

## Hearing music in service interactions: A theoretical and empirical analysis

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### Abstract

There is an extensive literature concerned with the impact of music on customers. However, no study has examined its effects on service workers and their interactions with customers. Drawing together literatures on service work and music in everyday life, the article develops a theoretical framework for exploring the role of music in service exchanges. Two central factors are identified – how workers hear, and respond, to the music soundscape, and their relations with customers, given these have the potential to be both alienating and positive to the point of meaningful social interaction. From these, a 2×2 matrix is constructed, comprising four potential scenarios. The authors argue for the likely importance of music's role as a bridge for sociality between worker and customer. The article considers this theorising by drawing upon interviews with 60 retail and café workers in UK chains and independents, and free text comments collected through a survey of workers in a large service retailer. The findings show broad support for music acting as a bridge for sociality. Service workers appropriate music for their own purposes and many use this to provide texture and substance to social interactions with customers.

### Keywords

Alienation, customer, music, service interaction, service work

Music is ... in the middle of things in many social relations. It is an essential but often overlooked part of the social fabric. (Styhre, 2013: 38)

## **Introduction**

Step into most retail, café and leisure outlets and one is likely to hear music. As Lang (2015) notes, customers are ‘besieged with music’ as organisations use music to shape consumer behaviour and spending. However, this does not always have the intended effect. *Waterstones*, the UK’s biggest bookseller, recently hit the headlines having followed *Marks and Spencers* in banning piped background ‘muzac’ following complaints from irritated customers. Cellist, Julian Lloyd Webber, has described ‘muzac’ as ‘an insidious cancer that has spread throughout society’. While others may disagree, it is not only customers who are ‘besieged’ – so are the workers who serve them and to a far greater extent as they are exposed to music throughout the working day. Although there is an extensive marketing literature concerned with the impact of music on customers (Garlin and Owen, 2006), no study has examined its effects on service workers and service interactions.

Instead, our understanding relies on press stories of maddening jingles and repetitive playlists, where refrains like “Here it is Merry Christmas, Everybody’s Having Fun” acquire a new irony. The dearth of research studies might suggest there is an important gap here but there are also good theoretical reasons for why one might want explore the role of music in service interactions. To begin with, the marketing literature shows the powerful effects that music can have on customer behaviours. It seems fairly reasonable to assume, therefore, that music may also affect those who serve them and that this may seep into service encounters.

We also know from existing research into music at work that music can play an important role in work relations. Music and song were part of work long before industrial capitalism (Thompson, 1968), let alone mass services. Historical research on labourers,

seamen and convicts shows how music helped workers to cope with hard physical labour, bonded work groups together and restored a sense of humanity in the face of otherwise dehumanising work (Pritchard et al., 2007; Korczynski et al., 2013). In the twentieth century, broadcast music became a prevalent feature of factory work, affording employers a tool for control to stimulate work effort. Music often helped workers to get through the working day, or ‘feel *just human enough* to continue ... in exploitative conditions’ (Bennett, 2015: 5; and for a detailed ethnographic study in a modern factory, see Korczynski, 2011&2014).

The growth of the service economy has brought significant changes, with music often directed at the ‘sovereign customer’ (du Gay and Salaman, 1992). In their discussion of music and work from ‘pre-industrial’ to ‘post-industrial’ societies, Prichard et al. (2007: 12) press the need for research to ‘further explore the use and effect of music on service workers.’ At the same time, studies of music in everyday life frequently draw attention to the importance of music in many people’s lives, including its transformative power to affect mood (DeNora, 2000). There are good reasons then for thinking that music may be significant in service interactions through its potential effects on workers’ motivation and their ability to build rapport with customers.

The danger is that studies become trapped in a narrow performance perspective and fail to engage fully with workers’ experience of customer relations. A key question in the sociology of service work has been to understand *when* front-line service workers are more likely to experience the ‘sovereign customer’ as an alien and controlling figure, and what might make for more positive social, or human, interactions (Korczynski, 2009). It may be that music matters for understanding a service encounter that is more complex than simply that between a ‘worker’ and ‘customer’. By *not* studying workers’ views of music in service interactions, research risks missing something potentially important in their experience of work. This article seeks to contribute, both theoretically and empirically, to this nascent

research agenda. Drawing upon 60 interviews with service workers in selected cafés and retail organisations in the UK, together with free text comments from a survey of service workers in a large retail chain, it advances new theoretical perspectives and explores for the first time workers' perceptions of the role of music in service interactions.

The article is structured as follows. The opening section highlights the absence of the service worker in the literature on music in service organisations as well as how music has been neglected within studies of service work. In doing so, it explores the nature of worker-customer relations, alongside studies of music in everyday life. Building on these literatures, it uses the dimensions of music as alienating or satisfying, and customer relations as alienating or socially embedded and positive, to create a fluid 2×2 framework, from which are derived four potential scenarios for the role of music in service interactions. An argument is then presented for the likely importance of music as a bridge to sociality within service interactions. The research methods are outlined and the empirical findings used to assess which of these scenarios best captures workers' views regarding the role of music. The article concludes by considering the explanatory potential of this theorising and highlights avenues for future research.

### **Music, the customer and service work**

The use of music in retail environments is not new. In the 1930s, the American company, 'Muzac', created an entire industry selling background music to retail stores (Radano, 1989). This industry is alive and well today; indeed, the vibrancy of the market for commercial playlists is one indication of how attuned most service organisations are to using music to shape the aural aesthetic of their store, or 'musicscape', in a bid to influence customer behaviour (Oakes, 2000). There is an extensive literature concerned with the impact of music on customers, and how the type of music, its tempo and volume can be used to prompt, pace

and guide consumption, reduce frustration while queuing, and so on (e.g. Milliman, 1982; North et al., 2003; Oakes, 2003). Summarising this literature, Garlin and Owen (2006: 762) note *en passant* the absence of research on service workers:

What are the similarities or differences between the effects of background music on patrons versus staff? Do different facets of the musicscape elicit different responses from patrons compared to staff? For example, ‘familiarity’ of music played in-store could have a very different effect on staff who might be more accustomed to the repertoire than customers might.

This literature serves as a useful reminder of how music is often viewed as an organisational resource for management aimed primarily at the customer. However, the ability of this literature to understand workers’ experience and the role of music in service interactions is hamstrung by seeing music’s effects purely in terms of service performance. To fully understand the role that music might play in service interactions, we need to conceptualise the nature of worker-customer relations and turn to the literature on service work.

#### *Insights from the service work literature*

The growth in ‘front-line’, ‘interactive’ or ‘customer-facing’ service work has spawned a burgeoning literature concerned with understanding this type of employment (Korczynski, 2013). While contemporary service work is heterogeneous, it is widely acknowledged that in ‘mass’ services, including large parts of retailing and hospitality, many jobs remain highly routinised (Ritzer, 1998). Others have sought to understand service work through the lens of *consumption* as a process of *identity-making* (Urry, 1990; du Gay and Salaman, 1992), and

the overlapping roles that people have as ‘workers’ and ‘consumers’ (Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Miles, 1998; Besen-Cassino, 2014). For critics, such accounts are seen to neglect, or downplay, more fundamental aspects such as production, the employment relationship, and wage-effort bargain (Warhurst et al., 2009; Bélanger and Edwards, 2013). While these criticisms are apposite, the issue still remains of how to deal with the distinctiveness of service work, owing to the proximity of the worker to the customer, and the extent to which this requires new, or revised, analytical perspectives (Korczynski, 2009&2013b).

