

# **“It Just Makes You Feel Really Good”: A Narrative and Reflection on the Affordances of Musical Fandom Across a Life Course**

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The study of how music may be important to health and well-being can be seen as an increasingly broad and interdisciplinary field. As issues of health and well-being are routinely understood within the wider context of life style and cultural engagement, musical experiences far outside the professional practices of music therapy and music medicine are now seen to offer “potent and preventative measures to enhance psychophysiological well-being reaching into almost every aspect of life” (MacDonald, Kreutz & Mitchell, 2012, p. 4). Such shifts grow in part from the integration of more expansive definitions of health that underlay the field. Here health is a concept emphasised variously as a “quality of human interaction and engagement” (Dreier 1994, cited in Stige 2002), or “a quality of human co-existence” (Kenny & Stige, 2002, p. 24), a ‘performance’ of processes by which ‘self’ is realised into the world—mentally, physically and socially (Aldridge, 2005); whilst musical experiences have been suggested as an ‘immunogen behavior’, that is a health performing practice (Ruud, 2002). This in turn has widened the scope of music and health studies to include any mode of musical participation that holds the potential to promote well-being. Consequently there is a growing interest in how ‘ordinary’ people in ‘everyday’ settings use music to facilitate health (Ruud, 1998, 2010; Denora, 2000; Skånland, 2012), and how self-made musical experiences are used “to regulate emotional or relational states or to promote well-being”, this “lay-therapeutic musicking in everyday life” being considered an important area alongside more specific professional practices (Trondalen & Bonde 2012, p. 40, citing Bonde 2011). This paper seeks to contribute to this discourse through an exploration of the experiences of being a music fan, a particular form of musical participation that may hold a variety of implications for an individual’s health, well-being and quality of life.

## The Narrative

Theoretical understanding of everyday life musical practices can only emerge through listening to the individual narratives of music as a lived experience. Crafts, Cavicchi and Keil's (1993) ground breaking study of music in daily life, *My Music*, uses the presentation of a wide range of narratives as a way of giving voice to people not ordinarily heard. The book is a fascinating snapshot of the lived experience of music in the USA, revealing "the knowledge that people have about how they use and enjoy music in their own lives" (p. xii). It demonstrates the value of archiving narratives rather than collecting them for analysis. Following on from this approach this article presents the narrative of DT, a 41-year-old male, who for more than 25 years has defined himself as a Bruce Springsteen fan. DT's narrative emerged as a result of a series of informal qualitative interviews or theme orientated conversations (Kvale, 1996) through which we mapped the chronology of his fandom, what being a Springsteen fan had entailed for him, how being a fan had been undertaken and his reflections on the experience of being a fan across his life course.<sup>1</sup> The narrative was curated drawing on established techniques of narrative configuration as 'discourse composition' that brings together "diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). DT and I collaborated in this process and he was free to change, edit, expand and reflect on the narrative and how it represented him. The result is a narrative about his experience as fan created from our shared understanding of the interview transcript. It is a story that portrays many, though not all, significant aspects of DT's relationship with Bruce Springsteen's music as it has evolved across his life course, from first encounters to present day routines and rituals both solitary and social.

DT: My narrative: It just makes you feel really good

*My name is DT, I am 41, I work as an engineer, and I live in a small town. I have been a Bruce Springsteen fan since I was 14. Bruce once said, "I always wanted my music to influence the life you were living emotionally—with your family, your lover, your wife, and, at a certain point, with your children." In this narrative I try to explain why Bruce and his music have meant so much to me over the years, and still does.*

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<sup>1</sup> Session 1: September 9<sup>th</sup> 2012, 2 hours. Session 2: September 10<sup>th</sup> 2012, 2 hours. Session 3: September 13<sup>th</sup> 2012, 2 hours.

## I liked the sound

*My sister had a copy of Born in the USA, which she played all the time. He [Springsteen] had a bit of a rough voice, and I saw pictures of him at the time in 1985, he has a leather jacket and a jeans jacket and a red headband [...] and my first impression was, "what is this guy?" [...] 'The River' album was the first time I actually began to enjoy his [Springsteen's] music [...] that was the start I think. The first thing was the melodies on 'The River' [...] it is very easy to like. I liked the sound.*

*Basically many of his songs are about men, and men who are living in a traditional pattern, that was usual back in the 1970s when the man in the house was working in the factory and the women stayed at home [...] Some of the words that you very often find in his songs are hope, dreams, faith, promise, love, broken hearts, cars [...] especially [from his songs] back in the 70s. I think that is why people can relate to that. Everyone can relate to that.*

