

Building a life note-by-note: music and the life course

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Abstract:

Music is an omnipresent component of many people's lives. On an individual level it is used to set moods, mark milestones, and connect to one's personal history. At a collective level music marks the concerns of cultural heritage, national holidays and days of remembrance, and brings people together by serving as a conduit to engage in fellowship, as well as an immediate point of shared interest or experience that helps to form bonds. While popular music is characterized by a degree of ephemerality in terms of its immediacy in popular culture, its roots extend deep into the soil of the cultural fabric and the people who embrace it. As will be displayed in this paper, the ubiquitous social qualities of music that are foundational to the development of personal identity, meaning making, and community formation are integral to life course development in music fans. Using the lens of the broaden-and-build theory, we demonstrate how people build a life through music, note-by-note.

Keywords: Music | leisure | life course | meaning making

Article:

It was the "rest day" between four concerts (two on 12/30-31/2013, two on 1/02-03/2014) of Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons in Portland, Oregon, and I¹ had planned to do interviews with both Kelly and Susanne. Fortunately they were staying at the same place along with four others so it made my job a little easier. After I wrapped up my interview with Susanne, I turned to Kelly and asked her if she was ready. She replied "yes" and smiled, and pulled up a seat at the table. Susanne stayed put in her spot at the table, while the others lounged on couches in the same room. I asked her if she was okay with the audience, she smiled and replied "yes" again. My first prompt to her was the same as to the other 33 participants: "Tell me about your first

memories with music.” Clearly weary from the previous two nights of music, Kelly managed her biggest smile yet and said, “I would love to.” Then she began:

Music was always on in the house. Whether my mom was cleaning, catching up on work, making dinner or entertaining the kids, it was always on. In fact, very few of my memories from childhood aren't set to music. And now that I think about it, most of what really sticks out to me right now as an adult involves music.

I asked, “So music has been important for a very long time then, huh?” She replied, “That would be an understatement. At times, it has been everything to me.” – From first author's field note journal and interview with Kelly.

For passionate fans of music like Kelly, it is fitting that many of her most precious memories in life were punctuated by music as humans are dependent on sound for our cognitive, emotional, and social growth from the earliest stages of our being (DeNora, 2000). Music is a defining component of identity (Ruud, 1997a) and quality of life (Ruud, 1997b) for many people, and these two components often find their intersection in the social networks of music scenes (Boer et al., 2011; Moberg, 2011; Straw, 1991). But before fans become immersed in music scenes or are enthralled by specific genres, they are first exposed to music socially in numerous arenas such as the home, the school, the community, and the social circle (DeNora, 1999). The process of finding music that speaks to one's sense of self, one's paradigms, and one's course of meaning making is a negotiated process that takes place over time; memories and past experiences of music are continually evaluated for their importance, role, and place in one's life (Maines, Sugrue, & Katovich, 1983). Building off these memories and experiences can provide a significant foundation for the development of the individual which grows over the life course, and thus speaks to the power of leisure involvement to aid in human flourishing and identity construction which may result in someone viewing their life as *positive* (Haggard & Williams, 1992; Kumm & Johnson, 2014).

What this study sought to surmise was, how does a lifelong connection to music serve as resource in establishing a high quality of life? In order to provide significant detail of the importance music plays in the life course development of passionate² music fans, we will explore its ongoing significance for establishing a foundation of sense of self and personal meaning making and its ability to be used as a coping tool for navigating hardships. We will also highlight how music makes important markers on individuals' historical timelines, as well as its importance in socialization and friendship building through meaningful shared experiences often over extended periods of time. As will be made clear, this personal growth and development can best be explained through positive psychology, specifically Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory.

Literature review

The life course has been explored in leisure contexts for nearly half a century (Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Kelly, 1974; Kleiber & Kelly, 1980; Kraus, 2014; McGuire, Dottavio, & O'Leary, 1987; Osgood & Howe, 1984; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975; Wheaton, 2017). The general takeaway has been that many leisure patterns exude some degree of

continuity, suggesting that what we engage in with our family and friends in youth sticks with us as we grow older (Atchley, 1989). Leisure has a very social component; engagement in meaningful leisure allows the participants to connect with others who also value particular activities, thus establishing the potential to find common ground through shared experience (Dunlap, 2013). Kleiber and Kelly (1980) said that leisure and socialization were symbiotic and both evolve in tandem through a “dynamic” process that unfolds over the life course. In order to better understand this process, we will build on theory from the field of positive psychology to merge current thinking on life course development and empirical research on the benefits of music consumption in aiding quality of life.

