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# **A TECHNOLOGY OF WELL-BEING**

**A qualitative study on the use of MP3 players as a  
medium for musical self-care**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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In 2006, a New Yorker, Leah Ryan, told me: "I wouldn't survive in New York without my iPod. It would be too stressful; there are too many people. I need to create my own space." The same year, another New Yorker, Steven Levy, published his book on the iPod – *the perfect thing* (Levy, 2006). With his journalist eyes, he takes a look at the role of the iPod as the defining object of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among other stories, he writes about his experiences after the attack on New York on 9/11 2001. He says:

Something odd began to happen. As the days passed and I bonded with my iPod, my spirits lifted somewhat. Maybe it was just a recovery process that would have happened anyway, but it seemed hastened by the daily delights of the music that appeared on my iPod. [...] I wasn't exactly *forgetting* about 9/11, but I was getting excited – once more – about technology and its power to transform our world (Levy, 2006, p. 21).

These two examples tell the tale of a music device that has become vital in the everyday lives of two individuals. The solitary music listening enables them to cope with different stressful situations, and increases their well-being as they move around in a big city. Could this also be the case for other individuals in other cities in other parts of the world?

This study aims to elucidate the role of the private, portable, and digital music listening device that the MP3 player is. More precisely, how can the MP3 player work as a medium for musical self-care?

## 1.1 MP3 PLAYERS – SOME TECHNICALITIES

It should be noted that what I am concerned with is the MP3 player as a *medium* of mobile music, not the MP3 player as a technological device.<sup>1</sup> However, the properties of the MP3 player make music more easily available to its users, enabling them to listen to whatever they want whenever they want. The MP3 player has been described as easily accessible and simple to use, and has become widely popular worldwide.

The MP3 player is not the first mobile music player that allows for private music listening, however. Sony introduced the Walkman in 1979, followed by the Discman, Minidisc and now the MP3 player. For more than thirty years, people have had the opportunity to listen to private, mobile music. Yet, the MP3 player offers private music listening in an easier, more accessible way than before. Because the MP3 player plays digital music files that are stored in the device, users can bring their music without having to bring external cassettes or CD's. In addition, the MP3 player is usually small, and can easily fit into a pocket. This makes it effortless to carry.

The MP3 file is a music format reduced in size. An MP3 file usually takes up 1:10 of the space compared to the CD format. Sterne (2006) explains:

An MP3 takes an existing CD-quality digital audio file and removes as much data content as possible, relying on listeners' bodies and brains to make up the difference. For example, a three-minute stereo CD file takes up about 30 megabytes of disk space; a three-minute MP3 of average quality takes up 3 to 4 megabytes of disk space (Sterne, 2006, p. 832).

Consequently, there is room for more music on the MP3 player compared to previous devices. In addition, while the MP3 players keep getting smaller,

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'MP3 player' because this is the most common term for digital audio players. It does not mean that I confine this study to digital audio players that are only compatible with the MP3-format (URL (consulted October 2009): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_audio\\_player](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_audio_player)). For example, Apple's iPod, the best-selling digital audio player on the market, is compatible with several audio formats, including MP3, MP3 VBR, AAC/M4A, Protected AAC, AIFF, Audible (formats 2, 3, 4, Audible Enhanced Audio, AAX, and AAX+), Apple Lossless, and WAV (URL (consulted October 2009): <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/iPod>, <http://www.apple.com/ipodclassic/specs.html>).

the disk space keeps getting larger. As of June 2011, the 'iPod classic' takes up to 40.000 songs.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the user can bring most of her music collection in her pocket. Because Apple's iPod holds the largest market share of the category of digital music players, I will in the following look into some of the specifics of this particular MP3 player.

As of June 2011, Apple offers the iPod shuffle, iPod Nano, iPod classic and iPod touch. The shuffle is a small device that can be clipped onto e.g. the user's jacket or purse strap. It has a 2 gigabyte storage capacity, and as of June 2011, the player comes with a new 'Voice Over' button that tells the listener the song title, playlist name or battery status.<sup>3</sup> The iPod Nano comes with a storage capacity of 8 or 16 gigabytes, and as of June 2011 it has a multi-touch display and a built-in FM radio.<sup>4</sup> The iPod classic has a storage capacity of 160 gigabytes, and the iPod touch has a capacity of 8, 32 or 64 gigabytes. iPod touch comes with a multi-touch display which allows the user to e.g., glide through albums with 'Cover Flow'.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the various iPod models, Apple offers the iPhone that is a phone with the inbuilt features of an iPod.<sup>6</sup>

The iPod differs from other mobile music players such as the Walkman and Discman in that the music is easier to handle. With exception of the iPod shuffle, the different iPods – that is, the iPod Nano, iPod classic and iPod touch – come with a display.<sup>7</sup> This means that the user can scroll through the music collection, choose music and see what is playing, without having to listen to it, or fast forward, as one would do on a cassette. This makes it simple to choose music, skip songs, or switch between albums, artists, or playlists.

The iPod allows users to listen to their music in various ways. They can choose to listen to an album, an artist, a playlist or a mix of songs via the

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<sup>2</sup> As of June 2011, Apple's iPod classic has a 160 gigabyte storage capacity, good for up to 40.000 songs (URL (consulted June 2011): <http://www.apple.com/ipodclassic/>). In comparison, the first iPod on the market, released in October 2001, had a storage capacity of 10 gigabyte, or 2500 songs (URL (consulted October 2009): <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IPod#Models>).

<sup>3</sup> URL (consulted June 2011): <http://www.apple.com/ipodshuffle/>

<sup>4</sup> URL (consulted June 2011): <http://www.apple.com/ipodnano/>

<sup>5</sup> URL (consulted June 2011): <http://www.apple.com/ipodtouch/>

<sup>6</sup> URL (consulted June 2011): <http://www.apple.com/iphone/features/ipod.html>

<sup>7</sup> URL (consulted June 2011): <http://www.apple.com/ipod/>

shuffle function. The playlist function enables the users to gather their chosen music in a list customized for specific purposes such as workout, travelling or a particular mood, or simply gather their favourite tunes in one place. If they are uncertain about what to listen to, or simply wish to listen to various tunes in a mix, users can choose the shuffle function, which plays the music gathered on the iPod in random order. This function can also be used within playlists, albums or the music from one artist. All the iPod models also offer the Genius function, which automatically finds other songs on the iPod that 'matches' the current song being played, and gathers these in a Genius playlist.

In sum, the MP3 player supplies the user with a large collection of music that is easily accessible, and makes it simple for the listener to choose music and skip between songs. This, I argue, gives the users great control over the music they listen to, and makes it effortless to choose music according to their 'needs'. Freedom of choice becomes an important aspect of MP3 use.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1.1 Online music libraries

With the introduction of Internet-based collections of music, listeners have an almost limitless access to music. The idea behind services such as *Spotify* is that people can access a large collection of music through the Internet and listen to the music 'live' instead of having to download or purchase the music first.<sup>9</sup> This means that once the listener is signed up for the service, she can access an almost unlimited amount of music whenever she is online. For many users, the use is restricted to their computer, but with smartphones with Internet-access, the online music library can also be accessed while on the move. This implies that users' music libraries no longer consist of 40.000 songs, but over 10 million tracks.<sup>10</sup> The constant evolvement of music technologies and the music industry most likely leads

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<sup>8</sup> For more about the MP3 player and listening habits, see Skånland (2007).