*It is so much more than the lyrics. The lyrics can be just telling a plain story, and there is always a point in the story, but there are so many other things—the melody, the instruments, and the voice. It's how it is presented, the tone of voice, there are so many aspects in a song that all combine together—that gives you this feeling which is impossible to explain [...] It gives you a heightened experience and it just makes you feel really good.*

*For me [Springsteen's music] it's like this big bucket of something, there is so much in there [...] If there are songs from other artists that you don't like immediately then you don't really bother to listen. Whereas with Springsteen you want to dig deeper and you want to see what is in there. Sometimes you find things you like or sometimes you think, "this song doesn't give me that much really", but you always give it a decent chance in a way [...] And I am glad I have done that because that has maybe given me the best experiences within his music; those songs that I maybe didn't like at first but kind of grows after a while, they become more important to you.*

## It's mostly when I drive

*Earlier I could just lie down on my bed in my room and just listen and study the lyrics but [laughs] I don't really do that anymore [...] [These days] if I want to relax I watch TV instead. Actually when I am cleaning the house, I put on some music, but then I can just as well put on ABBA or Dire Straits or any music by Adele for that matter, so [now listening to Springsteen] it's mostly when I drive.*

*When you are in the car alone, you can just turn it up as loud as you want, and so I sing a lot in the car, when I am alone, and it gives me a really great feeling [...] I think*

*it is perhaps a bit of an escape really, because you sit there in the car for one hour and you listen to the music and you are driving alone, so you don't talk to anybody. You sing along with the music, and your thoughts just run somewhere—which you really shouldn't when you are driving a car by the way [laughs]. So it's kind of a way to escape and relax—escape from thoughts about work and all that.*

*I like to sing as I listen to his songs, and although I don't know all the words—I maybe know the chorus or some of the verses—and you know when you are not a native English speaker the language itself can be a challenge. You don't always understand what he is meaning with this phrase or this verse, but you just learn the words anyway, or what you think the words are [laughs], your own version. And then you just sing-a-long and that gives me a really good feeling, just singing out loud.*

For every state of mind I am in I have these songs

*I guess when I was in my teens, I used it [Springsteen's music] as a way to build self-confidence, and it makes you feel—well—more confident. I remember in my teens I sometimes had low self esteem, you know both when it came to girls or at work and in relation to other people [...]. So I think that gave me a low self confidence and then I used his music as a comfort and a way to build up my self esteem again.*

*I have used Springsteen's music very much as a comfort, depending on the state of mind I am in. If I am sad, I can listen to certain songs, and if I am angry, I can listen to some songs, if I am happy [pauses]. For every state of mind I am in I have these songs that I kind of use as either a comfort or, [pauses] and I think you asked me how does a song change over the years, the meaning of it, but to me it doesn't, it's about what state of mind I am in. So I can still put on something which I listened to twenty years ago, and it can still comfort me.*

*"Do you ever listen to other music?" [laughs] I still get that from people. Of course if you get fanatic and it controls your life [...] then it becomes unhealthy, but with no doubt I think enjoying music is really necessary for everybody, to have something like that in their lives. And I think music can be so powerful, have such a powerful influence on your life and your feelings, in a positive way. [...] Using music as therapy - music has so much power in it.*

Springsteen was this part of us

*That's what music does it connects people [...] For me, L, B and P [DT's three closest male friends] Springsteen has for us maybe been our main platform of why we became friends. We had this mutual interest in Bruce Springsteen and we always went together to his*

concerts [...] We all just loved his music so we had that in common. We played football together and we had the same sense of humor. But back then [when they were teenagers] Springsteen was very important in our friendship and still is really [...] We would hang out together a lot and we had this very internal sense of humor and Springsteen was this part of us. And so we were really looked upon as, 'those guys—the Springsteen fans.'

It has always been about us four [DT, L, B and P] going to the concerts, so that is a thing that has brought us closer, so that is our thing [...] I guess people around us, I guess they thought it was a bit too much in a way, and when they came to party with us we would only listen to Springsteen and we would sit and talk about the music and the concerts—so I think many of them felt excluded in a way [...] They liked his music [...] but we were more like it was a hobby or a passion for us [...] and I think especially back then, many felt excluded from that. And we didn't try and involve any others, and we wanted to keep it for ourselves because that was our thing.