Positive psychology and the broaden-and-build concept

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) stated that positive psychology is about valued personal experiences that cross all stages of the life course. The field focuses on the study of wellbeing and creating satisfaction from experiences of the past, developing hope and optimism for experiences of the future, and building a sense of happiness and appreciation for the experiences of the present. A pioneering figure in the field of positive psychology, Barbara Fredrickson (2001, 2003), spoke of her concept of the broaden-and-build theory as one that focuses on engaging in life's activities in order to create positive emotions which have the potential to counteract negative experiences, and may, while often ephemeral, possess an ability to have “deep and enduring effects” that positively affect life for the long-term (2001, p. 333).

Fredrickson (2001) said that positive emotions build on individual's experiences thus broadening their processing and understanding of a situation, adding breadth and depth to their personal resources accrued through meaningful interactions. Fredrickson (1998) also indicated that when positive experiences take place with others, especially close friends or family, there is not only a shared enjoyment, but also a creation of “enduring alliances” that become further resources for individuals to draw on in times of need (p. 311). It is through the engagement in positive experiences, in this case music scene participation, that individuals are able to set and see their course of positive interaction with music into the future (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2011).

Music can then help individuals build personal narratives of their identity through a feeling of what they envision their life to be (Ruud, 1997b), and to do so with the company of close friends (Lonsdale & North, 2009). Following Fredrickson (2001), this creates the space for the development of interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal growth, which can lead to future benefits (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007). The meanings and value that are constructed through music then become an anchor for personal and communal coping in the face of potential future hardships, or for revelry and camaraderie (Schäfer & Sedlmeier, 2009).

Through immersion in meaningful leisure, such as the consumption of music, both as an individual and as a member of a fan community, participants can create stores of positive emotions from their involvement in music scenes which then serve as a bridge to building and strengthening their social relationships (Fredrickson, 2001), as well as attending to issues of their own personal identity (Pate & Johnson, 2013). Together, these two pillars of a meaningful life, positive sense of self and positive relationships – built, strengthened, and sometimes held

together by music – provide a foundation and an anchor point for navigating the trials and tribulations of life as best as one can.

The life course

Life is about growth and change. The accumulation of our experiences allows for us to be completely different individuals almost on a daily basis. What we are exposed to, whom we interact with, and how we create and apply meaning in our lives all lend to our personal development that is continuously being shaped over the course of our lives, often in a social capacity (Blumer, 1969). And while we inevitably change, for better or worse, we often hold on to key aspects of our lives and bring them along with us on our journey; this is where we see the potential for investigations into human growth and development throughout the life course.

Examining the life course is about analyzing change ... we reinvent ourselves with each transition as transformed meanings take shape ... a life course perspective allows us to look at life, attend to differences in circumstances be they psychological, sociological, biological, economic, or demographic, and consider what roles they play in explaining why we have diverse experiences as we grow up and grow old (Hendricks, 2012, p. 226).

Looking at the intersection of music and life course development through the lens of positive psychology offers the potential to better understand how we grow from our experiences and are shaped by them with an emphasis on what has “worked.” This requires a retrospective understanding of the meaningful moments, interactions, and relationships of our involvement with music in our lives to date, and how to use them to our fullest advantage going forward.

Memories of past experience not only shape future action, but serve as markers on our personal timelines. Significant life events like graduation from college, marriage or buying one's first house all show our growth as an individual, our accomplishments, and set the foundation for where we are headed. Friendships often take on the closeness of family, and may serve as a reflection of who we were, are, and remain to be (Harmon & Kyle, 2016a). These tight-knit connections we form with others can oftentimes span decades and are mutually beneficial to all parties involved in the sharing of experience, growth and appreciation. But there exists a very important element that frequently accompanies these relationships, memories, and experiences that are not always given its full due, and that is the role of music in aiding the creation of these connections (Scott & Harmon, 2016). It should be noted, however, that while the perceived value of one's leisure may not diminish as they age, the frequency or level of participation may decrease, or in some cases may change, such as listening to live recorded music at home instead of attending concerts (Adams & Harmon, 2014). This does not discount the leisure activity's importance in one's life necessarily, simply that how the individual uses it for their wellbeing is neither static nor always growing.

