to prevent adverse outcomes including suicidal behavior' (26) and is essential to the healing process. In the days and weeks after Mickey's suicide, fans of Rust Forever reached out in many ways to help Mallory and her daughter. Unfortunately, between the New Year's Eve run and the six-night run in February, Mickey had become increasingly despondent, depressed, destructive, and callous. Mickey had dealt with depressive episodes throughout his life, and with the demise of his marriage, this illness grew more prevalent. When lucid, he was aware of his damaging and unhealthy behaviours, so much so that he gave away all of his guns because he was afraid he would hurt himself – or someone he loved. It turned out that he did indeed keep one pistol, the one he used to take his own life in their bedroom.

Mallory and her daughter had moved out shortly after the New Year because they no longer felt safe, but also because Mallory felt that she was somehow making Mickey's life harder by being there. All of this added to the anger, confusion, guilt, and myriad swirls of other emotions that occupied Mickey's mind. Before he killed himself he destroyed all the truly personal items in the house, including every picture, card, and love letter, as well as the children's drawings, report cards, and awards and trophies. These violent and destructive actions taken to erase the life Mickey and Mallory had built together for more than twenty years can be seen as a form of the 'secondary losses' Ratnarajah and Schofield (2008) spoke about; a further, and final, rejection of the family and their shared history by Mickey.

Because of these final destructive acts by Mickey, Mallory was forced into a complicated process of meaning making after his death. Jordan (2001) stated that survivors struggle with two different versions of the loved one who takes their life; the image of the loving family member or friend, and the one who has rejected life and the love of those friends and family members. While speaking with Mallory in the weeks after his passing, she expressed to me that she had decided that in those final months the real Mickey was not present. He was hidden behind a veil of alcohol and drugs, and riddled with mental health issues that further complicated his ability to behave rationally. She was beginning to work on constructing the narrative she wanted to remember through her own 'death story' of her husband (Sands and Tennant 2010). This is in line with Kleiber, Hutchinson, and Williams's (2002) third proposition; that leisure can help to build a life story that is continuous with the past, even after a tragic event intervenes. Because the couple's life had been in many ways built through the music of the band and friendships made through their concerts, Mallory chose to use her anchor point of her memory of Mickey as all of the positive years, not the last few tragic months.

Because their home and hometown no longer felt loving and comforting, numerous friends from the fan community reached out to help Mallory and her daughter. Less than two weeks after his passing, Mallory had moved temporarily to live with friends in Denver, Colorado while she sorted out what path her life would take from then on. Other fan-friends helped her with money to pay off funeral expenses and fix the damage that Mickey had done to the home so she could look into selling it. Now that she was out of work, and rightfully full of conflicting emotions, Mallory could not find peace in her day-to-day life. Her only real venue for escape and catharsis was to attend the concerts of Rust Forever. Since the band has a busy and nomadic schedule throughout the United States (and beyond), Mallory did find numerous opportunities for these

little chunks of healing and release. But now that the band's concerts had become her primary focus, Mallory drifted further out into an unhealthy place herself. She increased her drug and alcohol intake, and acted in many ways that were described by others as 'irresponsible' manners of grieving. She and the friends she stayed with in Denver mutually agreed that she should no longer stay with them, and from there she moved on to another set of fan-friends from the music scene in Boise, Idaho, closer to where Mickey and Mallory were from. Here she found a set of willing accomplices to engage in her brand of healing – the music, the drugs, and the alcohol. Since suicide survivors are a group with increased suicide risk themselves, a healthy support system is imperative to their emotional wellbeing (Andriessen and Krysinska 2012). While Mallory was offered support from many, the only kind she was willing to take was hedonistic and potentially destructive. Many who expressed sincere concern for her wellbeing felt that she was turning away from them the way Mickey had turned away from her only a short time ago.