Now we [DT, L, B and P] don't see each other as much as we used to do and going to Springsteen concerts is kind of a way of coming together again and talking' about the glory days [...] the lyrics there [Springsteen's song 'Glory Days'] are actually a good point. [laughs] [...] Of course I see them at other times but when it's a [Springsteen] concert, then we know we are going, so we don't need to ask, "are you going to the concert", then we are definitely going. [...] So I guess it is every time he is on a tour it comes back, and we get together and we start listening to the new album and after the concert it cools down again, so it has its peak at the concert day.

With my situation now, I am single and they [L, B and P] are all in a steady relationships. [...] So, I am in quite a different situation to what they are [...] So, I think it is a way of keeping connected to B and L, Springsteen is still one of the things there. [...] Things are changing, [...] as you get older you don't necessarily hang out with the same people you hung out with when you were 20, and now you get new relations in your life. But in a way, with L, B, and P—especially L and B, Springsteen is one of the main things that keeps us together, in a way that's a good thing because we have been friends since we were kids really, and I think that the friendship we have had over the years is quite unique. If you ask people around 40 [years of age], "how many of your friends today have you known for more than 20 or 30 years and you still hang out with them", it's not so many. I think that is quite unique.

So it becomes more than just the music

I think as a live artist Springsteen is quite exceptional. His ability to present his music in the way he does is for me very important. [...] It's more than just him playing his songs—many artists they show up and play the songs and say goodnight [...] [with Springsteen],

*its more about the whole concept of communication between him and the fans—and me. It's what he says, what he does and the songs, the way he sings his songs [...] Often when he plays songs live he changes them a bit—new versions of the songs—that whole package in a way makes it more than just an ordinary concert where you just listen to the music, it's more like a communication.*

*When he is on stage there playing the songs that have meant so much to me, that gives me the same good feeling it has always done. You see him as kind of a friend, you feel like you kind of, in a way, know him because you have been a fan for so long [...] it's kind of a loyalty that isn't necessarily based on common sense.*

*[Speaking in a wry, self mocking tone] This is where we get to the part when I say that [laughing] I love him. [Returns to his normal voice] Springsteen has meant so much to me for so many years, so it becomes more than just the music, it's like the whole [pauses], who he is. [...] It's about him and the band, of course and it's a big part of it that he has kept the same band for so many years. It's like wanting it to be the same as it has always been. You don't want it to end.*

## You share a thing—with friends and family

*When Springsteen creates those magic moments for that shared feeling, that is the really important part of it for me. It's about sharing it with people who are close to me [...] [Springsteen's music] brings you closer and you share a thing [...] it is about sharing things together so then you will both feel the same way.*

*I don't think I would enjoy a concert if I were there alone, if I didn't bring my friends [...] I remember when we went to the [Springsteen] concert [...] the last time [...] and we had quite a few beers and I remember we were standing there, all holding onto each other and dancing and singing to 'Born to Run'. It was a really joyful moment we shared together, so it makes a connection that you can't always explain with words. It's a shared feeling.*

*I saw her [his older sister T] sitting there and singing it 'Drive all Night' [from the River album], she knows the whole lyrics. I saw her singing and I could just see that she had gone into a state of mind—it gives her a very special feeling—and I think that is what it is about for me. I could see she was just experiencing the same feeling that I have.*

*I have strong memories of my younger brother playing [guitar] and singing 'Adam raised a Cain' in the basement, and when we sang along together when Bruce played 'Jungle Land' [at a concert], in 1999.*

*For me, that [the sharing of Springsteen's music with his son S] is now important. [...] It just started with me playing the music in the car and as I was playing it [...] he was 4 years old [...] and then suddenly he would say, "Can't you put on song number*

3". He would come with requests and he would find his own favorites [...] I guess there will come a day when he will listen to things that are more popular, in a way, but I am really glad that he seems to get some of the same joy from Springsteen's music that I have experienced through the years. So that is why it was so important for me to bring S to a concert, [...] because then I know he will have a lifetime experience, something he will remember for the rest of his life, and we shared it together.

All those memories and all that music that he [Springsteen] has given to me, that will always be there for me [...] We have been really lucky to have experienced all the things we have done with him.