Music and the life-course

The current literature on the role of music in people's lives is quite diverse. Research has been conducted on how adolescents use music for developing their own identity, learning social mannerisms or regulating mood (Arnett, 1995; Larson, 1995; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007;

Selfhout, Branje, ter Bogt, & Meeus, 2009), and extends to older audiences and their desire in maintaining identity, connecting to their earlier selves and appreciating their aging process (Bennett, 2006; Coffman, 2002; Davis, 2006; Kotarba, 2002; Vroomen, 2004). Scholars have considered the ability and importance of music to act as a therapeutic tool in cognition and physical coordination or strength (Cooke, Moyle, Shum, Harrison, & Murfield, 2010; Hamill, Smith, & Röhrich, 2012; Lee, Chan, & Mok, 2010). Of particular interest to this study is research conducted on the role of music in developing bonds and close friendships, whether amongst one's peers or intergenerationally (Boer et al., 2011; Kotarba, 1994; Lonsdale & North, 2009).

However, there is a dearth of focus on the role of music as it is used, embraced, and identified with over the course of a lifetime. There are few studies of significance that look at how music use develops over the course of one's life (for exceptions see Adams & Harmon, 2017; Bennett, 2013). Much as Hendricks (2012) said that early life experiences are “embodied in the individual upon their occurrence and have a direct impact” (p. 228) on later circumstances, so too can music be defining and significant from the earliest interactions in adolescence to the last notes played at our funeral. The direction we need to take now is to understand how we build on our personal histories of music over the course of our lives. Much as our preferences for clothing, shelter and food inevitably change throughout our lives, these core tenets of human life also stay the same in their very necessity. That is not to say that one needs music as much as they need food, but simply to say that music can play a key role in providing many of the intangible essentials that aid in our quality of life, such as friendship, meaning making, and identity development.

Music and quality-of-life

The appreciation of music is often noted for its ability to provide aid in an individual's identity development and maintenance. In our earliest selves we are exposed to music for educational and cognitive growth purposes, and this often comes at the insistence of our parents and guardians (Laiho, 2004). Those who look over us, provide for us, and in general care for our well-being seek music that is soothing, inspiring and sometimes just plain fun. Music is used for background, setting moods and learning in our formative years (Clay, 2003), and this implies identity association on two levels. First, the music that is chosen for us is done so to steer our behavior, development and enjoyment of life. Our guardians do not simply choose any music; they choose what is appropriate for young minds as well as what they think we would like, often based on what suits the guardian. Their choice of music for younger generations is in a sense a way of forecasting one's own identity, through music, onto their offspring (ter Bogt, Delsing, van Zalk, Christenson, & Meeus, 2011). We want our children to like what we like; after all, they are often believed to be images of ourselves. Secondly, through this oftentimes prescriptive music, we start to develop thoughts about what we do or do not like associated with the music. If the selections yield tantrums and crying fits, the parents are likely going to recognize that we do not like what we hear, and will therefore choose something that more fits our interests, or more than likely, something that calms us down and keep us quiet. Humans are creatures of habit, so the guardians and the children both work to reinforce the types of music that create pleasant mind-states and decrease episodes of frustration (Kotarba, 1994).

Therefore, there exists the establishment of a pattern of what it is we like, and as we age we look for music that is closely related to what our interests are. This is not to imply that we only like what we hear when we are infants, but that there may be themes or styles of music that have their roots embedded in some of our earliest musical associations (Hargreaves & North, 1999). Once we have started to develop a liking for a certain style of music, we may begin to look for other related elements that help us to express that style. This evolution of identity development is a continuous process that unfolds over the life course, and is integral to how we shape our first independent sense of self. As we become more socially interactive, we meet others who also have been exposed to various forms of music, and with that, they, too, have developed a sense of self in response to music, as well as the tangible and intangible aspects that accompany certain artists, styles of music or attitudes associated with it (Boer et al., 2011). Here we see the merging of two major themes: identity and social networks. It is through these two major themes that we begin to work towards the third, and perhaps most important element often associated with music: quality of life (QOL).