<sup>9</sup> What is Spotify? From their webpage: "Think of Spotify as your new music collection. Your library. Only this time your collection is vast: 10 million tracks and counting. You can create as many playlists as you like from this collection - just drag and drop the tracks you want. And because the music plays live, there's no need to wait for downloads and no big dent in your hard drive. You can listen at any time, no matter where you are. Through your computer or your mobile phone." (URL (consulted November 2010): <http://www.spotify.com/no/about/what/>)

<sup>10</sup> URL (consulted November 2010): <http://www.spotify.com/no/new-user/>



to changes in people's listening habits. This study was carried out before the introduction of Spotify and similar services, and the findings are therefore based on the experiences of individuals with access to a personal music collection. This possible change in listening habits has therefore no essential consequences for the findings in the present study. It will nonetheless be interesting to see if there will be any major changes in listening habits and uses of music after the introduction of Spotify and similar services. Yet, I believe that the findings from this study still will be valid, and that people's use of music as a resource in self-care will not change dramatically.

### 1.1.2 Research on MP3 use

At the beginning of this study, little research had been carried out concerning the use of MP3 players, with exception of Bull's research on personal stereos<sup>11</sup> (2000) and the iPod (2007). However, during the last few years, there has been a growing interest in the use of so-called portable media players such as the MP3 player (Beer, 2007; Bergh, DeNora, & Bergh, forthcoming; Gran, 2010; Heye & Lamont, 2010; Katz, Lever, & Chen, 2008; Lever, 2007; Yaksich, 2007). Although some of these studies touch upon matters concerning the role of mobile music in emotion management and control issues, none of the studies interrogate the MP3 player's role in the listeners' self-care in more in-depth. This is where the present study fills a gap in research.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND

Hosokawa (1984) was perhaps one of the first to write about the Walkman and its effects. The author cites a report in *Nouvel Observateur*, where the reporter asks whether men with the Walkman are human or not, whether they are losing contact with reality, and so on. One of the interviewees

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<sup>11</sup> 'Personal stereos' is used as a collective term for personal, mobile music players such as the Walkman, Discman, Minidisc and MP3 player (Bull, 2000; du Gay, Hall, Jones, & Negus, 1997; van Dijk, 2006)

answers: “Your questions are out-of-date. The eighties are the years of *autonomy*.” *Individualisation* and *self realization* are key traits of the modern society (Berkaak & Frønes, 2005; Giddens, 1991). Use of personal stereos such as the MP3 player seems to enhance the experience of individualisation and autonomy (Bull, 2000, 2007; Skånland, 2007), and the use of these players can be described as a characteristic of the modern society. How is the MP3 player utilized and how does the use affect the listeners?

The anti-social aspects of the MP3 player have been emphasized by many, and there have been raised critical question about its consequences for social interaction (e.g. Brabazon, 2008). Further, the question of hearing damage has been raised in relation to the use of headphones and earbuds (Park, 2009; Vogel, Brug, Ploeg, & Raat, 2011; Vogel, Verschuure, Ploeg, Brug, & Raat, 2009; Vries, 2005), and people have expressed concern regarding safety in traffic when listening to music on personal stereos (Myers, 2010; Neider, McCarley, Crowell, Kaczmariski, & Kramer, 2010). Overall, many scholars present a negative outlook on the use of MP3 players. By contrast, I attain a resource-oriented approach regarding the use of MP3 players. Implementing this resource-oriented approach means that I focus on the specific qualities and consequences of music use through the MP3 player as an active ingredient in individual action. A *resource-oriented* perspective entails a focus on the *positive potentials* of the MP3 player when appropriated by the individual as an *active agent*.

Rolvjord (2004, 2008) has developed a resource-oriented perspective to music therapy, which implies a focus on the clients’ individual strengths and potentials. Although a resource-oriented approach does not exclude work with negative or difficult issues, the focus is on the clients’ resources rather than on their weaknesses and pathology. The present research is based on the same philosophy, and therefore finds support in salutogenic health theories and positive psychology (see chapter 3). Rolvjord notes that taking the client’s strengths seriously “...impels us to recognize the client’s goals and to acknowledge the way they are using music and music therapy to improve their quality of life” (2004, p. 104). The aim of the present study is precisely to acknowledge how individuals might use music (in everyday life) as a *resource* in *self-care*. This knowledge is valuable in

itself, but may further be significant in music therapy interventions as to “put the client in the “driving seat”” (Rolvsjord, 2004, p. 104) and to recognize individuals’ competences related to use of music in self-care.

### 1.3 RESEARCH FOCUS AND QUESTIONS

This study focuses on how ‘regular’ urban citizens employ their MP3 players as a medium for self-care in everyday life. This focus raises questions about how MP3 players can function as a positive resource in individuals’ everyday lives: When so many people in Norway choose to listen to MP3 players on a daily basis, the wish or need to bring their music into the streets must surely be based on a positive experience? What is it that makes these people choose to listen to mobile music on a regular basis? Based on what people tell us, is there anything in their experiences with MP3-listening that may be related to the maintenance of positive health? Can the listening-experience be related to subjective well-being? And can the listening be said to be a way for the individual to take care of herself, a form of so-called musical self-care? In general, these questions relate to self-care, and the main research question I pose is the following:

*Can the MP3 player function as a medium for musical self-care, and if so, how?*

By *musical self-care*, I refer to the concept as used by, among others, Ruud (2008). He uses the term in reference to how people employ music in everyday life in order to regulate energy, emotions, mood and memories. Further, he refers to how people use their personal, mobile music on MP3 players and music-phones to take care of themselves, their bodily and cognitive states of being. In short, *musical self-care* refers to how individuals employ music to take care of their physical and psychological well-being (Ruud, 2008). To explore this issue, I have chosen to focus on MP3 users’ *subjective well-being* and *mental health*. I therefore pose the following questions:

*Can the MP3 player function as a technology of subjective well-being, and if so, how?*

*Can the MP3 player function as a resource regarding positive mental health, and if so, how?*

The notion of ‘technologies’ holds two different meanings in relation to the present study. First, it is about the technology of the MP3 player; that is, a digital, mobile, music player. Second, ‘technologies’ is used throughout the thesis in reference to Foucault’s notion of *technologies of self* (Foucault, 1997b). According to Foucault, technologies of self are operations on the self that individuals employ in order to take care of themselves. When I speak of the MP3 player as a ‘technology of...’, it is in reference to Foucault’s use of the concept (see also DeNora, 1999). For more on this, see chapter 3, part 3.2.

Diener et al define *subjective well-being* as the experience of “life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experiences of unpleasant emotions such as sadness or anger” (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997, p. 25). In other words, subjective well-being is understood as high levels of positive affect and low levels of negative affect, as well as an individual’s cognitive appraisal of life satisfaction. For a discussion on well-being, see chapter 3, part 3.4.1.

As will be discussed in chapter 3, part 3.3, this study is placed within the sociological model of health. Within this model, health is viewed as a holistic phenomenon, and can be understood as *resource* and a *reserve of energy*, as well as *well-being*. My understanding of health is based upon an obvious link between *mental health*, *quality of life* and *subjective well-being*. The two research questions above should therefore be seen as related, as research indicates that subjective well-being contributes to – and can be understood as an important part of – positive mental health (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2005; Fave, 2006).<sup>12</sup>

This study is further based on a belief that music’s meaning occur in the interaction between listener, music, and context. Because the effects of music is believed to derive from the way it is appropriated by the listener, this study does not focus on the musical object, but rather on how listeners

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted here, however, that subjective well-being is not alone *sufficient* for mental health (Diener, et al., 1997).

make use of music, in this case *mobile* music. My understanding of music will be further discussed in chapter 3, part 3.1.

The research questions are interrogated by implementing a qualitative, empirical study. Interviews with adult urban users of MP3 players are carried out, focusing on their experiences of this use. The interviews are analysed within a theoretical framework based on health theories and positive psychology.