## Context: Fandom, Health and Well-Being

As Grey, Sandvoss and Harrington proclaim in the opening sentence of their collection of writings about fandom, "[m]ost people are fans of something. If not, they are bound to know someone who is", (Grey, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007, p. 1). However, despite the fact that being a music fan has become one of the most visible forms of musical participation to emerge during the twentieth century, it has been viewed as a rather dysfunctional state. First, the very origin of the term fan—fanatic—implies a negative state. Those who are fanatical have an obsessive engagement with music, different from other types of musical enthusiasm to the extent that it is disruptive or troubling. Indeed, fandom has been associated with dysfunctional modes of participating in particular forms of mass mediated music—music that of itself has been assumed to be pacifying or corrupting. Through the practices of fandom individuals and groups have been seen to perform a range of pathological symptoms such as obsessiveness and hysteria that can even result in dangerous or violent acts (Jensen, 1992; Cavicchi, 1998). As fandom represents a potent form of popular culture consumption, fans have also been held as the worst example of 'cultural dopes' in the grip of passive consumerism (Grossberg, 1992, p. 51).<sup>2</sup> Consequently, when music fans have been studied, it has often been to explore whether fandom, or the objects

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<sup>2</sup> In distinguishing music fans from those who enjoy music or musical aficionados issues of musical value are crucial. Often crude distinctions are made between the modes of engagement with music of high culture and music of mass culture. For example, the western art music tradition has conventionally been a form 'appreciated' through modes of engagement requiring contemplation, interaction, knowledge and taste. Whereas, many forms of popular music are seen to appeal to the masses and are therefore deemed to be 'consumed' unthinkingly by a passive audience lacking knowledge and taste (Jensen, 1992; Grossberg, 1992). See also Washburne & Derno, 2004.

of fandom (primarily different genres of popular music), were a symptom or cause of negative behaviours (Jenson, 1992).

The allying of fandom and musics deemed to be potentially corrupting can be traced in some of the latest thinking about music, health and well-being. For example, North and Hargreaves' contribution to *Music, Health and well-being* (2012) focuses on what they term the "more negative aspect of well-being", namely whether pop music subcultures "promote self-harming" and "delinquency" (North & Hargreaves, 2012, p. 502). Throughout the article the term 'fan' is used to define those participating with musical subcultures (defined loosely via generic terms such as 'rock' and 'rap'). The distinction being made by using the term fan rather than listener is never explicitly addressed. In the same collection Miranda *et al* (2012), also use the term 'fan' in relation to various states of distress or dysfunction that may result from listening to "musical subcultures" (p. 517), or "problem musics" (p. 523). For example, they speak of "distressed music fans" (p. 517) and "heavy metal fans" who are more at risk of suicide, (p. 524). The issue with this type of psychologically grounded research is the uncritical use of the term 'fan' to imply a particular yet undefined mode of engagement linked to genres of music—similarly ill-defined—that are viewed to be potentially damaging.

Such loose descriptions of engagement are somewhat at odds with other disciplines where a great deal of theoretical focus has been placed on differentiating music and how people actually engage with it as listeners, audiences, consumers or fans, through networks such subcultures, scenes and the mainstream. (Frith & Goodwin, 1990; Frith, 1996; Negus, 1996, 1999; Bennett 2001; Shuker, 2001; Straw, 2001, Longhurst, 2007). Fandom is viewed as a means to facilitate self, group and social identity and community whilst also affording personal expression, action, agency and empowerment for people at all stages of their life course (Grossberg, 1984; Lewis, 1992; Cavicchi, 1998; Bennett, 2000; Fast, 2001; Jenkins, 1992, 1996; Kotarba et al, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010; Fiske, 2010; Bennett & Taylor, 2012). Indeed, those who have studied musical fandom specifically have located it in terms of its affordances for coping with daily life within the modern technological world. Jenson (1992) suggests that fandom is a way of making sense of the world in relation to mass media but also in relation to "historical, social and cultural" situatedness (Jenson, 1992, p. 27). Lewis (1992) speaks of fandom as affording a depth of feeling and gratification important in coping with everyday life (Lewis, 1992, p. 1), while Grossberg (1984) suggests fandom offers individual strategies for survival and pleasure. Drawing on the work of Grossberg (1992), Lewis also notes that through participating in fandom fans construct coherent identities for themselves and experience a sense of empowerment (Lewis, 1992, p. 3). Cavicchi, (1998) views fandom as a way individuals cope with "the existential reality



of their daily lives" helping them, "make connections with other people around them" (Cavicchi, 1998, pp. 185-186). Similarly, Bennett has concluded that popular music fandom can be a "catalyst for forms of social identity" through collective participation that creates a strong sense of belonging and group membership (Bennett, 2006, p. 95). For many, musical fandom affords meaning, identity and a sense of community in modern society where such things are absent.