Diener (2006) said of QOL that it refers to “the degree to which a person's life is desirable versus undesirable, often with an emphasis on external components, such as environmental factors and income” (p. 400). Diener (1984) indicated that there were three categories for which subjective well-being and happiness (core components of QOL) could be grouped. The first was defined by external criteria such as virtue, and was described as a normative definition because it is something that is desirable. The second involved how individuals' evaluate their lives in positive terms. The third, and final, grouping involves a higher disposition of positive affect as opposed to negative affect. The second and third component are of most relevance to this paper, and speak to music's ability to add significance to one's life, typically through a personal sense of identity coupled with shared social interactions with likeminded others. Positive psychology, and more specifically, the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), provides the lens for which to develop a better understanding of how people create a meaningful life through their personal histories with music. Within this article we attempt to take the importance of music for the entirety of participants' lives into account, emphasizing focused attention on how relationships to, and reliance on music, was integral to their personal development, happiness, and ability to establish and *build* meaningful relationships.

Methods

This study focused on fans of the band Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons, a little known rock band with a “cult-like” following of fans. This study was part of a larger project investigating the use of music in forming communities for middle-aged music fans, as well as how the fans use music for coping with life transitions like family, career, and health. The band has not achieved any significant notoriety through charted singles, radio play or attendance at concerts. In fact, their concerts are rather small, with sometimes as few as 25 fans in attendance. There are several annual events that can attract upwards of 250 fans, but these are isolated occasions. The band has been active for over 20 years, and the lead singer/guitarist, Jerry Joseph, has played professionally since the early 1980s. The study occurred between December of 2012 and July of 2015 in mostly Western states (Colorado and Oregon primarily). There were more than 50 concerts attended during the period of inquiry. The first author attended all concerts and conducted all interviews. The first author had been involved in the music scene of the

Jackmormons for over a decade, and this made access to influential people in the scene easier to navigate. Additionally, based on his familiarity with the music and the fans, it allowed for his presence and investigation to be less intrusive. The second author served as an area expert, coder and an impartial editor based on the first author's extensive involvement in the music scene.

Participants

There were thirty-four informants, both male and female, with an average age of 43 years who participated in semi-structured interviews. All interviews were recorded with permission of the participants and transcribed by the first author. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, though the band was not. The majority of participants had been following the band for over a decade, though some had been seeing Jerry Joseph perform live for nearly 30 years. The participants attended on average between 10 and 15 concerts of the band each year. Many, if not all, had seen at least 100 live performances of the Jackmormons. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling based on the first author's knowledge of fan tenures and level of participation in the music scene (Patton, 1990). Additional participants were introduced by the primary interviewees, invoking a snowball sampling technique (Tracy, 2013).

Interviews

A pre-established set of questions was developed to understand the historical relationship of the fans to music in their lives, and to the music of Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons in particular. Some of the questions included: What were your first memories of music in your life? How important is music in your life? When you think of your favorite memories, how many of them involve music? How often do you listen to the music of Jerry Joseph? Do any of the band's songs have special meaning for you? And, have you made significant friendships with other fans? Notes were taken during the interviews to document details related to the emotional component of participants' responses as well as points of inquiry that needed to be examined further. Interviews typically spanned an hour, though several lasted up to three hours.

Data analysis and interpretation

Grounded theory was adopted as the foundation of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Our understandings of what transpired were reached through an inductive process that focused on the experiences of those who participated, and how they embraced their participation to make meanings in their lives. The analysis process used primary and secondary coding techniques which started with multiple thorough readings of interview transcripts and field notes (Tracy, 2013). This level of coding was deemed adequate due to our need to align the constructs we relied upon to make the case for the importance of music in life course development (positive psychology, quality of life, and life course). These themes were the foundational importance of music to participants' lives; music's potential to serve as a tool for coping with life's hardships and transitions; and the importance of music for connecting to others and developing meaningful relationships. The data were managed by establishing which content spoke to fans' personal histories of music consumption and participation. Following this we developed a hierarchical list of relevance for the remaining data as they were relevant to the study (Saldaña, 2012) in order to establish the continuous importance and presence of music in the lives of the participants. These

data provided the foundation for understanding the importance of music to these fans lives for issues of identity, friendship making, meaning making, and continuity in their lives.