Service organisations seek to ‘enchant’ customers using the rhetoric of ‘customer sovereignty’, whereby ‘the customer is king [or queen]’ and supposed to be ‘always right’ (du Gay and Salaman, 1992). This places the worker in a position of subordination to the customer, and often involves interventions by management to try to control worker behaviour and provide an element of predictability to service interactions which are inherently unpredictable and risk-laden. The drive to achieve valorisation or profit, however, means that customer needs are not primary, as service organisations have to balance contradictory logics of cost-efficiency and service quality (Korczynski, 2002). There are times when the ‘myth’ of customer sovereignty is laid bare during the service interaction, what Carlzon (1997) calls ‘moments of truth’, and enchantment turns sour. As the proximal face of the organisation, service workers can find themselves exposed to the anger of the disenchanted consumer who may meet them only fleetingly (Korczynski and Evans, 2013), anger which workers are expected to ‘take’ or ‘manage’ using ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983; Bolton, 2004).

However, the service interaction is not a purely instrumental, economic exchange between ‘worker’ and ‘customer’, and remains embedded in wider society (Korczynski and Ott, 2004; Bolton and Houlihan, 2007). Workers and customers have complex human and social needs (Sayer, 2007), and may find spaces within the service exchange for social encounters that can be pleasurable. This can apply even in highly routinised service jobs,

where ‘many of the encounters between workers and customers ... [are] experienced by both parties as real social exchanges’ (Leidner, 1993: 230). Korczynski (2009) draws upon the concept of *alienation* to ask under what conditions workers are likely to view customers as dominant, alien figures or as a source of positive social interactions. He highlights for consideration the degree to which the worker empathises with the service recipient, the power relations between both parties as conditioned by the skill and knowledge of the worker and their relative social status, and whether the service encounter is fleeting or involves repeated interactions. Bolton and Houlihan’s (2005) work on customers also highlights their agency within this process through their overlapping roles of ‘mythical sovereigns’, ‘functional transactants’ and ‘moral agents’.

The critical service work literature has little to say, however, about the role of music. There are occasional glimpses as in Lloyd and Payne’s (2014: 477) discussion of the routinised nature of UK café managers’ jobs where ‘even the background music was decided centrally’. In-store music may also be used to create an aestheticized experience for the customer, encompassing workers’ corporeal selves. At Abercrombie and Fitch, ‘branded’ workers are ‘strategically placed on balconies, dancing to the latest music’ (Deery and Nath, 2013: 106). Besen-Cassino’s (2014) study of similar ‘branded’ jobs in the US, often attractive to affluent youth despite poor pay, suggests clothes and music are frequently a talking point with co-workers and customers. Overall, however, the story is largely one of neglect.

Such neglect might be an unfortunate oversight, or it may reflect the ‘casual disdain’ shown by industrial sociologists towards this topic which has been carried over to service work (Prichard et al., 2007: 10). For many critical researchers, music at work may be regarded as somewhat trivial compared with wages, work organisation, management control strategies, and worker resistance. Often the presumption is either that music is not very important for workers or is just another device for managerial control and worker

subjugation. Both assumptions are questionable, and there remains a need for critical research that can shed light on the role that music plays in the lives of services workers and their relationships with customers. To understand this we need to take another step and conceptualise the music soundscape and how this is experienced by service workers.

### *Insights from the literature on music in everyday life*

Although there are no direct studies of how service workers experience music and its role within service interactions, the literature on music in everyday life provides a starting point. Using this literature, it is possible to draw out two contrasting *a priori* sociological positions – what might be termed the *music as social control* view and the *interpretive* perspective. The first takes its cue from the work of Marxian scholar, Theodor Adorno, a prominent figure within ‘the Frankfurt School’ of Critical Theory. Adorno (1976, 2002) saw most popular music, including jazz, as a standardized cultural commodity, subsumed by the market. Music offered a harmonious celebration of leisure and a distraction from exploitative capitalist relations, losing its true potential to develop critical awareness, and instead creating pliant, biddable subjects.

Also of relevance here is the work of French social theorist, Jacques Attali (1977/1985: 111), who viewed popular music as embodying a fake form of harmonious social bonding – what he termed ‘ersatz sociality’ – that displaced ‘real’ social or human relations between people. Music was seen to invade all areas of life, signifying ‘the presence of a power that needs no flag or symbol: musical repetition confirms the presence of repetitive consumption, of the flow of noises as ersatz sociality.’ Following this tradition, it might be inferred that music may be used by management to control service workers by reaffirming the power of the ‘sovereign customer’, and instilling a sense of false fraternity between them, or



that popular music has such effects even where this is not consciously sought by management.

The interpretive tradition is critical of such perspectives for constructing an analytical prison of predetermined effects (DeNora, 1999; DeNora and Belcher, 2000; DeNora, 2003). Music is seen as a something people ‘use to elaborate, to fill out and fill in, to themselves and to others, modes of aesthetic agency and with it subjective stances and identities’ (DeNora, 1999: 54). While music is bound up with ‘the material, cultural and social environments in which it is located’, it can only be understood as a form of cultural practice whose effects depend upon the individual or group and the way they listen to and appropriate this for themselves (DeNora 2003: 156).

It follows that workers may appropriate music in ways which enable them to express critical, resistive responses to organisations and work, as illustrated by Korczynski’s (2014) ethnographic study in a factory making window blinds. In interactive service work, there is the possibility that such critical views might be shared with disaffected customers as *co-conspirators*. Research in retail environments also reveals how music can act as a cue for consumption practices, and may prompt social performances by customers and staff in the form of singing, dancing or striking ‘a pose’ (DeNora and Belcher, 2000: 95-98; DeNora 2002). Retail workers may use music to assume the persona of a ‘co-shopper’, constructing a common identity and forging particular ways of communicating with customers (DeNora, 2000: 134&139), or use music as a bridge to social interaction. Intuitively, one might expect this more where workers and customers share in the enjoyment of music. What follows is an attempt to outline a theoretical framework that can guide empirical research by helping us to explore the potential roles that music might play in service interactions.

### **A theoretical framework for researching the role of music in service interactions**

Any theorizing of the impact of music on service interactions must acknowledge that customer relations are played out on a material terrain shaped by work organisation and managerial control strategies, and that service organisations may use music for different purposes. The primary focus is on understanding the ways in which music affects workers' subjective experience of the customer and its uses within service interactions, given the dual potential for workers to perceive customers as distant, alien figures and as people with whom they can form meaningful social encounters (Korczynski, 2009).

Worker-customer relations, therefore, provide the *context* with which the music soundscape interacts. The way individual workers respond to and use music in service interactions is seen as contingent upon how they perceive customers together with their experience of in-store music. On this basis, it is possible to construct four potential scenarios for the role of music in the service interaction using a 2×2 grid matrix (see Figure 1) comprising a horizontal axis for workers' experience of the music soundscape (satisfaction or alienation) and a vertical axis for customer relations (positive/socially embedded or negative/alienating).