These conflicting perspectives point to one of the great underlying tensions in theorising what people do with music in the infinite variety and complexity of contemporary everyday or ordinary life. As Keil (1993) so succinctly observes, on the one hand, music is now both highly commodified and mass mediated, suggesting a 'sameness of experience' that may hold potentially negative or damaging personal and social consequences. Whilst on the other, individual musical lives are often depicted as being 'highly variable', as people use music to form their own 'idioculture', through the creation of 'idiosyncratic, idiolectal' musical worlds (Keil, 1993, p. 211). This text focuses on elaborating such an idioculture as a way of exploring the potentials for musical fandom as a meaningful experience affording increased well-being and quality of life. However, understanding how individual experiences interact with mass experience, and *vice versa*, is a vital question for future research to address.

## **Reflection One: "It Gives You a Heightened Experience and it Just Makes You Feel Really Good"**

DT's narrative provides a rich description of a range of important perceptual, emotional and social experiences that have been created in, through and with the music of Bruce Springsteen as he has moved from adolescence to mature adulthood. DT's reflection that he has used Springsteen's music "*very much as a comfort*" voices how his experience has been a means to achieving and maintaining the feelings of physical and psychological ease that so enhance a person's quality of life and thus underscore a general state of well-being and good health. (Aldridge, 1996; Bruscia, 1998; Ruud, 2010) He describes how Springsteen's music has variously afforded a way of feeling good, a means of recognizing, matching and shifting feelings/emotions, a heightened sense of experience, a way of relaxing, a way of increasing energy, magical moments impossible to explain, an escape, a pause from ordinary life, a way of day-dreaming, an inspiration, a boost, a way of building self-esteem and self confidence, a type of therapy, a way of sharing feelings with others, a way of experiencing others, and a platform for relating and maintaining personal relationships. Such an array

of experiences confirms music as an 'affordance-laden' structure (DeNora, 2000; Krueger, 2011) crucial in facilitating, regulating and augmenting the emotional and social experiences of our life worlds.

Yet, what does DT's narrative suggest is afforded specifically by being a music fan, as opposed to other forms of musical engagement? Has being a fan afforded a different mode of musical participation or a different range of musical experiences? On one level DT's self-definition as a Bruce Springsteen fan expresses something of the particular mode of participation, distinct in terms of his attention. Participating with Springsteen is an activity done regularly with intense enthusiasm, an affinity, a commitment he feels to a body of music and the artist who created it—"it was a hobby or a passion for us". For DT being a fan is primarily marked out through a high degree of focused action and use of personal resources to access a specific music. This mode of participation could be termed an immersive experience. Immersion in this sense is a deeply enveloping experience of a particular music occurring over time. This allows for a wide variety of experiences and emotions to be attached to a particular body of music, which can then be carried into different situations, where it can be experienced and re-experienced for different purposes. The immersive experience of fandom then becomes a resource of continuity and stability across diverse and changing personal circumstances and public contexts. DT's narrative suggests ways in which this immersion has been used to 'cultivate' the self and how that self is shaped when shared with others through social participation (Krueger, 2011).

Like most other people, DT listens to music because it has the power to change, release or match emotional states: a process that in turn relieves stress (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010, p. 3). What marks out this experience as special for DT as a fan may relate to the deep sense of connection he feels for whole swathes of Springsteen's music, rather than just one song as he puts it, "*for every state of mind I am in I have these songs*". For every mood or emotional state DT has found a corresponding state projected back or matched by Springsteen. In this way Springsteen's music, and ultimately Springsteen himself, are the successful conveyers of emotions that are immediately knowable and in sync with DT's own. This intense 'emotional contagion' (Clarke, Dibben & Pitts, 2010, p. 84) works to construct a strong basis for feelings of affinity. This makes Springsteen's music different to that of other artists. As DT says, it's "*more like a communication*". This suggests not only that this music is consistently successful in sharing feelings, moods and ideas but is also a means of connection between people. Indeed, even in private moments of experience DT reflects on the awareness that he is not alone in finding such connections—"I guess that everybody experiences something like that". DT's investment in this experience of synchronization in many senses 'authorizes' Springsteen's music to speak as an emotional surrogate

(Grossberg, 1992, p. 59). As a result his music receives a special kind of attention and status. The relationship of affinity continually propels DT to invest more, to "*dig deeper*" in terms of listening and participation. Digging deeper takes the form of repeated listening to "*see what is in there*". DT senses that there will always be something in there for him, something he can know. Indeed he goes as far as saying that digging deeper has "*maybe given me the best experiences within his [Springsteen's] music*".