Although this study is placed within the field of music and health, it should be noted that this is not a study of or within music therapy practice. Music therapy practice is defined by Bruscia (1998, p. 20) as “...a *systematic process of intervention wherein the therapist helps the client to promote health, using music experiences and the relationships that develop through them as dynamic forces of change*” (emphasis in the original). Listening to MP3 players in daily life does not involve an intervention, and there is no therapist involved. Further, the listener is not seen as a client. This does not however mean that the findings from this study cannot be relevant to music therapy practice. Deeper understanding of how people make use of music in their everyday lives may be of great importance in music therapy interventions (i.e. Rolvsjord, 2004; 2008; Skarpeid, 2008). Stige (2002) finds it fruitful to define the discipline of music therapy in broader terms, and suggests the following definition: “Music therapy as discipline is the study and learning of the relationship between music and health” (2002, p. 198). This definition opens up for a breadth of research within the discipline of music therapy, and also means that the present study could be placed within this discipline. Thus, this study relates to the discipline of music therapy, but is placed at the intersections of music psychology, music sociology, and music and health.<sup>13</sup> This involves a rather eclectic approach to the research. Instead of focusing on one theoretical approach, I have chosen to incorporate several theories that can shed light on the research questions (see chapter 3).

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<sup>13</sup> As Stige (2002) defines the discipline of music therapy as the relationship between music and health, I could have chosen to place this study within the field of music therapy rather than the field of music and health. Since I want to make it clear that this is not a study within the practice or profession of music therapy, I have nonetheless chosen to speak of the field of music and health throughout the thesis.

Individuals' choice to interact with music, either by listening to music or performing music, is most probably not made based on a health aspect. I believe few people choose to listen to music because it will maintain or increase their positive health. The craving for music is most likely based on entirely different wishes or needs, such as a wish for entertainment, the need to regulate bodily energy, the desire for emotional release, or a yearning for pleasure (c.f. DeNora, 1999; Sloboda & Juslin, 2010; Sloboda, Lamont, & Greasley, 2009; Sloboda, O'Neill, & Ivaldi, 2001). It would therefore be unfortunate to assume that people consider their health when they listen to their MP3 players.<sup>14</sup> Instead, it might be interesting to use health theories as a perspective on music listening, in this case mobile music listening through MP3 players. Although 'music and health' has been defined as an academic field, it might in other words be more fruitful to view it as a *perspective* rather than a *platform*. Within this perspective, I have chosen to focus on how MP3 players may function as a medium for musical self-care.

## 1.4 PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

I have chosen a hermeneutic, qualitative, and empirical approach to the present study. This entails that I, as the researcher, brings my personal and professional context into the study. The research will not be free of my preconceptions, but rather take form based on my biographical and theoretical background. This makes up a frame of reference from which the current study arises. I will therefore use some space here to clarify my background. This will make the reader more capable of evaluating my biases and preconceptions. The intention is that this will contribute to an easier assessment of the validity of the study.

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<sup>14</sup> Some people might reflect upon the effect of the mobile listening on their hearing, but this issue is not part of the present research.

### 1.4.1 Academic background

In 2007, I submitted my Master's thesis *Soundescape: A study on how music is integrated into the everyday lives of users of MP3 players* to the department of musicology at the University of Oslo. This study was explorative, and aimed to illuminate the uses of MP3 players among Norwegians in their twenties, and how this use affected them. The thesis focused on listening habits, the experience of control, and identity constructions. Interviews were conducted with four men and four women between the ages of 23 and 29 years. The thesis raises questions about whether the vast amount of music which are now available to us at all times leads to 'passive consumers of music' (i.e. North, Hargreaves, & Hargreaves, 2004). Light is shed on the listening habits of MP3 users, and it is concluded that music is now used more as a resource – a contrast to Adorno's analytical listener (Adorno, 1976/1962, 2004/1978 [1938]). Further, the MP3 users' sense of control is explored, based on Bull's (2000) writings on 'the personal stereo'.<sup>15</sup> Here, it is looked into 'cognitive control' (mood, energy, emotions, thoughts, and concentration), 'moral control' (social control), and 'aesthetic control' (sonic control, filmic experiences). Finally, the thesis explores the issue of identity constructions in relation to music listening and use of MP3 players. It is looked into the role of music in identity work, music and memories, personal music, musical taste, and the role of the iPod as an identity marker.

At the end of the dissertation, I write:

Throughout the work with this thesis, from the day I began to ask questions about the use of MP3 players, through the conversations with my eight informants, and the studies of theory and research on the field, till the preparation of the final text, the engagement has grown in me. My hope is therefore that this study does not end here, but will function as a stepping stone to further research on the field (Skånland, 2007, p. 105, my translation).

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<sup>15</sup> I have chosen to look further into the issue of control in the present study, but with a clearer focus on perceived control in stressful settings, and with an analytical framework which is based on coping, resistance resources, and well-being.

I feel lucky that I have been able to follow up on my own invitation. The fact that I have written a Master's thesis on the topic of the use of MP3 players means that I had some presuppositions when I began the present study. I already had some ideas about how people use music and their MP3 players in their daily lives, based on my own M.A. research, as well as research by Bull (2000, 2007) and DeNora (DeNora, 2000). In addition to research from Bull and DeNora, my theoretical background has mainly been based on theories from music sociology and music psychology, and research focusing on music in everyday life, in particular Sloboda (2005c, 2005d; Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001), Juslin (Juslin & Laukka, 2004; Juslin, Liljeström, Västfjäll, Barradas, & Silva, 2008), and Ruud (1997a, 1997b, 2002, 2005).

### **1.4.2 Personal background**

I have used an MP3 player since early 2005. Since I began my studies on the use of MP3 players later the same year, I have become especially conscious about my own use of the player. I see that I use my player in somewhat different ways than my informants – but that there are also similarities. For example, I do not use my player as much and as often as most of my informants. I do however identify with their experiences of the music as a mood-regulator or energy-booster. There is a certain risk that I have used the informants' stories to confirm my own experiences. I have been concerned with *their* use of the MP3 player, and not my own, but realize that my own use might have given rise to some unconscious presuppositions. However, my experience is that my own use has given me a better understanding of how the informants use their players. It has also clarified a few issues concerning how the player is used and what effects it has. Mainly, in my view, my first-hand experience with the MP3 player has given me better insight into the use of such players, and has been a resource more than an obstacle. Nonetheless, my preconceptions may have had implications for the validity of the study, which will be discussed in chapter 4, part 4.7.



## 1.5 RELEVANCE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The MP3 player has become a prime medium for everyday listening to music, as the users can carry their music with them wherever they go. The global MP3-market reached 225 million players in 2009 (InStat, 2009), and has been expected to reach 245 million players by 2012 (InStat, 2008). In addition, one can listen to MP3 music on most mobile phones. In Norway, more than 50 per cent of the general population, and about 70 per cent of the young population, used MP3 players daily in 2010 (Vaage, 2011).<sup>16</sup> This unprecedented availability of music and extensive use of MP3 players raise questions about its impact on the user. Research on the active use of MP3 players is therefore necessary to develop an understanding of how and why this relatively new technology has become so widespread. More importantly, how does mobile music listening influence the listener, and how can it be used as a resource for individual action?

The findings in the present study relate to and support findings from other scholars focusing on music listening in everyday life, such as Bull (2000;2007), DeNora (2000), Lilliestam (2009) and Sloboda (2001;2005). Thus, the present study contributes weight to research on the use of music in everyday life, as it verifies that people use music in their daily lives in rather similar ways across nations in the Western world. Further, the present study illuminates relations that has not been shown earlier, that is, relations between music listening in everyday life, new music technology, subjective well-being, and mental health. This knowledge is crucial to the understanding of the role of music in everyday life; how and why individuals use MP3 players and how listeners are affected by this use. By focusing on the *positive* consequences of MP3 listening, the present study may contribute knowledge of the role of mobile music in individuals' self-care.

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<sup>16</sup> In comparison, 12 per cent of the general public used MP3 players in 2004.