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Quadrant one, '*alienation, or no role through tuning out*', lies at the intersection of an alienating music soundscape and negative customer relations. The assumption here would be that service interactions in routine customer service work are mainly limited, perfunctory exchanges in which the 'sovereign customer' appears to the worker predominantly as a distant and alien figure. Where service workers also experience in-store music negatively as

an alienating soundscape, this is likely to compound workers' feelings of alienation from customers, especially where the customer responds positively to this music. The impact of music within service interactions is likely to be limited, and workers may 'tune out' of this alienated soundscape by subconsciously blocking out the music from their minds rather than actively listening.

Quadrant two, '*Potential for co-conspirators*', is formed through the combination of an alienating music soundscape and a positive relationship with the customer. In this scenario, music in general is unlikely to play more than a minor role within service exchanges. There is, however, the possibility that *both* worker and customer may experience music as an alienating soundscape and that this experience may be shared in ways which support a positive interaction or even prompt critical views to be exchanged. Such critical views might focus simply on the music or they may even extend to the organisation and the nature of work.

Quadrant three, '*Music as a bridge to sociality/ersatz sociality*', describes a situation where workers experience satisfaction with music at work, have generally positive relations with customers, and actively use music in ways which support or enhance the service interaction. The assumption here would be that worker-customer relations, even in the context of routine service work, are deeply socially embedded to the extent that the relationship with customers is more often positive, with feelings of alienation confined to instances of customer aggression which are relatively rare. Music, when enjoyed by the worker, is likely to play a substantive and positive role within service interactions, especially where this experience is shared with the customer. The question is whether such positive interactions around music can be said to constitute real or meaningful social exchanges or simply represent 'ersatz sociality', a point we return to below.

Finally, quadrant four, '*Music as a haven from customers*', is formed through a combination of negative customer relations and a music soundscape which is positively experienced by the worker. Again, the assumption here would be that customer relations in routine service work are comprised mostly of mundane and alienated encounters between a distant customer and subordinate service worker. Where in-store music is enjoyed by the worker, it is unlikely to play a significant role in service interactions but may help workers to get through the working day. This scenario also opens up the possibility that service workers may use music in ways which help them to deal with instances of aggression directed at them by certain customers.

It is important to emphasise that this theoretical framework operates as a heuristic device and is not intended to represent stark or static positions. Music may have multiple, mixed, overlapping, contradictory and unintended effects that may vary depending upon the individual worker, customer and the particular music being played at any one time. For example, a worker who experiences music mainly as a bridge to meaningful social interactions may not have a single, uniform experience of music and may still experience alienation in dealing with particular customers. The quadrants do not have closed, impermeable boundaries (and are represented therefore as dotted lines), as individual workers may move between them, with their positions remaining fluid rather than fixed.

That said, an argument can be made for the likely relative importance of quadrant three, or bridge to sociality. This would follow from three assumptions, derived by combining insights from some of the service work literature and the interpretivist approach. The first would be an acceptance that service interactions are deeply socially embedded and that even in routine customer service jobs *many* such interactions are experienced as real social encounters. The second would be that even where music is controlled by management and directed at the customer, its effects upon the worker may not necessarily be negative or

alienating, given that workers can be expected to appropriate and use music for their own purposes. The third would be that music is significant in many people's lives, has transformative power to shape mood and behavior, and is likely therefore to become a talking point within the service encounter.

### **Research questions and methods**

Using this initial theorising, it is possible to explore empirically which of the four scenarios best captures workers' understandings of the role of music in service interactions. The key overarching research questions are as follows. How do workers see the role of music in service interactions? Does music serve mainly to alienate workers from customers or provide a bridge to meaningful social interaction, and what factors affect this? Finally, if music can, under certain conditions, support positive customer relations, how or through what mechanisms might this occur?

To explore these questions, qualitative research was undertaken in 20 retail stores and cafés in the UK between 2014 and 2015, comprising eleven large chains and nine independents. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore in depth how service workers understood the role of music in service interactions. Interviews were conducted with 60 customer service assistants, supervisors and team leaders, 14 of whom worked for independents and the remainder for large chains. Roughly two thirds were women, with four in five aged 16-35. Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, and covered relationships with customers, music direction, editing rights, satisfaction with music, engagement with customers through music, and perceived impact on work performance. All interviews were fully transcribed and coded using Nvivo. The researchers also spent time observing the music within the particular store or café.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with two senior managers in a large coffee shop chain (Café-Chain1) and a major retailer (Retail-Chain1) with responsibility for the music played in their organisations as well as with two companies designing and supplying music for these organisations.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the researchers conducted an on-line survey of employees' views of music at Retail-Chain1, which had its own radio station, obtaining 226 responses. As part of this survey, respondents were invited to '*describe a notable example where music has played a part in your interactions with customers and/or co-workers*', with 132 providing written free text comments. Pseudonyms are used for individuals and organisations throughout to safeguard anonymity.

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations of the data. The reliance upon worker interviews and survey responses does not allow an exploration of the role of music in the service interaction from the customer perspective. There is the added difficulty of 'seeing' or 'hearing' the effects of music retrospectively through the eyes and voices of service workers at a distance removed from the actual service encounter. This means that what is partly an extra-discursive phenomenon is explored through discussion with workers which may not fully capture the ways in which music flows between bodies and spaces and its more subtle effects on service interactions.<sup>6</sup> While the researchers did spend some time observing the use of music in these establishments, limitations of access unfortunately precluded any direct observation of service encounters or interviews with customers.

If one accepts, however, that workers' retrospective accounts can tell us something valuable about how they see the role of music in service interactions, there is another hurdle to overcome. Drawing upon Attali's critique, how is the researcher to judge whether workers are expressing a false form of sociality when they relate positively to customers or are involved in a social interaction which is real and meaningful? While this is a legitimate question, it should be noted that critical theorists do not provide an explanation of what

‘ersatz sociality’ is. The researchers approach this matter empirically by considering how workers themselves see music’s role in service interactions, and go on to discuss this in more depth in the discussion section. While this might not satisfy everyone, the argument here is that workers’ views matter and that researchers are on safer ground when listening to them. The next section presents the main findings from the study.

### **Exploring music in service interactions**

The theoretical landscaping outlined above uses the two key dimensions of the nature of worker-customer relations, and workers’ experience of music at work, to understand the role of music in service interactions and its potential significance or otherwise. This section begins with an overview of the findings in these two areas, before examining more closely workers’ accounts of the role of music in service interactions and how these map on to the four quadrants shown in Figure 1 above.