What DT terms his best experiences with Springsteen's music could also be understood in terms of Gabrielsson's research into 'strong experiences with music' (Gabrielsson, 2010). Gabrielsson has undertaken extensive research into this 'exaggerated' (Gabrielsson, 2010, p. 547) form of experience collecting data from individual narratives that chart a mix of physical, behavioural, perceptual, cognitive, emotional and social components. Strong experiences with music are seen to have "profound significance" for individuals but actually occur relatively rarely (Gabrielsson 2010, p. 571). DT's narrative suggests that the immersive experience of fandom may afford a recurring means of achieving such significant moments. One explanation for this may be linked to how fandom shapes engagement with music through specific patterns and practices of listening. Strong experiences with music are often related to the feeling of being surrounded by the music (Gabrielsson, 2010, p. 569). The concept of being surrounded is highly pertinent for fans who are often immersed in a literal, physical sense through focused concentrated listening, and also in a metaphorical sense through their wider immersive participations with the same music over time. DT's immersive participation is particularly evident in his descriptions of his private engagement/listening experience and how it has evolved from adolescence into middle age. As a teenager listening to Springsteen's music was a very focused intense form of engagement: "*I could just lie down on my bed in my room and just listen and study the lyrics*". The process of creating a listening experience that allows the listener to both envelop and be enveloped by music creates a heightened experience of, and connection to, the music. This musical cocoon has many similarities with the kind of 'auditory bubble' that has been found important when using personal listening devices such as MP3 players (Bull, 2007).

DT links this 'bubble' or enveloping phase of listening to adolescence as a time of strong "*passions and sensitivities*". During this period of intense listening Springsteen's music was a resource to "*influence self-esteem or feelings*", whilst listening in later years is described as offering a wider range of pleasures: "*now I can really more enjoy the music*". The enjoying of Springsteen's music is still marked out as a special experience, different to the enjoyment DT finds in other types of music. For example, in recent years at home he listens to a range of music for pleasure, relaxation or distraction whilst his private participation with Springsteen's music occurs "*mostly when I drive*".

DT stresses that a key dimension of listening in this space is its solitary nature, despite the fact that DT lives alone for the most part and has many opportunities to listen alone and uninterrupted. Clearly in this situation the solitary focused listening of the adolescent bedroom is re-experienced in the enclosed intimacy of the car. The time spent in the car allows largely uninterrupted extended periods (1 hour) that are enveloping (“*turn it up as loud as you like*”). Reserving Springsteen listening for the car suggests that this is a time spent alone not merely by himself but with himself. DT describes how listening in the car affords the pleasure of *escape*, from the routine patterns of thinking and the routine pressures of work, “*your thoughts just run somewhere*”, it “*makes you daydream*”, “*you get a pause from your ordinary life*”. Significant here may be the fact that cars feature heavily in much of Springsteen’s work often used as a literal and metaphorical means of escape. Escaping in this sense can be viewed as a powerful form of dissociation; a way of “cutting off from surroundings and external activities”, resulting in a therapeutic diverting of the normal patterns of thought—an experience imbued with an array of meditative qualities (Herbert, 2011, p. 93 and p. 62). Listening to Springsteen in the car also involves a lot of singing: “*I sing a lot in the car when I am alone, and it gives me a really great feeling*”. This mode of interaction has been seen as a way of obtaining “a greater sense of presence” (Bull, 2003, p. 368). Feeling a sense of oneself, present, embodied and alive, is an intensely affirming experience, particularly given the context, when this sense of self emerges through a musical experience that is deeply implicated in the formation of significant past events and emotions.

DeNora (2000) has suggested that for many people intense phases of listening to specific music can be a means of finding a representation of self in a “particular musical mirror”, a process that is later stopped, with the music rarely if ever used again. Certainly for some, the immersive experience of being a music fan marks out a special phase of life, something that is stepped into and out of. For those, like DT, who continue to find themselves in a particular musical mirror, this type of engagement evolves into a much more enduring affinity—a musical “template of self” (DeNora, 2000, p. 73), that continues to propel and shape why and how he listens. Such a reliable template provides a consistent source of reassurance and comfort: “*so I can still put on something which I listened to twenty years ago and it can still comfort me*”. In this way being a Springsteen fan becomes an important form of agency, experienced across time, instrumental in achieving a wider sense of security and personal ease.