## 1.6 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The first part of the thesis consists of literature review, theoretical framework, and methodology. In the literature review (chapter 2), I present research on music in daily life, conducted within the disciplines of music sociology, music psychology, and music and health. From music sociology, I recapture some of the findings from Bull's studies on the use of personal stereos and the iPod, and DeNora's studies on the function of music in everyday life. From music psychology, I present research related to the role of music in connection to emotions and mood, particularly studies from Sloboda and van Goethem. Finally, from the field of music and health, I present research and theories from Ruud and Batt-Rawden, which focus on the role of music in relation to health in everyday life.

Chapter 3 makes an outline of the theoretical framework of the research. The approach has been rather eclectic, but the superior theoretical perspective has been based on health and positive psychology. Following an account of how music can be understood, and the ontologies of music which this thesis rests upon, I aim to give an account of some understandings of health, and place the present study within the sociological model of health. From the field of positive psychology, I draw particularly on theories on well-being, and discuss a eudaimonic versus hedonic approach, as well as the fruitful outcomes of positive emotions.

The study is based on a hermeneutic, qualitative approach, and the methodological decisions that have been made are presented and discussed in chapter 4. The research questions have been interrogated through interviews with urban MP3 users, but other methods are also considered and discussed. The selection of informants is presented, and the research process is mapped. Questions about the validity of the study and ethical considerations are also discussed.

The second part of the thesis is a presentation and discussion of the empirical material. I have chosen to merge the presentation of findings with theory, and reflect on and discuss the findings as they are presented. The first chapter in this part (chapter 5) has the purpose of mapping out the informants' use of their MP3 players. This chapter is therefore mainly a presentation of how the informants in the present study use their MP3

players in their daily lives; their listening rituals, choice of music, and experiences regarding listening outside versus at home, as well as listening to headsets versus loudspeakers.

Chapter 6 interrogates the use of MP3 players as a technology of self-regulation. The chapter is divided into three parts, and looks into the mobile music's role in cognitive regulation, affect regulation, and bodily regulation. Theories concerning self-regulation are presented, and the findings are discussed in the light of these theories.

The last chapter in part two (chapter 7) discusses the use of MP3 players as a technology of coping. Here, I look into the MP3 player's role in creating private space in urban places, how the mobile music can create a sense of internal and external control in the listeners, and how it functions as a coping strategy to deal with the stressors of daily life, particularly in commuting to and from work. Here, I draw on theories concerning stress and coping, and argue a relationship between private space, sense of control, and successful coping.

The final part of the thesis (chapter 8) is a summary and discussion of the main findings. Some implications and limitations are presented, and the use of MP3 players' role in subjective well-being and positive health is discussed.



## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

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This chapter will present an overview of research that I find relevant for this study. The present study is about music listening in everyday life, and is linked to aspects of psychology and health. Research done within the field of music sociology has also proven to be important references to this study, although I do not use sociological theories as such. The research that I have chosen to present in more detail arrives from these fields, and is related to music listening in everyday life. Before I take a closer look at these studies, I will give an overview of the outcome of a structured literature search in eight different databases.

## 2.1 LITERATURE SEARCH RESULTS

In May 2010, I made a structured search for relevant references in what I consider to be the most suitable databases that were available to me. These databases were BIBSYS, WorldCat, RILM, IIMP, PsycInfo (Ovid), SCOPUS, ERIC and JSTOR. The search queries used were "music listening" + health; "music listening" + "well-being"; "music listening" + "quality of life"; "music listening" + everyday; "MP3 player"; "mobile music", and similar versions of these. The searches resulted in the following outcome:

- BIBSYS (mostly books):
  - music + health: 58 references.
  - music + "well-being": 3 references.
  - "music listening" + "quality of life": 0 references
  - "music listening" + "life quality": 0 references
  - "music listening" + everyday: 6 references.
  - "MP3 player": 4 references.
  - "mobile music": 14 references.
  
- WorldCat, restricted search to English only, time period 1990-2010 (mostly books):
  - "music listening" + health: 3 references.
  - "music listening" + "well-being": 1 reference.
  - "music listening" + "quality of life": 1 reference.
  - "music listening" + everyday: 6 references.
  - "MP3 player": 91 references.
  - "MP3 player" + use: 6 references.
  - "MP3 player" + listening: 2 references.
  - "mobile music": 20 references.

- RILM, restricted search to English only, time period 1990-2010:
  - “music listening” + health: 7 references.
  - “music listening” + “well-being”: 0 references.
  - music + “well-being”: 61 references.
  - “music listening” + “quality of life”: 2 references.
  - “music listening” + “life quality”: 0 references.
  - “music listening” + everyday: 16 references.
  - “MP3 player”: 2 references
  - MP3: 55 references.
  - “mobile music”: 5 references
  
- IIMP, restricted search to English only, time period 1990-2010:
  - “music listening” + health: 95 references.
  - “music listening” + “mental health”: 31 references.
  - “music listening” + “well-being”: 37 references.
  - “music listening” + “quality of life”: 34 references.
  - “music listening” + everyday: 58 references.
  - “MP3 player”: 4 references.
  - “mobile music”: 3 references.
  
- PsycInfo (Ovid):
  - “music listening” + health: 18 references.
  - “music listening” + “well-being”: 7 references.
  - “music listening” + “quality of life”: 7 references.
  - “music listening” + everyday: 15 references.
  - “MP3 player”: 15 references.

- “mobile music”: 6 references.
- SCOPUS, restricted search to time period 1990-2010:
  - “music listening” + health: 24 references.
  - “music listening” + “well-being”: 6 references.
  - “music listening” + “quality of life”: 9 references.
  - “music listening” + everyday: 13 references.
  - “MP3 player” + listening: 21 references.
  - “mobile music”: 70 references.
  - “mobile music” + listening: 6 references.
- ERIC, limited search to English only, time period 1990-2010:
  - “music listening” + health: 0 references.
  - “music listening” + “well-being”: 0 references.
  - “music listening” + “quality of life”: 0 references.
  - “music listening” + everyday: 1 reference.
  - “MP3 player”: 3 references.
  - “mobile music”: 0 references.
- JSTOR, restricted search to English only, time period 1990-2010:
  - “music listening” + health: 7 references.
  - “music listening” + “well-being”: 5 references.
  - “music listening” + “quality of life”: 2 references.
  - “music listening” + everyday: 21 references.
  - “MP3 player”: 6 references.
  - “mobile music”: 1 reference.



Most of the references that appeared from the queries ‘music listening + health’, ‘music listening + well-being’ and ‘music listening + quality of life’ were related to music therapy or musicians’ health. Very few of the references on MP3 players and mobile music were related to the *use* of portable players. Moreover, several of the same references appeared within different databases and different search queries. Particularly the search queries “music listening” + health/well-being/quality of life resulted in many of the same references.

I will in the coming sections present chosen studies carried out within the fields of music sociology, music psychology, and music and health, which focus on music listening in everyday life. The research presented below is selected based on what I find most significant for the current study. This means that I will not give a complete overview of all research done within the selected fields, but focus on the research which work as framework and inspiration for my study.

## **2.2 MUSIC IN EVERYDAY LIFE – A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### **2.2.1 Everyday music listening – Tia DeNora**

Tia DeNora (1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2007) has made an important impact on research on the role of music in people’s everyday lives. With her book *Music in Everyday Life* (2000), she was one of the first to focus on how people actually appropriate music in their daily lives, not in more particular contexts such as the concert arena. Her goal is to study music as a social ordering device as she looks into music ‘in action’ within specific social contexts, such as aerobic exercise classes, karaoke evenings and music therapy sessions. In addition to participant observation in these settings, she has conducted interviews with 52 women from the United States and United Kingdom about the meaning of music in their daily lives. Her approach is from a sociological background, and she uses a theoretical framework based on e.g., Adorno, Gibson and Giddens. She characterises

the field by explaining that “sociology takes as its substantive focus a concern with action, intersubjectivity, the production of culture and knowledge, institutions, organizations and their conventions, and the implications of all these things for the social lives and life chances of individuals” (DeNora, 2001, p. 161). But even if DeNora’s approach to the field derives from music sociology, I find her work highly related to research done within music psychology, particularly work by Sloboda and colleagues (2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2010; 2009; 2001; 2001), which I will look into below. DeNora herself notes that within the social sciences, it has traditionally been the psychologists who have adopted an environmental approach to socio-musical studies. In more recent time, however, there has been a significant shift in focus from a preoccupation with the static musical ‘work’ to the practices in which the musical materials are used and what it ‘does’ in social life (DeNora, 2001). DeNora clearly falls in with the latter category of focus.