Stigma

In April of 2017 I received a call from Keith who had dealt with his own struggles with drugs in the past, but had been sober for several years. He had known Mickey and Mallory longer than I had, and he was genuinely concerned for Mallory after the death of her husband. He asked me if I had seen a recent Facebook post from Mallory; I hadn't yet. He sent me the link and it was a polemic from her about a group of 'bully's' in the music scene who had been talking trash about her lifestyle, how she should stop going to concerts and causing drama, and how she needed to learn how to grieve properly. In short, others felt she needed to withdraw from the music scene to get her life in order. Usually not one to meddle in the fan community, the lead singer of Rust Forever posted that nobody should be telling her how to grieve, and that the only people who could tell someone not to come to their shows was the band – and they were fine with her being there. This led to more offline chatter and you could sense a very real fracture in the music scene. Sides were being taken. – Vignette from the author's journal.

The aftermath of suicide is not limited to issues of mental health. Quite frequently there is disruption in the family, daily living habits and routines are impaired, issues of spirituality are struggled with, and social relationships are often troubled (Andriessen and Krysinska 2012). Range (1998) pointed out that those who are bereaved by suicide often feel as they have been blamed for not preventing the death of their loved one. In this instance, unfortunately, some did place some blame on Mallory for the way she 'aired the couple's dirty laundry at every chance she could,' as well as her callous nature and quickness to disconnect from Mickey after she found out about his online dating. In fact, it came to the surface that Mickey had not acted on his desires; either he could not go that far or he had not been given the opportunity to do so.

Because of this, many truly believed that Mickey's passing was in vain, thus leading to more hostility towards Mallory. Jordan (2001) concurred with Range (1998), stating that mourners of suicide often feel blame, and with this comes a self-stigmatization as well. This was clearly evidenced in Mallory. She told me that she knew others not only disapproved of her lifestyle in the months following his passing, but some held her accountable for his death through her 'perceived cruelty' towards him after the online dating incident. Because of this, she was continually questioning her role in his suicide and wished she had acted differently in many circumstances. The blame, secrecy, and ambiguity led to another sensation for Mallory, that of

social ostracism (Cerel, Jordan, and Duberstein 2008). While Cerel et al. stated that self-isolation often comes with the social ostracism, this was not the case for Mallory. She found out who she believed her true friends were in her ongoing grieving process (Sands and Tennant 2010).

Post-traumatic growth

The day that Mallory found out her husband had taken his own life, she was already headed back home. Some friends from a few hours away had picked her up on their way to the concerts and would be dropping her off: Susanne and another couple, Mary and Jimmy. Shortly after I received the message about the Facebook post from Keith, I texted Mallory to see how she was doing. I didn't mention the post to her, I just wanted to be an empathetic friend. She told me that she was travelling around the country with Jimmy while he worked, going to the shows that were closest to them. I didn't think much of it at first. It was just one friend helping out another in her time of need. Then I remembered another part of the Facebook post that I had glossed over because I was focusing on the judgment and bullying that was being levied about: Mallory had also mentioned that others were critical of her being 'in love' again so soon after Mickey's death. While talking with another fan, Kelly, she mentioned that Mary and Jimmy had indeed split up. I asked her if Mallory had played any role in that, and because that whole group had once been so tightknit, she left it up to me to figure out. It wasn't difficult. – Vignette from the author's journal.

The process of PTG is initiated by a major life crisis, like a loved one's suicide, that significantly challenges or even destroys one's paradigm and sense of self. While there were many people who felt Mallory was in some ways complicit in Mickey's suicide, and others who felt her lifestyle and the 'drama' she brought to the music scene was harmful to cohesiveness of the community, many truly felt terrible for Mallory and wanted to help her become healthy and happy again in any way possible. Those in the latter category expressed that they could only do so much; whether or not Mallory would find healing was largely up to her.