## Reflection Two: "It's About Sharing Things Together So Then You Will Both Feel The Same Way"

DT's narrative speaks of how Springsteen's music has provided a focus for many of his most significant personal relationships with family and friends. Specifically he articulates how Springsteen's music has been used as a "*platform*" for his closest male relationships. In this sense Springsteen's music can be seen as a supporting structure, a stage on which relationships have emerged and have been played out; as well as a medium that both facilitates and maintains the sharing of experience. Sharing in this sense is both the act of giving something of yourself to others, but also jointly possessing experiences of self with others.

The quality of our personal relationships can have a profound influence on physical and psychological health (Duck, 1994; Vanzetti & Duck, 1996; Bedford & Turner, 2006; Way, 2011). Consequently understanding how music might function in friendships may be of particular relevance to increased understandings of how music practices afford health. DT's fan narrative demonstrates how music forms the basis for behaviours that define relations, primarily intimacy and interpersonal perception (Hinde, 1981), whilst also being especially relevant to three of the seven main functions, or provisions, of relationships (Weiss, 1974), namely belonging (through the building of reliable alliances and forming a place of acceptance and trust), emotional integration (a place for testing out emotional reactions and deciding what matters) and communication of self (expressing oneself freely and through the acceptance of that expression being understood).

DT's relationship with L, B and P can be described as a 'friendship network' evidencing high levels of homogeneity (i.e. they have many characteristics in common such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, age and geographical location), density (each member of the group knows each other) and solidarity (the degree of intimacy is reasonably equal for all the relationships between members) (Adams & Blieszner, 1996). The homogeneity of the group, a trait common to many friendships, already bound the men together through a shared participation in the wider negotiations of social identity, and the behaviours and roles widely understood to define such identities. Yet, crucial to the formation of the friendship network was the creation of a distinctive collective sense of identity based on a special shared understanding of, and relationship to, a particular object—in this case Springsteen and his music. The particulars of this group relationship and their shared sense of identity were worked out through their experience of being Springsteen fans. Their shared identity became an important statement projected into the world. They were known as "*those guys—the Springsteen fans.*" This was an identity of their own making, holding within it an

internally authorized set of priorities—they decided what mattered and why it mattered—what Grossberg describes as a “practice of strategic empowerment” (Grossberg, 1984, p. 227). It was a group identity closely guarded. It excluded peers who perhaps enjoyed Springsteen but did not share the same relationship or understanding they had as fans—*“we wanted to keep it for ourselves.”*

In this way the key provisions of their friendship group—their sense of belonging, their sense of solidarity, their sharing of self, their high levels of emotional integration, are built on their ability to achieve and maintain intimacy, and their continued ability to achieve this. It is primarily through the processes of intimacy that people gain access to each other, emotionally, intellectually and physically. When DT states, *“Springsteen was this part of us, it brought us closer”*, he speaks directly as to how participating in music together was a crucial way for this friendship network to access each others thoughts and feelings. Krueger’s (2011) notion of “joint attention” is useful for understanding how such a sharing occurs in the musical moment. DT, L, B, and P’s mutual attendance of the music in different settings occurred as an awareness not just of the music but also of each other’s awareness of the music (Krueger, 2011, pp. 16-17). Through this joint attention “the other becomes an integral part of the experience for the one, I do not just hear the music. I hear the others hearing the music” (Krueger, 2011, p. 20). DT speaks vividly of the importance of “hearing others hearing” Springsteen to the point of noting he didn’t feel he would enjoy a concert if he went alone.

Across the life course the nature and function of friendships is believed to change, as we age the intensity of friendships can often diminish leading to a loss of intimacy that can be emotionally detrimental (Adams & Bliezner, 1992; Grief, 2009). DT notes that the intensity of the friendship network so important in their youth and early adulthood changed as new relationships and responsibilities emerge as they reached mature adulthood: *“we don’t see each other as much as we used to do”*. Significantly, during this later phase their collective identity and active participation as Springsteen fans has afforded the group a range of opportunities to be together. As DT states, *“Springsteen is one of the main things that keeps us together”*. In this way participating with Springsteen’s music is the collective thread that brought them together, allowed them to be closer in their togetherness and now keeps them together. This *“keeping together”* occurs through a musical participation which allows them potent forms of remembering, *“of coming together again and talkin’ about the glory days”* and also a way of securing memories and re-experiencing a particular closeness, as DT puts it, through the experience of going to concerts together: *“it comes back”*. Musical experiences have been seen to be particularly significant in the creation of memories and therefore the creation of a sense of self (DeNora, 2000) and as Ruud (1997, p. 96) suggests, *“contained with the music-emotional memory is a sense of continuity and*