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#### *Customer relations*

For most of the workers in this study (see Table 1), customers were, in the main, perceived positively, with many talking about how they derived immense satisfaction from providing ‘good service’ and ‘helping people’. Jessie (Retail-Chain5) commented: ‘To make somebody else feel good and know you’ve contributed to that, that’s a feeling you’ll struggle to find doing anything else.’ Jay (Café-Chain1) described how ‘personally with me the customers are a really good thing’, while Aiden (Retail-Chain1) stated that ‘99% of the time, it’s really positive.’ Polly (Café-Chain1) remarked: ‘it’s a real positive, if you wake up in a negative

way, they [customers] can cheer you up, and ... if they are negative, you cheer them up.’ Nita (Café-Indep1) spoke of how ‘after a couple of chats with people ... you brighten up.’ For Lyle (Retail-Indep5), customers were ‘by far’ his ‘favourite part’ of the job, people with whom he could sometimes have ‘amazing conversations’. Sally (Retail-Chain2) spoke of how she had ‘actually made some personal friends from serving customers.’ Regular customers were often viewed with particular affection as people who ‘kind of make it [the job]’ (Ross, Café Chain1).

For some, like Nathan (Café-Chain1), customers were more ‘fifty-fifty’, while one took the view that ‘most of them, they don’t care about who you are, about your job, they want to pay for their food and that’s it, and they get angry easily’ (Ricky, Café-Chain3). Certainly, many service interactions are functional, perfunctory exchanges and no service worker escapes customer abuse, the effects of which can cut very deep: ‘when they are horrible, it can affect me a lot’ (Lily, Retail-Chain2). Many disliked the condescending way certain customers ‘speak to you as if ... you are beneath me’ (Monica, Café-Chain3). While all workers had to deal with difficult customers, extreme cases of customer abuse were rare, and most were of the view that ‘there are many more friendly people than there are rude definitely’ (Lily, Retail-Chain2).

For the majority of those interviewed, interacting with and helping ‘nice’ people was quite simply one of the best parts of the job: ‘the rapport with the customers’ (Sally, Retail-Chain2), ‘making people smile, making people’s day’ (Chrissie, Retail-Chain6). Rude customers were frequently identified as among the worst aspects, alongside low pay, long shifts, lack of job challenge, standing up for long periods, not getting rest breaks, lack of progression, unachievable targets, mistreatment by one’s manager, and feeling unappreciated. Notwithstanding these negative features of work, these accounts speak to a service interaction



which remains socially embedded and which, for most workers, is more positive than negative, and where there is the potential then for music to play a significant role.

### *Workers' experience of the music soundscape*

If worker accounts of customer relations are generally positive, what about their experience of the music soundscape? Before addressing this directly, however, it is pertinent, in light of above discussion of worker-customer relations, to consider their views on who they thought in-store music *should* be for.

In most of the large chains in this study the music was controlled centrally and focused on the customer experience and the music-brand fit. As a senior manager responsible for music at Café-Chain1 commented, 'the music we play is for our customers, not for our staff ... if they really hate it that much they will have to go and work for Starbucks.' The company supplying the playlists to Café-Chain1 referred to workers having to 'assimilate themselves into the branded project.' However, this sole focus upon the customer did not apply in every case. Retail-Chain1 had its own company radio station where staff could submit requests. The impact on employees had been a key consideration for management who saw this as helping to alleviate problems of high staff turnover and low levels of engagement. In the smaller independents, unit managers and staff often had much higher levels of influence over in-store music and in some cases this was almost entirely under the control of the work group.

Workers in large chains were acutely aware that music was directed at customers. While some argued that organisations needed to take more account of workers' experience, interestingly many felt the customer *should* come first. Some even suggested that their co-workers could not be trusted to responsibly choose music that would appeal to customers: 'some people don't appreciate that just because it's head-banging music you like to dance to

on a Saturday night, it's not the music that 80 year old ladies who come in to buy their Olay cream ... want to listen to' (Lily, Retail-Chain2). In the independents, only rarely did workers disregard the customer when selecting music. As Paul (Café-Indep1) commented: 'for a lot of customers you just sort of hoped they'd deal with your music choices.' In most cases, however, music was selected to appeal to both staff and customers in accordance with notions of brand identity and a concern not to offend customers: 'You don't want to put anything on that's going to offend the customer' or 'not going to fit with the content of the stock' (Fleur, Retail-Indep1). For a unit manager at one independent Retro clothes store, while the primary audience was 'me and my employees because we spend most of the time in the shop', the music still had to be 'customer appropriate' (Sheila, Retail-Indep3).

There is evidence that where workers exercise editing power over in-store music, many are quite adept at tailoring their choices to perceived customer preferences. One referred to how he would 'look around and kind of get a feel for what people would probably like' (Michael, Café-Indep4). An assistant manager on an independent cosmetics counter within a major health and beauty chain spoke of how she would select a song like Pharrell Williams' *Happy* on Saturdays to appeal to younger clientele, while on weekdays she would choose 'Sixties Pop or Motown' for more mature shoppers (Gill, Retail-Chain2). Overall, it would seem that many service workers are either willing to defer to the customer when it comes to in-store music or at least shape their own choices in light of its perceived impact on customers.

How then did workers themselves experience the music soundscape? Of 57 workers interviewed, 34 were broadly satisfied with the music played at work, 11 were neutral, and nine dissatisfied (see Table 1 above). Of these nine, all, except two, regarded music as playing little or no role in their interactions with customers. For the neutral group, the results were more mixed. In the satisfied group, 22 referred to music as an important bridge to the

customer, with 10 regarding it as insignificant. The results would suggest that while satisfaction with music is important, it is not a sufficient condition for workers to use this in their interactions with customers and that other factors may also be significant.

The dissatisfied group is comprised exclusively of workers from large chains, including all but one of those working for Retail-Chain6. Here, workers were confronted with an alienating soundscape that was highly repetitive and widely disliked, comprising a CD from Head Office with a limited repertoire of 6-8 songs of 'Alternative Indie Pop' played on a 40-minute loop at high volume, which was only changed four times year: 'it drives you crazy' (Claire); 'terrible' (Rob); 'you start to lose your marbles after a while' (Bella).

What is surprising, perhaps, is that with the exception of one worker interviewed at Retail-Chain6, who stated they would have welcomed a period of 'silence', most preferred the current situation to a workplace without music. Periods when the music stopped were seen as 'weird' or 'awkward', and there was a feeling that any kind of music was preferable to a musical void filled with a cacophony of bleeping tills, buzzers, screaming children, and the like. Some music was quite simply 'better than no music' (Bella, Retail-Chain6). This view was voiced frequently by those who were broadly satisfied with music across the interview sample as a whole. One even went so far as to say: 'I'd rather listen to music I absolutely hate than no music at all' (Joy, Retail-Chain7). For most, having some music on, provided it did not grate on one's nerves, was seen as preferable. Again, however, some caution is required as the study did not include organisations that did not have in-store music.

One also has to be careful when making generalised assumptions about workers' experience of music in large chains where playlists are under the control of management. If one dissects the composition of the satisfied group (34 workers), it comprises 22 workers from chains, most of which directed music solely at the customer. This suggests that where music is directed at the customer and workers lack influence over music played in store, this

does not necessarily mean that they are dissatisfied with the music soundscape. However, this should not be taken to imply that music direction and the ability of workers to exert influence are not important factors affecting workers' experience of the music soundscape and its potential to play a role in service interactions.