Key to PTG is the concept of 'cognitive rebuilding' which is the slow and gradual attempt to reconstruct one's sense of self after a traumatic incident (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). For Mallory, she found this through becoming even more immersed in the music scene, attending as many concerts as possible. Unfortunately, this also came with excessive drug and alcohol use, the oversharing of intimate details of her family's problems with others in the music scene, and her apparent involvement in the dissolution of another couple's relationship. But all of these perceivably negative actions aside, Mallory was able to work through her traumatic situation through her personal reinvestment in the music scene and a reliance on close friends, as potentially destructive as it was at times. Because the last several months of Mickey's life, and their marriage, was so chaotic and destructive in itself, it is conceptually understandable that Mallory would need to vent, find meaning, and heal in destructive ways (Sands 2009). Sands indicated that there is a nonlinear narrative of the experience of grief, and the coping mechanisms that accompany it by nature have to fit the individual who is grieving. Mallory gained insights into her long history with Mickey over the first few months following his passing. She was able to process her memories in such a way as to favour the best memories of her time with her husband, and accept that those last few destructive months were simply not him; it was his mental illness and abuse of alcohol and drugs that led to his suicide. While she

also lost friends in the music scene because of their interpretations of her role in Mickey's death and her 'dramatic' and hedonistic ways in the aftermath of his passing, she also found significant support from many others who wanted to offer any assistance they could to help her be well again. This non-traditional 'support group' was integral to her post-traumatic growth (Groos and Shakespeare-Finch 2013). Those friends who stuck it out with Mallory through the tragic and harrowing months following Mickey's death speak to Kleiber, Hutchinson, and Williams's (2002) second proposition, that leisure can provide optimism for the future. She knew she would be reliant on the music and her friends going forward to cope, therefore she looked to the future with a degree of brokenhearted hopefulness that things would get better in time.

Conclusion

Mallory sent me a text saying that there would be a memorial for Mickey in one of their favourite places to camp in Montana. It was to be three days of the celebration of the life of Mickey, and it would be the place where everyone could leave behind all of the drama and pain that was tied to his death. She wanted the fan community to heal together, and she wanted to accept and announce that while she wishes she would have made different choices, these decisions had already been made. She and Mickey had been together for more than twenty years, and the vast majority of them were good. They had been intimately involved in the music scene for nearly as long. She knew things would never be the same, but she wanted to make an effort for the music and the fan community to remain as important a part of her life as it had always been. She wanted to find further healing, together. – Vignette from the author's journal.

Music has been demonstrated to be a significant resource for identity development (DeNora 1999), the making of close friends (Boer et al. 2011), attending to personal spiritual needs (Gellel 2013), and to establishing and maintaining a high quality of life (Ruud 1997). Equally so, music has been used for its therapeutic properties for people dealing with serious illnesses (McClean, Bunt, and Daykin 2012), so we estimate that it could be beneficial in coping with tragedies and traumas like suicide. The wave of emotions that overcomes those affected by the suicide of a loved one are complex (Callahan 2000), and blame and support often come hand in hand (Jordan 2001). To this point, as has been displayed, conflicting and competing emotions following suicide greatly affected the camaraderie and cohesiveness of the fan community. But over time, and an ongoing grieving and healing process, some level of catharsis was found through immersion in meaningful leisure, in this case the music scene of Rust Forever.

Kleiber, Hutchinson, and Williams's (2002) fourth, and final, proposition of how leisure is used as a coping mechanism lies in its ability to be transformative. While difficult, and through much trial and error, Mallory found 'all was not lost.' Kleiber and colleagues said that when leisure is used as a vehicle for personal transformation after a negative life event, it requires those grieving to assess what they can no longer do, or in this case, who they can no longer do it with. With this recognition, the mourner accepts their station in life and uses their leisure resources to not just exist, but attempt to live again.

The metaphor of a stone being thrown into a lake and creating a ripple effect has been used to describe the far-reaching felt impacts of suicide on survivors (Andriessen and Krysinska 2012). Perhaps fittingly, the memorial held at Mickey's favourite camping spot was located at the shore

of Lake Como. The passing of Mickey will be embodied by all of his friends, and especially his wife, Mallory, forever. But by relying on those close friends who were part of the fan community, the ripple effects of Mickey's suicide may slowly start to smooth out and dissipate, with the lake eventually returning to a state of placidity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Justin Harmon's main threads of research focus on the role of music in life course development and the benefits of music and nature interventions post-diagnosis of cancer for coping mechanisms and identity maintenance. He can be typically found in the forest or backyard with his dog, or in the back row of a concert many nights during the week.

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