I find especially DeNora’s (1999) description of music as a *technology of the self* interesting in relation to this study. I will elaborate on this in chapter 3 (theoretical framework), because I find it useful as a conceptual framework for this study. DeNora’s interrogations of the role of music in relation to the self, identity, and emotions, and the relationship between music and embodiment, have been particularly fruitful as inspiration for this study. “At the level of daily life, music has power”, DeNora writes (2000, p. 17). She continues: “Music may influence how people compose their bodies, how they conduct themselves, how they experience the passage of time, how they feel – in terms of energy and emotion – about themselves, about others, and about situations” (2000, p. 17). This argument has been validated through other research, presented below.

Further, DeNora describes how her informants ‘knew’ what they needed to hear at specific times and in specific settings, thus acting as disc jockeys on themselves. Moreover, they used music to regulate their emotions and energies, which DeNora relates to a ‘care of the self’. “Music is a resource to which agents turn so as to regulate themselves as aesthetic agents, as feeling, thinking, and acting beings in their day-to-day lives”, she notes (2003, p. 95). Music seems to strengthen our sense of self and identity; it helps us ‘get into the mood’ or out of dispreferred states; it broadens our

access to emotions and seems to increase emotional consciousness; it is a tool in understanding how we feel and in communicating our emotions to others. Thus, music seems to be a catalyst in self-help and self-development (Batt-Rawden & DeNora, 2005).

One of DeNora's most important arguments is that it is probably impossible to speak of the 'powers' of music separated from its context. Further, the context is so vital that to speak of the 'musical work' as a meaningful unit is mostly irrelevant when we speak of how music 'works' (DeNora, 2000, p. 61). Relating to Gibson's (1966) notion of *affordance*, DeNora (2000, 2003) claims that music affords something to the listener, which then is up to the listener to *appropriate*. This is in slight opposition to Gibson, who considered objects to afford the same things independently of how users appropriated them. Rather, DeNora perceives the music listener as an *agent* who relates to and configures the music through her interaction with the music. It is therefore highly individual how different people appropriate the same music. Further, music listeners are not passive recipients of the music, but actively involved in choosing how to appropriate the music, and consequently choosing how to be emotionally affected by it. Thus, music is not a 'magic pill', but a tool with certain properties that individuals actively choose to use.<sup>17</sup>

In her article from 2007, DeNora outlines the importance of everyday musicking (c.f. Small, 1998) in relation to health and well-being. She relates music's health properties to affordance, and argues that music's role as a technology of health depends on how it is appropriated. She gives examples from her own research, focusing on music as a technology of the self, and from Batt-Rawden's (2007a, 2007b; 2005; 2005) research on music and health promotion, which I will look into below. Through these examples, she shows how individuals act as lay-therapists to themselves by using music in emotion regulation, body modification and cognitive development, which she links to self-care and mental health. In her conclusion, she states: "If *music* provides an important form of resource that affords or supports health, then the study of health-promotion needs to consider how music

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<sup>17</sup> I will elaborate on the affordances of music in chapter 3 (theoretical framework).

features in everyday care of self and health-performance in mundane settings” (DeNora, 2007, p. 284). Thus, she opens up for the present study.

### **2.2.2 Personal stereos and the iPod – Michael Bull**

Michael Bull (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) is the leading researcher on the use of personal stereos such as the Walkman and the iPod. He published a comprehensive study on the Walkman in 2000, followed by a study on Apple’s iPod in 2007. In his study on the Walkman, referred to as personal stereos, Bull looks into what he calls “the first truly mobile consumer technology” (2000, p. 1). He interrogates the significance of the personal stereo in the everyday life of users, and asks three main questions: “what is the nature and influence of the auditory in everyday life? what role does technology play in the construction of auditory experience? and what role do personal stereos play in the management of the everyday life of users?” (2000, p. 2). He states that personal stereos seem to be technologically empowering to the individual, functioning as a form of acoustic protection for the listener. He creates a typology of the personal stereo user where he summarises that 1) the users might aim to block out external sounds with their personal stereos, excluding both unwanted sounds and the experienced discomfort of crowded urban spaces; 2) users often put on their personal stereos as soon as they leave home, clearing a space for themselves; 3) they use their stereos whenever they are alone in public, and report hating being alone – thus using the personal stereo to relieve this experience; 4) the users often choose music that matches their surroundings, but report that they are not particularly interested in their environment; 5) rather, they enjoy listening to music that reminds them of personal memories; 6) the personal stereos work as visual ‘do not disturb’ signs which enables the users to control interaction with others; 7) the use of a personal stereo allows the subjects to reclaim time, taking their mind off the repetitiveness of their daily journeys, and 8) the subjects often feel a greater sense of purpose when listening to their personal stereos.

A few years after Bull published his book on personal stereos, the MP3 player made its entry, and more or less took over the market. With the introduction of the MP3 player, it also seemed that more people started using portable music players. Hence, Bull initiated a large study on the use of Apple's iPods. He conducted the research by an online questionnaire, receiving 1004 responses mainly from the UK, USA, Switzerland, Canada, and Australia. Some of the subjects were then asked to elaborate on the answers given. Additionally, a few interviews were conducted with UK users. While Bull was initially interested in the use of MP3 players, he chose the iPod as research object because of its dominant role in MP3 use (Bull, 2006b). Bull describes the properties of the MP3 player as an increase in freedom of choice; the ability to store a vast amount of music tracks and continually choose how to listen to music. The users may further construct an assortment of playlists or listen to a random range of tracks by choosing the 'shuffle' function on the player. Bull notes that although the Apple iPod is a privatising technology, it also offers new ways of music consumption that might be thought of as both more mobile than with the personal stereo, and more collective. For example, the iPod can be plugged into the home stereo, in the car, or into users' work computers, thus sharing the listening experience with others. Also, iPod clubs have emerged both in the UK, the United States and in Australia where iPod users provide the music for the entertainment of the night (Bull, 2006b).

Bull argues that users "fine tune the relationship between mood, volition, music and the environment in ways that previous generations of mobile sound technologies was unable to do" (2006b, p. 136). Hence, the underlying desire for mobile music is mostly the same as with the personal stereo – it has now only become easier to fine-tune the music according to these desires. In his book from 2007, Bull looks into the management of time and space, as well as the cognitive management of everyday life. In addition, he interrogates the aesthetics of the music and the city, as well as interpersonal strategies and privatisation in iPod culture.

Bull's work has given insight into how people appropriate their private and portable listening-devices, and has shown that personal stereos offer the users unprecedented levels of control over cognitive, social and aesthetic experiences. Like DeNora, Bull is a sociologist. Hence, he uses theories from

the field of sociology as framework for his studies, such as Bauman, Giddens, Adorno, Benjamin and Lefebvre. Bull touches upon several of the issues that I look into in the present study, such as the management of everyday life and sense of control. However, our approaches differ. While Bull's framework is informed by readings of the early works of Critical Theorists and concerned with writings on cities, the public sphere and the sociology of the senses, my point of departure is music psychology, with a framework composed of theories on health, positive psychology and subjective well-being. Even if our researches converge with each other, our different focuses bring out different aspects of the use of MP3 players and personal stereos.