### **Worker perspectives on the role of music within service interactions**

How then did workers view the role of music in service interactions? This section begins with a broad quantitative analysis of the interview data in terms of its perceived significance, before probing workers' accounts in more detail and mapping these against the four quadrants outlined in Figure 1 above. The section also draws upon free text comments from the online survey. In doing so, we also seek to illustrate some of the ways in which music is used by workers within service interactions.

A quantitative analysis of the interview data shows that 23 of the 57 workers interviewed felt that music played little or no part in the service interaction, with 29 workers providing examples of music having positive effects.<sup>6</sup> These results cut across gender, age or length of time in the job. The data suggests that more workers see music as playing a positive role compared with those who see it as having little or no role. This latter group represents a significant minority, however, and is comprised almost exclusively of workers in large chains. Of the 29 workers who saw music as being important, ten worked for independents. However, 19 were employed by large chains, most of which directed music exclusively at customers and afforded workers little or no influence. Overall, the data does not suggest a simple relationship between the way in which workers perceive the role of music in service interactions and the type of organisation (chain or independent) they work in. The complexity of these relationships emerges when examining more closely worker accounts of the role of music and how these map against the four quadrants of Figure 1 as discussed below.

### *Alienating or no role*

As noted above, a significant minority of workers in the interview sample felt that music played little or no role in service interactions. One worker ‘hadn’t heard one person comment on the [in-store] radio in seven years’, although she had noticed customers singing and dancing (Joss, Retail-Chain1), while others said it was rare for customers to comment on the music (Ray, Café-Chain2; Will, Retail-Chain1); another could recall only two occasions in the last two years (Ross, Café-Chain1). It is important to note that not all of these workers found the music soundscape alienating; they simply did not see music as important in the service interaction.

There is no doubt, however, that many do dislike some elements of in-store music over which they have little influence and from which there can be little escape. This feeling is most widely shared among workers where the music soundscape becomes highly repetitive, as illustrated at Retail-Chain6 discussed above, although it is not confined to such cases and can simply reflect a person’s particular music tastes. This comes across in some of the comments from the online survey at Retail-Chain1: ‘Customers regularly complain about the racket we play!’; ‘Customers commenting how bad the music is’.

In these situations, workers do their best to ‘tune out’, blocking out tracks they find particularly annoying: ‘I just zone it out and go into my own little world’ (Claire, Retail-Chain6); ‘you stop listening’ (Ross, Retail-Chain1). Indeed, the practice of ‘tuning out’ and ‘tuning in’ (i.e. actively listening to particular songs which are enjoyed) is widely referred to by workers across the interviews, indicating that they retain some ability to insulate themselves from certain forms of in-store music, a practice which becomes more difficult the more monotonous and repetitive the playlist.

Music can also be too loud, providing workers and management with a flurry of customer complaints, and making any attempt to ‘tune out’ almost impossible. High volume can be particularly problematic where it gets in the way of conversations, especially during busy rush periods when queues are long, adding to stress levels. At these moments, workers can feel alienated from customers as there is little space for social embedding in the service interaction, with the music soundscape only aggravating the situation. As Chrissie (Retail-Chain6) comments: ‘it’s like two people trying to have a conversation and someone just shouts over you’. Tracey (Café-Indep3), who generally liked the music played in store and saw it as having a positive role in service interactions, recalled situations ‘when you’re feeling really pressured ... like a really busy period and then you get loads of like jangling piano or trumpets ... to us it’s like, oh my God, this music’s making it worse. You’re in a Charlie Chaplin film and everything is just noise.’ Indeed, this provides one of many examples of how workers can move between these different quadrants.

#### *Music as bridge for sociality/ersatz sociality*

The largest group within the interview sample (29 respondents) is comprised of workers who felt music played a positive role in service interactions, with the most populated quadrant of Figure 1 being number three. For this group, music was seen as a ‘great bridge that can open up a conversation’ (Finn, Café-Chain3), as an ‘icebreaker’ (Sally Retail-Chain2), or as a ‘focal point’ (Paul, Café-Indep1) for connecting with customers and people: ‘Once or twice a week like someone comes up and asks “what’s that song?”’ (Michael, Café-Indep4); ‘quite a few customers ... say “Oh we really like this song, can you find out what it is”’ (Richard, Café-Chain1). Workers in this group frequently referred to how they, their colleagues and customers would react to music by humming, singing, or dancing, which could then become part of a shared experience. Dana (Retail-Indep5) commented how it was

‘lovely to see tattooed people ... dancing along to Dean Martin or Michael Bublé’ and how she would ‘sing along’ and try to ‘include the customer’, using humour to break the ice: ‘I’ll just joke and say something like “It’s gotta be done, you know” ... and it’s amazing nine times out of ten as soon as you talk to a customer they will open up ... music actually opens that opportunity up and in a fun sort of way.’

Indeed, humour and music often go hand in hand, with interactions forged through shared laughter. As Joy (Retail-Chain7) puts it, dancing and singing along to music is not only ‘fun’, it ‘makes customers laugh and smile ... they can approach and chat to me.’ Sally (Retail-Chain2) described how ‘when customers hear you singing they find it funny ... it breaks the ice.’ Many of the written comments from the survey also pick up on this: ‘*Sloop John B* was being played on the Sunday shift and my colleague and I were singing along and customers were laughing at us singing’; ‘When we sing along to songs customers often comment and laugh about being serenaded while they shop’; ‘Bucks Fizz’s *Making Your Mind Up* got a good conversation going recently when a few customers and me and a team leader started doing dance moves; we all had a laugh’.

Another finding is the way that music works to evoke memory which is then shared with another. As DeNora (1999) notes, music, as with scent, has a Proust-like semiotic power to recall past experiences and feelings in the listener by taking them back to events in their lives associated with a particular piece of music or genre (see also Hesmondhalgh, 2008). Recent research on customers also highlights how ‘Music triggers retrieval of autobiographical, emotion-laded experiences from the listener’s past’ (Cluley, forthcoming). Workers often referred to how memories prompted by a song or piece of music could be shared between workers and customers: ‘Mandy who is next to me ... she’s a Motown lover. If there’s a certain song on there, it’s back again to memory, she’ll say “oh I remember when” ... and then other people will interact, be it a customer or colleague’ (Gill, Retail-

Chain2); ‘One customer commented that a particular song that was playing at the time was the first dance that she and her husband had on their wedding day’ (Retail-Chain1, free text comment); ‘The Retro years are very popular ... the conversations with staff and customers go along the lines of ... Ooh 19\*\* [year] I remember I was etc. Always starts a great conversation off’ (Retail-Chain1, free text comment); ‘when we played Motown ... there were a lot of conversations about the music because a lot of ladies were “Oh, I remember when this first came out”’ (Lily, Retail-Chain2).