sameness in life", something DT clearly relates to: "*it's like wanting it to be the same as it has always been. You don't want it to end*". DT poignantly acknowledges the profound impact of his fandom on the construction and ordering of memories when he states, "*all those memories and all that music that he [Springsteen] has given to me, that will always be there for me*". A statement that points to how the immersive experiences of fandom may become an indelible emotional resource.

It is a common belief that engagement with music is at a peak for adolescents (Laiho, 2004, p. 48). Only recently has the experience of adult fans been recognized. As Kotarba *et al* (2008, p. 114) point out for adult fans many forms of popular music "serve as a critical meaning resource [...] as they continuously experience the being of self throughout life." Research into long term fans like DT points out how music can act as 'touch stones' or 'lifelines' as people age (Harrington & Bielby, 2010). In this way being a music fan can shape and maintain "a continuous self by acting as a map or overlay with which to mark the passage of time and organise one's perception of oneself in it" (Cavicchi, 1998, p. 150). Indeed, one theory as to why fandom has become an increasingly prevalent form of engagement is that it provides a means of "emotional anchoring" (Harrington & Bielby, 2010, p. 445). Those living in the western world have experienced the gradual dissolution of the normative patterns of adult life across the twentieth century. Consequently the traditional social scripts of how we should age and how we should live out the transitions of our lives have become increasingly superfluous. For many people, it is their relationship to cultural objects, such as fan-based engagement with music that affords the personal, social and cultural anchoring necessary to navigate the path from adolescence into adulthood and old age.

## **Conclusion: "To Have Something That You Really Care About"**

My reflections have focused on two strands of DT's experience of musical fandom that have had direct impact on his sense of emotional well-being and quality of personal relationships. Through the immersive experience of fandom the powerful affordances of music to regulate emotions are channelled specifically to shape listening practices and provide a recurring means of accessing essentially strong experiences with music. Indeed, DT's narrative of fandom offers other ways of understanding affect. Grossberg (1984, 1992) describes fandom as a particular 'affective sensibility'. Through this affective sensibility fans construct a 'lived coherence' by defining not only what sites (practices, pleasures, meanings) matter, but also how they matter

(Grossberg, 1992, p. 60). The investments of fandom thus “empower individuals in a variety of ways”, not least because they allow fans to organise moments of stable identity in sites where they feel ‘at home’ (Grossberg, 1992, p. 59). The feeling that Springsteen’s music provides a coherent mode of emotional synchronicity, surrogacy and anchoring, may well be important experiences in the development of the affinities of fandom.

Yet as much as being a Springsteen fan grows from internal processes and perceptions, it has also played a vital role in the dynamics of personal relationships. Being able to construct and share the immersive experience of fandom with others has been an important medium through which intimate, strong, productive, affirming male friendships have occurred. This certainly raises a range of questions in relation to men’s health particularly. One key factor in men’s usually poorer health is related to the social practices associated with the performance of ‘masculinity’ and its impact on men’s ability to disclose emotionally and seek support (Robertson, 2007; Reeser, 2010). This has been seen to lead to a lack of intimacy in relationships which can have a range of detrimental effects. The ability to have close friendships with other men is seen to be vital to men’s “sense of self-worth, validation and connectedness to the larger world” as well as enhancing “psychological, physical and academic well-being” (Way, 2011, p. 8; see also Bedford & Turner, 2006; Grief, 2009). In an era where masculinity is described in terms of ‘crisis’, when men at every stage of their life course are viewed as being pressured out of intimacy (Way, 2011) music’s potential role in facilitating friendship networks and personal relationships may prove to be particularly significant.

DT’s narrative confirms how in making music matter personally and collectively he has found comfort, meaning, a sense of stability through life’s transitions, a sense of self and a mode of sharing intimacy with others. His narrative is a rich resource, providing many insights beyond the scope of the brief reflections offered here. In this way it is hoped that such a narrative can provide a compelling case for further study of contemporary modes of experiencing music, so that we may gain better understanding of how people use, experience and create pleasure from music across a life course.

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