## 2.3 MUSIC IN EVERYDAY LIFE – A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

### 2.3.1 Music and emotions in daily life – John Sloboda and colleagues

John Sloboda (1991, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2010; Sloboda & Juslin, 2001, 2010; Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001; Sloboda, et al., 2001) has conducted several studies on the relationship between music and emotion, and has been concerned with engagement with music in everyday life. In a study of 67 regular listeners, Sloboda (2005b) collected descriptions of the participants' most valued emotional experiences with music. Although the accounts differed in detail, he found some common descriptions, such as being relaxed or motivated by the music, feeling understood and comforted, being detached from emotional preoccupations, and feeling that emotions are shared when recognizing one's own emotions in the music. Sloboda characterised these responses as music as a *change agent*. Another category was music as *intensifying* or *releasing* existing emotions, described in terms such as:

- 'Music releases emotions (e.g. sadness) that would otherwise be bottled up'
- 'Music helps me discover what I am actually feeling'

- 'Music reconnects me to myself when my emotions are ignored or suppressed'
- 'Music makes me feel more alive, more myself'
- 'Music can provide a trigger for the outlet of my emotions concerning memories of pleasurable or painful experiences in my past' (Sloboda, 2005b, p. 204).

Several of these findings confirm DeNora's (2000) research on everyday listening and emotions and findings from the present research, particularly narratives on being relaxed or motivated, feeling understood and comforted, and discovering what one is actually feeling when listening to music. Sloboda notes that music does not create or change emotion, but enables the listener to access already existing emotions which are perhaps not fully apprehended.

In agreement with DeNora, Sloboda and O'Neill (2001) argue the importance of context in their study on emotions in everyday listening to music. Hence, because music listening always takes place in a social and personal context, in a particular place at a particular time, by a particular individual possibly carrying out other activities, "[t]he emotional response to the music is coloured, and possibly sometimes completely determined, by these contextual factors" (Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001, p. 415). In order to capture the mundane experiences of emotions related to music as they happened, Sloboda, O'Neill and Ivaldi (2001) chose to employ the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) in their research on everyday music listening. The eight adult participants were given pagers, and were paged once each every 2-hour period between 8 am and 10 pm for seven days. When paged, they were asked to stop what they were doing in order to fill out a response form which they were asked to carry with them at all times. It was found that music pervades everyday life, but that listening to music as the main activity is rare. Rather, music is commonly used as an accompaniment to other activities. In general, it was found that music made the participants 'feel better'. Further, music has a range of mood-altering functions that Sloboda and colleagues classify as therapeutic. It also seems that music can be used for purposes which I would interpret as self-care, e.g., what Sloboda et al describe as "emotional repair process[es]" (2001, p. 13), exemplified by using music to cry and engender emotional release.

In their review of why people choose to hear music, Sloboda, Lamont and Greasley (2009) notes that the choice of what music to listen to, where, when and how, has immensely improved with the increased availability of recorded music and the portability and flexibility of music players such as the MP3 player. They identify six main activities to which music is used as accompaniment – these are travel, physical work, brain work, body work, emotional work, and attendance at live music performances. The authors note that the context of music listening often forms and controls the intention, character, and effect of listening. Moreover, although the music is often used as background to other activities, the experience is still psychologically powerful.

Together with Patrik Juslin, Sloboda edited the book *Music and Emotion* (2001b), which was later revised and expanded into *Oxford Handbook of Music and Emotion* (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010b). In their article on psychological perspectives on music and emotion, Sloboda and Juslin (2010) notes that positive emotions predominate in music listening. They argue that the belief that ‘music does you good’ has been grounded in empirical research. However, if ‘music does you good’, I would claim that this has not only to do with positive emotions induced by music, but also music’s role in emotional release, sometimes a factor in sadness and melancholy, possibly resulting in crying, as shown by Sloboda et al (2001). Moreover, there is not an unambiguous relationship between music and positive emotions in the present study, which will be further discussed in chapter 6 (self-regulation).

Sloboda’s work, and the recently published *Handbook of Music and Emotions* in particular, have been significant contributions to the field of music and emotions. The interest in the field has improved greatly during the last decade, resulting in several empirical studies concerning the relationship between music and affects (Bachorik, et al., 2009; DeNora, 2006; Gabrielsson, 2001, 2008, 2010; Juslin, 2009; Juslin & Laukka, 2004; Juslin, Liljeström, Västfjäll, & Lundquist, 2010; Juslin & Sloboda, 2001a; Laiho, 2004; Resnicow & Salovey, 2004; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; van Goethem, 2010; van Goethem & Sloboda, 2008; Vist, 2009). The interest in emotions in response to music in real-life, mundane situations, outside of the laboratory, has also improved greatly. This means that we are



developing an understanding of how people actually experience emotions in relation to music in their everyday lives.

### **2.3.2 Music and affect regulation – Annelies van Goethem**

Annelies van Goethem (2010) notes that the ability to regulate affect has been widely recognized as crucial for a healthy psychological life. It has been suggested that music listening can function as a potentially effective tactic for such regulation, although the role of music in affect regulation has not been previously studied exclusively. In her PhD research, van Goethem therefore interrogates the role of music in affect regulation. She proposes a new framework for affect regulation, indicating four levels at which such regulation occurs: goals, strategies, tactics, and mechanisms. The affect regulation *goal* may for example be to create energy or enhance happiness. The goal may suggest which tactic and strategy can be most efficient. Affect regulation *strategies* include for example distraction, reappraisal and suppression. More specific ways to regulate affect than strategies are termed *tactics*, including taking a shower, exercising, or listening to music. Finally, affect regulation *mechanisms* explain how affect regulation actually work. In the case of music listening, for example, mechanisms that provide regulation might include musical features, familiarity of the music, or memories evoked by the music. In earlier literature on affect regulation, there has been no such distinct differentiation between the different levels of regulation. In particular, there has seldom been distinguished between strategies and tactics. However, distinguishing between the different levels makes it easier to understand what is actually going on. Following van Goethem's framework, an example of affect regulation with music could be the following: a) Goal – an individual wishes to change her sad mood. b) Strategy – the individual tries to understand her own feelings (introspection) and get things into proportion (reappraisal). c) Tactic – she chooses to listen to a specific song. d) Mechanism – the lyrics of the song allow the individual to reflect on her emotions and get things into perspective (e.g. "I'm not alone in the way I feel" – recognition in the song).

In her study, van Goethem adopted a mixed methods design, including a literature study, two survey studies, a diary study followed by semi-structured interviews, and a diary-based intervention study. All participants were recruited at a university in the UK, and the majority of the participants were young adults.

The research demonstrates that music listening is used more often, and for a wider range of strategies than any other tactic. This is an important finding, and shows that increased understanding of how music works in affect regulation is necessary. The six strategies found to be most commonly used for affect regulation were *relaxation* (“the process by which people try to create a positive, relaxed feeling”), *distraction* (“the process by which people try to seek distraction from the unwanted situation, thoughts, or mood”), *rational thinking* (“the process by which people engage in some sort of rationalization about the situation or mood in order to deal with it”), *introspection* (“the thought process in which one attempts to understand one’s own feelings better”), *active coping* (“the process by which a person actually attempts to do something about the situation or mood”), and *venting* (“the process by which the emotion or mood is actually expressed or enhanced for the purpose of getting the emotion or mood out of the system”) (van Goethem, 2010, p. 263). As mentioned, participants indicated that music could be used to help most strategies. The most frequently used strategy helped by music listening was relaxation. Music listening also appeared to be particularly successful for the strategy of introspection, as compared to other tactics.

Van Goethem also asks the question of which affect regulation goals music is used for. Through the diary study followed by interviews, it appeared that the majority of affect regulation attempts were towards a positive affect. ‘Happy/excited’, ‘calm/relaxed’, ‘positive’, ‘motivated’, and ‘energetic’ were stated as the most desired affects, and ‘tired’ and ‘angry/frustrated’ were stated as affects that wished to be changed. Interestingly, ‘melancholy’, which has been generally considered a negative affect, appeared to be desirable when music was involved.