Results

I spoke with Bill and Viv, a married couple in their late 50s, about their nearly 20-year involvement with the band while in Alaska for the Jackmormons' tour. While speaking with Viv about her earliest memories with music, she reflected fondly on how her mother used to sing all the time, and that was how she would put Viv and her siblings to sleep every night: with a special lullaby made just for them. Visibly choked up from this memory, Viv then stated how that got her into singing when she was a teenager too, but that she hadn't done so in a while. She thought maybe she should give some thought to picking it up again.

Later that night at the final installment of the three-day run, the band was playing their song LAX, written about the unexpected death of Joseph's father, and Viv told me about how Joseph had written that song at the time her mom was dying of brain cancer. She found the song to be quite fitting to her experience of dealing with her mom's passing, and that she also felt she had a connection to Joseph, through the music, about shared tragedy. After she told me the story, we both returned to the music, but I took a step back to consider what had just been articulated. In the midst of our most trying of life's experiences, we instinctively search for reason and meaning as to why "this" is happening. And though it doesn't make the heartbreak any easier to get over, music can be integral to aiding our ability to cope and move on. And when a song is able to capture our emotion, and provide some comfort, it allows us to connect to a lifetime of memories and experiences that serve as a stable foundation going forward. – From first author's field note journal.

Music as a foundation

For all of the participants, their early years were defined by and through music. While most described their childhoods as largely positive, many had unstable family situations. For some, this involved neglect or abuse. Others moved frequently and had a hard time making friends. Still others simply felt like outsiders to the popular crowds. Regardless of the perceived quality of their childhood and youth, music was a ubiquitous guide and confidant. Hunter, who now works in the music industry as a recording agent, had this to say about the role of music in her childhood:

Music has always been important to me. I was the only child growing up in a divorced family, and I was left alone a lot. I found myself escaping to my room with some headphones and records. It always had a big influence on my life. My mom listened to a lot of music back then too, so when she was around, we would sometimes bond over that. But mostly it was just me. Music was always an escape from my lonely childhood.

Intrigued by her use of "escape," we asked her to explain what she meant by its usage. She replied:

I didn't always have somewhere to go or somebody around to do something with. I found that when I listened to music I could close my eyes and go to these places the bands were singing about, do the things they were talking about. It sounds silly now (laughs), but my room was the portal to the universe. And eventually, when I got older, music literally was my ticket out. I eventually started touring with [the band] Widespread Panic and saw a lot of [Grateful] Dead shows, too. I went all over the country for years because of music. That goes back to my bedroom, that's where it all started.

As mentioned, most participants did not have lonely or traumatic upbringings, but still cited music as an integral part of their early lives and livelihood. One of Julia's fondest memories as a child was during Christmas one year when there was a snowstorm that knocked out the power and shut down the town. Since she and her sisters all played instruments, and the other family members were all very musical, they decided to go caroling to all the neighbors' houses to make the most of the situation and the seasonal spirit.

After revealing this cherished memory, Julia then began talking about her favorite bands growing up who she had been exposed to by her two older sisters. She said that she was turned on to music that her friends would not hear for years, and she felt as if she had been let in on some "little secret" that only the "cool kids" got to know. Of particular interest was that one of Julia's favorite bands growing up was a band by the name of Little Women out of Boulder, Colorado. Her sisters had introduced the band to her, and she said she "wore out" all of their tapes because she played them so much. When it came time to choose a college, she chose the University of Colorado at Boulder because that is where the band called home. Little Women, it should be pointed out, was Jerry Joseph's first band before he formed the Jackmormons in 1995.

Music as a coping mechanism through life's transitions

We had the serendipitous opportunity to interview Janet, a mid-50s, recovering drug addict, both during her period of addiction and after she had attained sobriety. In that first interview she openly spoke about how her relationship to music while addicted to narcotics was a tumultuous one. Though she was actively involved in the music scene of the Jackmormons, she said that her involvement was more for an "acceptable" place to abuse drugs and alcohol than a "truly enjoyable music experience." For Janet, it took a very serious wakeup call of a near-fatal overdose to try to pursue a life of sobriety. She reflected on that night, New Year's Eve 2013/2014, and said that it was also the anniversary of the passing of both her father and her husband, so it was a particularly emotional period of time where she was not sure if she wanted to live any longer. She said, at the time, the music of the Jackmormons was the only source of happiness she had. She went on:

It was the only light in my life I had at the time, but it was bad because it promoted the drinking and the drugs to an extent of loss of control – which is what eventually saved my life in the end, ironically. I think that night I was dead, both spiritually and physically. I was that messed up that my stomach needed to be pumped. I felt like I had finally intruded on other people's happiness. My mental status and drug addiction; I couldn't control it anymore. I lost my grip on the music, the last thing that mattered to me.