While selecting music that can appeal to different age groups is challenging for many organisations, there are occasions when it can help to bridge the generation gap: ‘It even gets like old and young talking together ... like old ladies in the shop and I have been moving my head along to Michael Jackson and ... they’d go “Don’t you know this one?” and I’m like “No, I wasn’t born...sorry” and they’re like “Oh you should listen to it, you really should”’ (Aiden, Retail-Chain1). In this way, music can act as a cue for customer service by helping to build rapport: ‘This morning I had a Brigitte Bardot song on and there were like people dancing ... they [customers] will hear something and say “Oh, I remember this and then you say “yeah” and then that leads into “Oh, by the way, do you need any help?”’ (Sheila, Retail-Indep3). For some service workers, music helps their personalities to shine through so they can be themselves and become more approachable to customers: ‘Sometimes yeah I’ll do a little jiggle ... hopefully I can make the customer feel comfortable with me by just kind of being myself’ (Andrew, Retail-Chain4); ‘I like to sing a lot ... have a little dance ... to try and make the customer feel comfortable around me and make them feel ... we’re not scary retail workers’ (Jessie, Retail-Chain5).

As DeNora (1999: 37) notes, music has transformative properties, not least by helping people to ‘shift mood or energy level’. Many workers referred to how happy, optimistic songs with a more upbeat tempo could lift their spirits and prompt them to be more positive with



customers: 'when an upbeat song comes along it reminds me to smile and chat' (Retail-Chain1, free text comment). Another commented: 'When a song comes along that the staff and customers enjoy you see a noticeable difference in their moods, some start singing and the rest have huge smiles on their faces. The morale of the staff is massively improved' (Retail-Chain1, free text comment). For another it was simply a case that 'music lifts my spirits which I can then pass on to customers' (Retail-Chain1, free text comment). Others, like Polly (Café-Chain1), would sing along to music when customers were waiting in long queues as a way of trying to 'chill ... and cheer up customers'.

Many spoke of how customers would often respond positively to workers who were visibly seen to be enjoying themselves: 'I have been singing along and customers have commented on me being happy at work' (Retail-Chain1, free text comment); 'Currently playing Sam Cooke's *Bring It On Home* which I sing along to and customers will say "someone's happy in their work"' (Retail-Chain1, free text comment). Nor is this just one way; service workers also spoke of how seeing the customer respond naturally to the music by humming, singing or moving their bodies, would make them smile and make the customer more approachable *to them*: 'We have had people walk past and sing along and say "Oh I love that song" and we've had a chat about it' (Fleur, Retail-Indep1); 'there was a lot of conversations about the music [Motown] ... they're happy, jiggy songs and you'd see somebody walk past and they'd be having a little bit of a smile and a giggle and sing-a-long and there was a positive interaction about the music' (Lily, Retail-Chain2).

Sometimes more personal bonds can be forged through music. Lyle (Retail-Indep5) explained how in an independent store with a 'niche' clientele he could spot people who liked raucous 'Metal' bands like *Death Heaven*. While management would often tell him to turn it off, 'people come and say they like it ... you kind of get a weird little bond.' Another worker commented how when AC/DC's *Back in Black* came on the store radio he had seen a 'Biker

guy' with 'bandana and beard' and felt confident enough to make an emotional and physical connection: 'like I knew he'd like the song, so I just put my arm around him and we kind of like [shared in our enjoyment of the track] (Wes, Retail-Chain1).'

### *Potential for co-conspirators and music as a haven from customers*

The least populated quadrants with the fewest examples are two (*potential for co-conspirators*) and four (*music as a haven from customers*), which are discussed here together. However, they shed some light on the role of music in service interactions. Where music is a source of displeasure for both worker and customer, it can still form part of a shared experience, or talking point, and be handled in ways which would seem to support sociality in the service interaction. Several comments from the online survey reflect this: 'Usually when Rap is on the radio, have a laugh and a joke with customers that neither of us can stand it!'; 'We have discussed what terrible song is on'; 'I often ask them if they find the unavoidable music annoying.' However, these comments are rare, while there is little in the data to suggest workers and customers use music to share critical views of the organisation or work, beyond the music itself.

Nor is there much support for the idea that workers see the music soundscape as a haven from customers. There are certainly times, however, when *all* service workers experience difficult or abusive customers, and the interviews offer an insight into how music can help workers to deal with the stress by letting off steam. This may involve finding spaces off-stage, away from customers and managers, to play music on their own listening devices. Monica (Café-Chain3) described how music could not only 'calm my emotions down' but if she felt the need also 'rile them up': 'There's a song by Limp Bizkit and if I am feeling angry and can't suck it back down, I listen to *Break Stuff*. It makes me very angry, I go a bit loopy ... and then it's gone ... some customers make me angry.' A retail worker related how when

she felt ‘cheesed off’, she would go up to the ‘warehouse, a song comes on the radio, cheers you up, you’ve forgotten all about it’ (Sally, Retail-Chain2).

*A note on the fluidity of worker positions within the framework*

Notwithstanding the broad patterns outlined above, we have been at pains throughout to emphasise that this theoretical framework is not intended as a static analysis and that workers can move between the different quadrants. There are a number of individual examples in the data, some of which have already been touched on, such as the effects of music during busy service periods. It may be useful by way of illustration to provide a singular, in-depth example of the subjective nature of music and its complex, variable and shifting effects. Julia (Retail-Chain3) enjoyed some elements of in-store music, while disliking others, and generally considered periods without music as ‘solemn’ and lowering one’s spirits. She spoke of how music acted as an ‘icebreaker’, adding that with some particular songs the ‘music transforms me, makes me want to sing’, which carried over into her interactions with customers: ‘everybody starts to laugh and ... the customer will comment “you’re in a good mood today” or something like that’ (quadrant 3, music as bridge to social interaction). In busy periods, when she needed to concentrate, or deal with a particular customer issue and ‘just focus on the job’, she would get into ‘a routine of blanking those songs out’ (quadrant 1, tuning out). However, there was one track that was repeatedly played which prevented this and turned the music soundscape into an alienating experience: ‘makes you think what on earth are you doing here’ (quadrant 1, music as alienating soundscape). At these moments, music could not inform a positive interaction with customers, unless it was through shared complaints. Customer abuse was rare and while a difficult customer could undermine the potential of music, even when enjoyed, to act as a bridge to social interaction, it could still

help her to deal with frustration: 'I sing to myself' (quadrant 4, music as a haven from customers).

A further illustration of how workers shift position on the 2×2 grid is provided by the way interviewees responded to questions probing their feelings towards Christmas music. This is a period when management-controlled playlists can become particularly repetitive and annoying and where workers can feel themselves at the mercy of an alienating soundscape, even for those who are generally either neutral or positive towards music at work. Brian (Retail-Chain5) was far from alone in his view that Christmas music 'pisses me off ... so annoying ... the same songs every day. I hate Christmas music!' For Lily (Retail-Chain2), while music could often be a positive in customer interactions, Christmas music 'drives me round the bend ... *Rocking around the Christmas Tree, Driving Home for Christmas*, makes me depressed.'

And yet caution is required lest one be tempted to draw generalised conclusions, for some workers clearly 'love Christmas songs' (Anya, Café-Chain3). Again, where there is shared enjoyment between worker and customer, Christmas music can help to oil the wheels of social interaction and build customer rapport. While Chrissie (Retail-Chain6) found the music soundscape alienating, Christmas was different: 'it's nice and it sort of got everybody into the Christmas spirit'. This is also reflected in the online survey: 'Customers humming Christmas songs ... allows us to initiate a conversation and provide an authentic and engaging style of customer service' (free text comment). Besides showing how workers' responses to the music soundscape can change and with it their propensity to use music within the service interaction, such comments are a further reminder of how individually subjective music is, something which makes studying the factors shaping workers' satisfaction with music particularly challenging.