Finally, then, what are the underlying mechanisms that help music establish the intended affect regulation goal? During the interviews, this question was interrogated. Ten different underlying mechanisms were brought to

the surface. In addition to the list of mechanisms, in-depth descriptions of how these mechanisms helped during the affect regulation processes were provided by the participants. The mechanisms mentioned were *emotion of music* (e.g. happy or calm music can help the listeners achieve this mood); *type of music* (musical features such as being upbeat can help the listeners achieve the same mood); *familiarity of music* (familiar music can for example help the listeners make associations and can therefore help with e.g. distraction and relaxation); *content of music* (lyrics can for example help the listeners to understand their own emotions); *other world* (the listeners can sometimes forget the world around them, which can help them think things through, feel safe, etc.); *memories* (memories evoked by music may help the listeners to become happy, understand their emotions, etc.); *creates happy mood* (music sometimes simply makes the listeners happy, which can help them achieve their desired mood); *enhances level of mood* (enhancement of mood may help the listeners to better understand which mood they are in because it becomes more prominent); *music-related activities* (activities such as dancing or singing along may for example help the listeners to relax or vent affects); and *music-unrelated activities* (activities such as house-work or exercising are more enjoyable with music, which may in turn help with relaxation, distraction, venting, etc.). Emotion of music was frequently mentioned, but was not the only, and not the most important, reason why music helped with affect regulation. Thus, it is not the emotion or the structure of the music alone which is important in affect regulation.

Van Goethem's work contributes thorough and in-depth understanding of the role of music in affect regulation, and increases our knowledge of the importance of music in such regulation and how it actually works. This knowledge is significant to anyone who studies the relationship between music, mood and emotions.

## **2.4 MUSIC IN EVERYDAY LIFE – A HEALTH APPROACH**

### **2.4.1 Daily music listening and health promotion – Kari Batt-Rawden**

In her PhD thesis, Kari Batt-Rawden (2007a) explores the role of music and musicking in the daily lives of people with long-term illnesses. Her approach is exploratory, and her research design is participatory and action-oriented. The research interrogates whether the participants could learn to use music for health promotion and self-care through the exchange of musical materials and practices. Batt-Rawden notes that there has been little work devoted directly to the relationship between music and health in everyday life. The aims of her study are thus to “explore the role and significance of music and musicking in the life of men and women with long-term illnesses in or through different life phases, situations, events, issues and contexts” and to “increase knowledge on how participants, through exposure to and exchange of new musical materials and practices, may learn to use music as a ‘technology of self’ in relation to health and healing” (2007a, p. 34). Interestingly, a large part of the research focus is on music listening, which makes this research highly relevant to my study. Batt-Rawden concludes that the subjects “considered music listening and musicking to be important tools in the process of change and self-development, enhancing well-being and ‘wellness’ and offering resources for recovery and quality of life in the face of illness” (2007a, p. 3). The participants used music to achieve a sense of wholeness – mentally, bodily and spiritually – which seemed to position them on a road to recovery (2007a, 2007b).

For this research, 22 subjects aged 34 to 65 were recruited from Oslo and Akershus in Norway for participation. During a period of one year, Batt-Rawden conducted eight interviews with each of the subjects. An important aspect of the research was the development of the ‘participatory CD design’ where the participants contributed to and reflected on the making of several CD compilations named ‘Keepsakes and Memories’, ‘Music and its significance for me and why’, ‘My Mood’, ‘Feeling at my Best’ and ‘All Times

Best'. Additionally, Batt-Rawden put together a CD for the participants, which she named 'A Parting Gift'. "The 'Participatory CD Design' shed further light on which types of music seemed to benefit whom and why", writes Batt-Rawden (2007a, p. 3). The subjects' involvement in the project raised their musical consciousness, which they described as beneficial, "resulting in increased self-awareness and a new repertoire of musical skills relating to self care" (2007a, p. 3). For example, one of the subjects told how she had probably used to listen to a type of music which enhanced her feelings of being ill, rather than music which increased her sense of well-being. Through her participation in the project, she became more conscious about her music choices, and tried out some new musical genres, which made her feel more uplifted and energetic, rather than remaining 'down there', which was the result of her earlier music listening.

The participants reported an increase in well-being when they listened actively to music. An important issue is the *active* music listening. Batt-Rawden concludes that when music was used as a 'technology of self', it was seldom used as background music. Further, she relates to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, and suggests that "it may not be the hearing that improves life, it is the deep, focused listening that may induce flow experiences" (2007a, p. 95). This is interesting in the context of my study, because the very technology of mobile listening is designed for listening while performing other activities – such as commuting to work. However, I do not believe in the active/passive dichotomy, and will challenge the notion of *passive* music listening in chapter 3 (theoretical framework). This is not to say that hearing music in itself is related to well-being. Another vital aspect of music listening and well-being noted by Batt-Rawden is the crucial role of *personal chosen* music. 'Free will' becomes vital – the participants' opportunity to listen to their personal chosen music whenever they choose to do so. When the music does not correspond with the subjects' mood or state of mind, the music may evoke anger, annoyance, feelings of being ill or unwell. Hence, several of the participants describe situations where they have left a site because of the music being played there – perceived as disturbing or noisy. Obviously, music is a personal medium, chosen to fit specific, individual needs.

Batt-Rawden's research is the first in its kind. However, her focus on people with long-term illnesses leaves the question of how 'healthy' people appropriate music in their daily lives as a possible 'health technology' still to be answered. Also, she plays an active part in the study by 'teaching' the participants how to appropriate music. How, then, do people listen to and use music in their everyday lives – without the interference of a researcher – and which consequences do the music-listening have for their daily well-being?

### **2.4.2 Music, health, and quality of life – Even Ruud**

In his article 'Three narratives of music and health', Even Ruud (2002) shows how people can use music for health maintenance or health improvement through three examples of music use in everyday life. The first narrative is about an elderly theologian who cured his asthma with singing. When he was a young boy, he suffered from asthma attacks. At the same time, he was deeply involved with singing, and realised that his mood improved when he sang. As an effort to strengthen his lung capacity, he began to practice singing and breathing exercises systematically. At the age of eighteen, his asthma disappeared, and when he had a chest X-ray many years later, the doctor was impressed by his lung capacity despite the traces of asthma that still could be seen in his lungs. This story proves that singing might have positive effects on our physiological health. Moreover, the theologian also told that he used singing as a conscious activity to change his mood positively or to prevent anxiety. Thus, for this man, singing has obvious positive benefits regarding both his physical and mental health.

The second narrative is about a woman in her late thirties who began to sing and dance as a ritual to regulate her levels of stress. She explains that music gives a sort of release by bringing her into a state that could be described as *flow*, where she is totally absorbed in the music. While listening, she is also singing and dancing, and experiences a rush of adrenalin. The music takes her thoughts away from the stressful matter, and loud music works as an outlet for her anger. Ruud points to this narrative as an example of "a musical ritual in the service of health-

performing behaviour” (2002, p. 116). He explains that by listening at a high volume through headphones, this woman creates a space where her head is emptied so she can “enter a new state of well-being” (2002, p. 116).

In the third narrative, a former female inmate, now in her forties, struggles with serious social and emotional difficulties. She is writing music and playing in a band, and expresses that music gives her ‘health’. She explains that sometimes the only thing that can help her get out of bed is to imagine the music. “So for me, this is a real help psychologically”, she says (Ruud, 2002, p. 117). Attending band rehearsals improves her mood and makes her more active, also when she has returned home after the rehearsal. Composing music and writing lyrics helps her to structure and clarify her thoughts and emotions. Moreover, she expresses that listening to music helps her regulate her emotions, moods and thoughts. In all, different forms of music activities enable this woman to overcome depression and social phobia.