At the time of our second meeting it happened to be the day that she collected her 6-month chip from Alcoholics Anonymous. I attended the meeting with her. Afterwards she said:

I now see myself the way you guys all see me. I didn't know I was beautiful and loved. My mind was so cluttered with mindfuckery that I couldn't enjoy it. I was listening to what Jerry was saying and it would take me to the dark place and I couldn't really come back to the light. I would stay in the darkness with the drinking and the drugs. I wouldn't say I wasn't enjoying it, but it's totally different now. When he plays now, I hear every word; the music has become me. I don't think it was before. I was worshipping the drugs ... There's hope in the music for me now. I found hope, grace, compassion and love. Most of all love. But I couldn't really love back then because I didn't love myself. I was exhausted. I'm uplifted today. When he sings "*let it grow, let it blossom, let it flow, someone to love you, someone to hold you tight,*" I just feel that he's been singing that to me for years, and it didn't click. Now it does. I'm in a place of love now.

Fortunately for Janet she was able to overcome a long battle with drug addiction that lasted decades. Music had been an important component of her life since childhood, so before she fell into the perils of addiction, she created many positive memories and interactions with music. Now sober, she is able to reconnect to those mostly positive aspects of her lifelong connection to music without feeling the need to use drugs or alcohol. That her connection to music started off in a positive manner allowed her to draw from that foundation to help her cope with the struggles of her life. She now feels as if she can add to the positive, filling up the reserves she depended on in her battle to become and remain sober.

Mickey and Mallory, a married couple in their mid-40s, got married at age 20 after having known each other for only three weeks; music was one of the most significant shared interests that helped to foster that bond that is still strong more than 20 years later. As time wore on, though, they also had to rely on their historical connection to music to help them through a traumatic time. One day they got the news that no parent should ever have to receive: their oldest daughter was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Unfortunately, she succumbed to the ravages of cancer in her late teens. Before she passed, though, they strengthened their relationship to their daughters through the sharing of music. In the late stages of her life, when the family was trying to set aside enough money to take her on a trip to Paris (which is where she had always wanted to go), friends threw a benefit concert with the Jackmormons to help them raise the money. While speaking with them about the day of the benefit, Mallory said:

Jon arranged a benefit concert for her so we could take her to Paris, because that's what she wanted to do [before she died]. So we brought her to the first set and I introduced her to Jerry [Joseph] in the sound booth. After a while it was like I wasn't really needed, you know? I left and came back like twenty-five minutes later. I could tell by the look on her face that she was smiling and laughing, they obviously got along. He saw something in her.

Mallory was telling Jerry that her daughter wanted to bring her boyfriend to Paris with her, but that the family didn't have the money. Jerry responded that she should be able to and that maybe he could help them raise the money. Months later, after their daughter had passed, the bereft

couple and their youngest daughter took a family trip that included a Jerry Joseph show. Upon seeing the family enter the venue, he walked up to them and asked, “What would she want to hear?” He then immediately said, “I guess that doesn't matter now. What do you *need* to hear?” Mallory said, “He saw something in her. He cared. You've got to appreciate that when someone sees that in your kid.” Mickey added, “That music never meant more to me than right then. It was connecting me to my wife, my daughters, and all the memories we had together. It was so sad, but so beautiful.”

Music as the conduit for long-lasting friendships

As much as finding the music you love is often a process of trial-and-error and discovery, so too is the search for friendships that stand the test of time. When the two intersect, having close friends who share the same love for the same music, there is an often instant bond to build from. A significant aspect about friendships made through music is that there exists a pre-history of context for the relationship to flourish from: if friends come together over music, they can draw from their personal experiences with music to find common ground over past experiences. This was evidenced by Dave when he spoke about catching the tail-end of the Grateful Dead phenomenon:

One of the luckiest things I've had at my disposal was that I caught the tail-end of the Dead; I caught the last two shows at Soldier Field. I'll never forget how I felt that music could unite people. The experience of the introduction to that scene showed me that there was a subculture that believed in this spirit I was looking for.