## **Discussion**

The data suggests that while there is a significant minority of workers for whom music plays little or no role in the service interaction, a greater number regarded music as important in supporting positive interactions with customers and fall into quadrant three of Figure 1. Worker satisfaction with music appears to have an important bearing on it playing a positive role, but is not in itself a sufficient condition.

Overall, most workers in this study are positive in their views of customers, with feelings of alienation reserved mainly for instances of customer rudeness and aggression or busy times of the day when customer interactions are rushed and often stressful. Where music is centrally controlled, many also hold the view that music should primarily be *for* the customer. When workers exercise editing power, as is the case in the independents within this study, most will defer their own self-gratification, or at least modify their particular music choices, in order to take account of its effects on customers. This would also suggest that for most service workers in this study the customer is seen more as a legitimate stakeholder than an alienating figure.

The research opens up an important window on the way many service workers use music and the transmission mechanisms through which it affects service interactions. Enjoyment of music can be expressed by many workers and customers aesthetically in the form of humming, singing and dancing, all of which can provide visual and aural cues for conversations about music, memory and customer service. The naturalness of behaviour invoked by unconscious responses to, and enjoyment of, music helps workers and customers to initiate conversations as people through a common shared experience. Personalities come out, the conversational ice is broken, as the banal is rendered fun and funny, and both worker and customer become more familiar, more approachable and more human to one another. In

some cases, music works through memory, recalling past life experiences which are then shared in ways which can reach out across the generations and bring them together.

What then of the Attali view that music serves only to create ‘ersatz sociality’ rather than ‘real’ forms of social interaction? Taking into account the way in which workers *talk* about the role that *music* plays in service interactions, it would be hard to dismiss this as embodying a form of sociality that is, in some sense, false. Worker accounts lean heavily towards the idea of music acting as a bridge to social interactions with customers. Worker accounts of customer relations in general, however, are more ambiguous, being framed in terms of delivering what they consider to be ‘good service’. The nature of the service encounter in organisations that are irreconcilably torn between rationalised cost-efficiency and service quality and which is ‘violated’ by managerial controls (Bolton and Houlihan 2007) means that this is not easy to deliver. The Attali school might legitimately claim that in these conditions customer relations can never constitute real forms of sociality, although it is not a position with which we would concur.

In our assessment, workers’ accounts of the role that music plays within service interactions offer another lens through which to better understand a service encounter which is profoundly more complex in terms of people’s motivations, behaviours and interaction than simply that between a ‘worker’ and a ‘customer’. In the same way that service workers (and customers for that matter) are active agents within the service interaction, service workers actively appropriate the music soundscape and use it to interact with customers in their own way and in accordance with their own social and human needs.

The transformative power of music on workers’ mood can certainly have a significant effect on their level of engagement with customers, helping them to build rapport which can be of commercial benefit to organisations. It would seem that music can help to momentarily restore a sense of naturalness, sincerity and authenticity to worker-customer relations. In so

doing, it can aid service workers to serve customers better by helping to provide them with a positive experience of customer service, with obvious spill-over benefits for the organisation. Indeed, management is often seeking to find ways to get workers to be 'real' in their dealings with customers, and music is one means by which this can occur.

## **Conclusion**

The article began by noting the lack of research on the impact of music on service workers and their interaction with customers, arguing that this gap risks neglecting something potentially important in workers' experience. Consequently, it set out to understand the role that music might play in service interactions. As well as providing new empirical data, this article has sought to make an original theoretical contribution. Building on the socially embedded nature of service interactions derived from studies of service work, it presents an original theorising of the DeNora argument concerning the contextual appropriation of music by listeners in everyday life for their own needs and purposes, and applies this to the specific contextual setting of the service encounter. The data show broad support for this theorising, its main conclusion being that while service workers can feel 'alienated' from some customers and some organisationally-controlled music, they exert an active agency in the way they respond to, and use, music within their everyday work and interactions with customers. For many, 'music is a difference maker' (free text comment) in the service interaction which is used to forge social and human relationships with customers that go beyond an instrumental service exchange. These findings add substance and flesh to DeNora's (2000: 151) perspective on the 'social "powers"' of music as well as Styhre's (2013: 38) contention that 'Music is then not only used as method to reduce the strains of working life, or to promote a mass-produced consumer commodity, but is also part of the social fabric, being used in a variety of ways to construct meaningful relationships en route.'

Service organisations might do well, therefore, to pay more attention to the impact of music on their staff as well as their customers. While this study stresses that service workers use music for their own purposes and that management-controlled playlists are not necessarily perceived negatively, caution is required on the question of worker influence. In the same way that managerial control strategies can often serve to ‘crowd out’ the efforts made by service workers to provide customers with ‘good service’, so unsophisticated and repetitive playlists, which take no account of the impact on workers, may limit the potential that music provides to improve customer relations, not to mention workers’ experience of work. Music is, nevertheless, highly subjective and individual. Using music to define the brand, appeal to customers, and address the diverse needs and preferences of workers requires considerable thought as well as investment in terms of resources, and will inevitably involve trade-offs and compromises in what is a delicate balancing act.

The literature on music in service settings certainly has a lot of catching up to do, assuming those in this area are so inclined. So too, for that matter, does the literature on service work. This paper is primarily intended to go some way towards addressing this lacuna. In doing so, it would be naive to suggest that music could compensate for other factors affecting job quality and worker satisfaction in many routine service jobs. But that is not an argument for neglecting its significance in the working lives of many service workers to which the voices in this article ably attest. It certainly deserves more attention than it has hitherto received.

Finally, this study suggests important avenues for further research. The article has not sought to probe the factors affecting service workers’ satisfaction or dissatisfaction with music at work which would require a separate paper. Given that some of the findings, however, suggest that music can be alienating for workers, further work is needed to unpack the conditions under which this occurs. Some clues are provided by the data – repetitive



playlists, busy rush periods, high volumes and personal tastes – all of which are worthy of investigation. We already have some insight into the factors which may affect workers' subjective experience of the customer (Korczynski, 2009), the other key dimension on our 2×2 matrix shaping music's effects on service interactions. Further research could explore the circumstances under which both dimensions change. Exploring employer perspectives on music design and its use is another area that warrants investigation. It would also be interesting to explore whether music allows service workers to express critical, resistive understandings of organisations and work, and whether these are shared with disaffected customers. This study is limited in that it only focuses on cafés and retail, and does not consider the perspective of customers, both of which could be addressed. It is hoped, however, that this article has at least made a start and encourages others to engage with this research agenda.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors wish to thank the associate editor, Amanda Shantz, and three anonymous reviewers for their many helpful comments and suggestions on previous drafts of this paper.

### **Funding**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Marx (1964) described the worker under capitalism as alienated from their labour, from their own nature, and from others. A complex concept, it expresses at its simplest the failure of work to provide conditions for human flourishing. Korczynski (2009) argues that service workers might be viewed as being in an *objectively* alienated relationship to the dominant, mythically sovereign customer but that their *subjective* experience of the customer is not pre-determined owing to the socially embedded nature of the service encounter.