Dave said that he found people “who spoke my language” and valued music the way he did. He went on to say that,

Music is the reason I wake up in the morning. To find people that feel the same way; that opened the door to opportunities that I never knew existed before, but in reality had been hoping to find because of how important [music] was to me since the very beginning.

Dave continued to talk about his entry into the music scene surrounding Jerry Joseph & the Jackmormons and said:

I remember Camille from the Jmos' (short for Jackmormons) scene here; she kind of took me under her wing a little bit. I remember emailing her that I thought the song *Hallelujah Trail* was fantastic. In a town (Portland, Oregon) where people can be kind of anti-social and image has become in vogue, this community is really laid back, and really accepting. For a guy who never belonged to a church and who went out on his own and ended up here to find this community, it's lucky. I've developed these relationships of texture based on longevity and shared interest and experiences. It's been a blessing.

As was the case for nearly all the participants, the friendships formed through the music strengthened the connection to the music. It was almost as if the two were symbiotic or mutually inclusive; to love the music was the precursor to coming to love their fellow fans.

While speaking with Kurt about how he feels in the days following his attendance at Jackmormons' concerts, he said that after seeing the band live he is able “to store positive energy for weeks, months, maybe even years.” A bit caught off by the grandiose of that statement, we asked Kurt to clarify how he could store positive energy from participation for that long, to which he replied, “You're creating memories and stories you can tell” and “[I'm] doing it with the people I love, my family.” He went on to say that going to see the Jackmormons allows him “to decompress and blow off steam” and that affects his work, his family and his quality of life for the better; something he was “very conscious of on a daily basis.” To have multiple positive outcomes from his experience, such as “release, catharsis, growing friendships, the realignment of my perspective, and a renewed invigoration for what is to come,” Kurt said that sharing these positive experiences with people who both feel the same and reap the same rewards leads to a bond that is “insurmountable.”

Whether it was in the face of mundanity, tragedy, or revelry, music had a constant presence for the participants of this study. It served as a conduit to connect oneself to others platonically, romantically, and socio-culturally. It was a bridge to their earliest memories that they expected to follow into their future. In sum, music was omnipresent and always available in time of need, and therefore served as a reliable resource for finding meaning and direction going forward.

Discussion

It has been documented that participation in meaningful leisure leads to a “broad range of benefits” for people's QOL (Wheaton, 2017, p. 17). From the data analyzed, and in keeping with the broaden-and-build framework we worked within, we believe that these benefits have a greater potential for actualization when participants experience sustained engagement in meaningful leisure. If leisure leads to positive outcomes, then the resultant positive emotions can be “vehicles for individual growth and social connections by *building* people's personal and social resources” giving them the potential for more meaningful lives to come (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 224).

Our exploration centered on how a group of passionate music fans recalled their growth through music by focusing on their histories, their relationships, and their subjective interpretations of music and its application to their lives. By encouraging fans to reflect on their earliest memories associated with music, as well as how they relied on music as a resource for coping or a surrogate for nonexistent social support, we were able to discern how they established aspects of their identity, building on it as they aged and navigated life's positive moments and challenging obstacles (Fredrickson, 1998). As music is a publically available medium that is used to set moods, provide a backdrop, negotiate transitions, and encourage socialization (Bennett, 2005), developing a more thorough understanding of how individuals use music in their development can help us to understand how it affects society more broadly (Sharpe, 2008).

The main issue with research on music consumption, identity, and socialization is that it has been largely attended to by age group/cohort with little examination in regards to life course development aside from a few sources (for examples see Adams & Harmon, 2017; Bennett, 2013) – this is the case in the leisure literature and beyond (sociology, communications, cultural studies). What this study does is provide an empirical examination of participants'

reflection on their lives with music and its connection to their current involvement and affiliations, suggesting the potential to “see” how lives develop *through* music over the decades. By examining the earliest stages of people's involvement with leisure, in this case, music, we developed a better understanding of the initial meanings associated with music and how those relationships were called on in the future to benefit the fan (Kraus, 2014).