<sup>2</sup> Adorno often praised Schoenberg as a composer for expressing the contradictions and disharmony of capitalism. He reserved his most trenchant criticisms for jazz, writings which fellow Marxist, Eric Hobsbawm (1993: 300), regarded as ‘some of the stupidest pages ever written on jazz’.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the qualitative interview data included interviews undertaken at both Café-Chain1 and Retail-Chain1.

<sup>4</sup> We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

<sup>5</sup> The 60 interviews included a focus group of 3 workers at Retail-Chain3 which are not included in the analysis, leaving a total sample of 57 interviews.

<sup>6</sup> Five interviews analysed are unclassified in this respect, meaning that the question was not sufficiently addressed.

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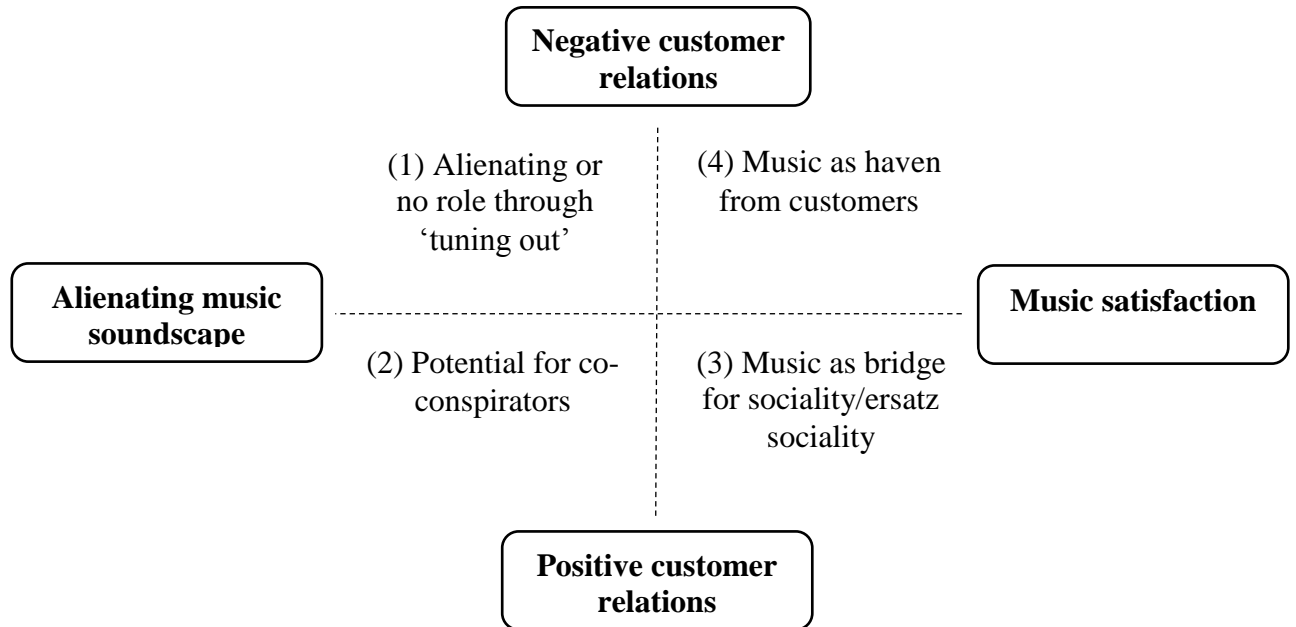
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**Table 1: Workers' views on customer relations, the music soundscape, and the role of music in service interactions**

<b>Worker, organization (anonymised)</b>	<b>Customer relations</b>	<b>Experience of music soundscape</b>	<b>Perceived role of music in service interaction</b>
1. Aiden, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
2. Will, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
3. Wes, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
4. Jackie, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
5. Trisha, Retail-Chain1	50/50	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
6. Melissa, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
7. Aisla, Retail-Chain2	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
8. Gill, Retail-Chain2	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
9. Sally, Retail-Chain2	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
10. Andrew, Retail-Chain4	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
11. Joe, Retail-Chain4	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
12. Jessie, Retail-Chain5	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
13. Chloe, Retail-Chain6	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unclassified
14. Mary, Retail-Chain8	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unclassified
15. Rachel, Retail-Chain8	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
16. Samantha, Retail-Chain8	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
17. Polly, Café-Chain1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
18. Nathan, Café-Chain1	50/50	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
19. Richard, Café-Chain1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
20. Ray, Café-Chain2	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
21. Ricky, Café-Chain3	50/50	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
22. Anya, Café-Chain3	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
23. Fleur, Retail-Indep1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
24. Belinda, Retail-Indep1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
25. Jaz, Retail-Indep1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Unimportant
26. Johnny, Retail-Indep2	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
27. Sheila, Retail-Indep3	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
28. Gail, Retail-Indep5	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
29. Dana, Retail-Indep5	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
30. Lyle, Retail-Indep5	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
31. Paul, Café-Indep1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
32. Nila, Café-Indep1	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
33. Tracey, Café-Indep3	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
34. Michael, Café-Indep4	Generally positive	Generally satisfied	Music as bridge to customer
35. Sue, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Neutral	Unimportant
36. Scott, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Neutral	Unimportant
37. Sophie, Retail-Chain2	Generally positive	Neutral	Unimportant
38. Julia, Retail-Chain3	Generally positive	Neutral	Music as bridge to customer
39. Brian, Retail-Chain5	Generally positive	Neutral	Unimportant
40. Joy, Retail-Chain7	50/50	Neutral	Music as bridge to customer
41. Emily, Café Chain1	Generally positive	Neutral	Music as bridge to customer
42. Finn, Café-Chain3	Generally positive	Neutral	Music as bridge to customer
43. Monica, Café-Chain3	50/50	Neutral	Music as bridge to customer
44. Luke, Café Indep2	50/50	Neutral	Unclassified
45. Stella, Café-Indep3	Generally positive	Neutral	Unimportant
46. Joss, Retail-Chain1	50/50	Dissatisfied	Unimportant
47. Roger, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Dissatisfied	Unimportant
48. Lily, Retail-Chain2	50/50	Dissatisfied	Music as bridge to customer
49. Bella, Retail-Chain6	Generally positive	Dissatisfied	Unimportant
50. Rob, Retail-Chain6	Generally positive	Dissatisfied	Unimportant
51. Claire, Retail-Chain6	Generally positive	Dissatisfied	Unimportant
52. Chrissie, Retail-Chain6	Generally positive	Dissatisfied	Unimportant
53. Ross, Café-Chain1	Generally positive	Dissatisfied	Unimportant
54. Jay, Café-Chain1	Generally positive	Dissatisfied	Music as bridge to customer
55. Colette, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Unclassified	Unclassified
56. Les, Retail-Chain1	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified
57. Sandra, Retail-Chain1	Generally positive	Unclassified	Unimportant
58. Retail-Chain3 (focus group of 3 workers)	Not included	Not included	Not included

**Figure 1: Four scenarios for the role of music in service interactions**



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**Many thanks!**

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