As meanings are socially constructed (Blumer, 1969), the very social and public aspects of music make it an obvious venue for understanding how people negotiate aspects of identity, friendship, and perspective (DeNora, 2000). That these pivotal components are the bedrock of a life well-lived stresses the importance of concepts like the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001, 2003) to provide insights into how people transcend the hardships of life by connecting them to their personal histories and valued experiences which they cultivated through their pursuit of leisure (Adams & Harmon, 2017; Bennett, 2013). In the event when fans were faced with traumatic circumstances, having the potential to pull from their accrued resources of positive experiences and emotions served as a buffer to the felt-impact of their personal setbacks and tragedies (Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002).

For the fans of the Jackmormons, whether it occurred at an individual or a collective level, there were numerous opportunities to *build* off, or draw from, their personal histories with music and their lengthy tenures as fans to create a meaningful life through music. Alongside the friends with whom they shared the music over years, if not decades (Harmon & Kyle, 2016a), this allowed for the broadening of their social support networks through establishing and refining of intangible resources like music, and tangible ones like close friendships. That they all reflected on music as being important from their earliest memories signals the power of music as a resource for living a meaningful life, even when life is challenging, distressing, or downright tragic (Harmon & Kyle, 2016b). Music, then, allowed the fans to string together all facets of their emotional spectrum to provide a picture of who they were, are, and will be by tying their interests and friendships together through a shared history of music which they can draw in the future to help them in their journey through life.

Hendricks (2012) said that “Examining the life course is about analyzing change” and that “we reinvent ourselves with each transition as transformed meanings take shape” (p. 226). Therefore, when we “analyze” our lives to understand what has transpired and chart our course forward, it follows that we will build on the sum of our total experiences, but that we will also make decisions based on what were the most impactful, and how we understood them. Recent examinations of life course development in leisure signal as much, suggesting that developing a better grasp of the origins of initial involvement will shed light on the current meanings (Kraus, 2014). When individuals are able to see their personal history of leisure growth and development, this evolution is evidence to personal empowerment through identity realization (Wheaton, 2017). For each of the participants of this study there involved a reflection on how music has accompanied them over the course of their lives. This included how music was used as a tool for navigating life's hardships, a resource for the construction of the self, and as a social lubricant that led to the establishment and maintenance of valued friendships. Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory allowed us to establish how meaningful life resources like music can be built on and stored for sustenance when we are faced with the tragedies and traumas of life. Fredrickson's work helps us to recognize that life is not a series of

compartmentalized experiences, but a seamless accumulation of experience (Maines et al., 1983; Scott & Harmon, 2016).

Conclusion

When we find people, places, knowledge, or experiences that suit our interests and our growth, we retain them and *build* on them as our life unfolds (Fredrickson, 2003). Socialization through meaningful leisure leads to patterns of behavior and experience that unfold on a continuum; the process of identity development and meaning making is never a culmination (Kleiber & Kelly, 1980). Leisure has been described as a “major vehicle through which to find or reestablish a personal and social identity” suggesting that life is actually more an accumulation of meaning in which we build a storehouse to select the experiences, interactions, affiliations, and objects which we will add to our personal tapestry over time (Osgood & Howe, 1984, p. 186).

For many people, they find life's meanings, guidance, points of reference, and friendships through music, and this music then serves as a foundation, a soundtrack, or a mantra going forward (Kotarba, 2005). Music does not just possess socio-cultural or socio-psychological benefit; numerous studies have documented its value in cognitive development in the very young (Ilari & Polka, 2006), and its therapeutic power to counteract the demise of old age (Cohen, Bailey, & Nilsson, 2002). Much as we need food, shelter, and water to *survive*, we need social interactions, friendships, a meaningful life, and a sense of who we are to *thrive*. Leisure, broadly, is the forum for developing those essential associations over time (McIntyre, 1989), allowing us the ability to affect our course forward through positive experiences (Carruthers & Hood, 2004). Music often serves as the conduit to these essential components of living a life that is fulfilling. It is by developing a more well-rounded understanding and illustration of music's omnipresence for many that we may gain insight into the intangible power of various forms of leisure to provide a shield of protection, and a mirror to reflect one's identity and growth over time.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1. The pronouns “I” and “me” refer to the first author throughout.
2. Fans defined themselves as “passionate” based on the length of their tenure as fans (in most cases more than a decade) and frequency of concert attendance (often 10–15 concerts a year).

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