I find Ruud’s understanding of health particularly interesting. He focuses on how lay people perceive the concept of health, and notes that this understanding is linked to an experience of quality of life more than the traditional biomedical understanding of health as absence of disease. He introduces four aspects in which music has value in relation to our quality of life, namely music as a:

- a) provider of vitality, i.e. emotional stimulation and expression,
- b) tool for developing agency and empowerment,
- c) resource in building social networks,
- d) way of providing meaning and coherence in life (see Ruud, 1998) (Ruud, 2002, p. 114).

If engagement in music is taking care of some of these needs, Ruud believes that musicking provides improved quality of life, which means that it also provides better health. Through the three narratives accounted above, Ruud shows that all these aspects are present in the subjects’ experiences with music. By engaging in different music activities, the subjects become more aware of their feelings, regulate their affects, and express their emotions through music composing and singing. Thus, they are empowered

as actors. Particularly in the third narrative, music plays a vital role in the subject's ability to build social networks and socialize with others. Band practice is in fact sometimes the only thing that gets her out of bed and out the door. These subjects' involvement in music seems to provide meaning, as in a sense of wholeness and purpose in life. The concept of coherence draws on the work of Antonovsky (1979, 1987). People who have a sense of coherence in life, that is, people who perceive life as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful, have a better resistance towards disease than people who have a low sense of coherence. Thus, if engagement in music can improve subjects' experience of life as meaningful and manageable, their resistance towards ill-health is likely to improve (Antonovsky, 1987; Ruud, 1997a, 2002).

Moreover, Ruud (2002) describes music as a form of 'cultural immunogen', which may enable us to maintain health or prevent ill-health, in the same way that brushing teeth, developing good sleeping habits, and wearing safety belts may protect our health. In this sense, music works as an immunogen among several other behavioural immunogens, functioning as health-promoting behaviour. Along this reasoning, engaging in music may lead us in the direction of positive health.

## **2.5 PLACING THE PRESENT STUDY**

All of the studies mentioned above, function as vital references to this study. Bull has done important work on the role of the personal stereo, while DeNora has shown the importance of music in people's everyday lives. Batt-Rawden's study on the role of music in everyday life for the long term ill illuminates that music listening does indeed promote well-being, and functions as self-care, and Ruud shows that music can promote health and well-being. The importance of music in relation to emotions and mood is illuminated by Sloboda's and van Goethem's work. However, none of these studies focus on the role of music listening in everyday life as a technology of health and well-being for people who are apparently healthy. And none of these studies focus on the use of MP3 players from a psychological point of view.



The aim of the present study is to document uses of portable, private music in everyday life and to illuminate how this music can function as a technology of self-care. It consequently fills a gap in research on music and health as well as research on the role of music in everyday life. By interrogating mobile music listening in mundane, everyday settings, and relating this to theories on well-being, quality of life and health, this research opens up for a wider understanding of the relationship between everyday music use and health issues.



### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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This chapter aims to give an overview of the theories that work as framework for the present study. It will position the research as well as my starting point as a researcher. The research is first and foremost a study on how *music* may work as a resource, and has been carried out within the department of music. Hence, it is natural to begin with an account of my understanding of music. The first section will therefore present the ontologies of music that my understanding is based upon. I believe music can function as a *technology of self*, and the next section will therefore clarify what I mean by this, with reference to Foucault and DeNora. Further, this study is positioned within the academic area *music and health*, and I will therefore look into different understandings of health before I place this study within the social model of health, with particular reference to Antonovsky. Finally, *positive psychology* has worked as an important framework for the research, and the last section of this chapter will elucidate the matter of this direction within psychology.

## 3.1 MUSIC

At a basic level, we can understand music in three separate ways (Bonde, 2009): a) music has no other meaning than itself and does not refer to anything in the outer world, neither objects nor affects; b) music represents and/or expresses phenomena outside of the music (emotions, ideas, experiences, etc.) and its meaning is attached to those who create it; c) the meaning of music is not inhibited in the music, but arises in the meeting between the music and the listener. This study is built upon the latter understanding of music, which is called the *constructivist* understanding of music. Bonde (2009, p. 17) elaborates on this perspective: "Music is an aesthetic phenomenon, but the aesthetic components of music are related to and share qualities with basic human experiences, and these are always influenced by the social and cultural context" (my translation). I believe that meaning occurs in the interaction between music, listener, and context, and that each of these aspects must be considered when we interrogate the meaning of music listening.

My fundamental understanding of music is that it can work as a *resource* for the people who engage with it. North, Hargreaves and Hargreaves (2004) claim that we now *use* music to a higher degree than before. According to them, music is actively used as a resource to create certain moods, to regulate levels of energy, to attain or maintain specific affects, and the like. Laiho (2004) and Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2007) also assert that engagement in music is a goal-oriented activity where the purpose is to regulate mental states. However, according to Saarikallio and Erkkilä this self-regulation is not always a conscious activity. Still, in several cases, the use of music as a resource involves conscious involvement from the listener. Sloboda (2005c) considers the listener to be an active agent who makes conscious choices regarding what music to listen to, where and when to listen, and what to listen for, in accordance to personal needs, goals and intentions. In his research on everyday music listening, respondents reported various functions and activities for chosen music, categorized in six thematic types: Memory (e.g. reminder of valued past event), transcendent (e.g. spiritual experience), sensorial (e.g., source of pleasure), mood change (e.g. put in a good mood, excite), mood enhancement, and other (e.g. to work to). It also became clear in DeNora's (2000) research

that the participants had a strong consciousness about what they ‘needed’ to hear in different situations. Here, music was for example used to regulate moods and emotions and to achieve certain levels of energy, as well as to constitute self-identity and ‘social life’.

We see that music is used as a resource for different purposes. To think of music as a resource that can help the listener achieve personal goals is a fundamental condition for this study. Hence, I do not consider the subjects to be passive listeners who simply listen to music for the sake of being entertained. Rather, I believe music can have several functions concurrently: There is no doubt that music is listened to for entertainment and enjoyment; however, I believe the music has been chosen actively according to mood, situation, and purpose, although perhaps not always consciously. Thus, music becomes a resource for the listener, who can choose what, where and when to listen, according to personal needs, c.f. Sloboda (2005c).

### 3.1.1 Musicking

In 1998, Christopher Small introduced the term *musicking*. He states that ‘music’ is an abstraction, a fabrication. “Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something people do”, Small asserts (1998, p. 2). He wants to draw the attention away from the musical work and direct it instead at people, “as they play and sing, as they listen and compose, and even as they dance” (1998, p. 8) – that is, away from music as a thing, and towards the activity of people *musicking*. Included in the notion of musicking is any engagement in music, whether it is playing or listening, composing, or dancing. Small stresses, which *any* musical activity – even listening to muzak in an elevator – is “to music”. Further, he emphasizes that ‘to music’ is not value-laden:

It is *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. It covers all participation in a musical performance, whether it takes place actively or passively, whether we like the way it happens or whether we do not, whether we consider it it [sic.] interesting or boring, constructive or destructive, sympathetic or antipathetic. The word will remain useful only for so long as we keep our own value judgments clear of it. Value-laden uses that I have heard, such as “Everyone ought to

music” or “You can’t call listening to a Walkman musicking,” distort its meaning, weaken its usefulness as an investigative tool, and plunge us back into futile arguments about what music or musicking is (Small, 1998, p. 9).

*Musicking* is a fruitful term, in that it includes all forms of involvement in music. Hence, to play music and to listen to music is put on an equal footing. Listening to an MP3 player is thus a form of musicking just as much as a musical performance is. To me, it is important that listening to music is understood and valued as a form of musical engagement, an activity where the listener is seen as an active agent. Further, when using the concept of musicking, the context of the musical activity is appreciated as a vital factor. Instead of asking the question of the nature or meaning of the work of music, Small proposes the question “*What does it mean when this performance (of this work) takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants?*” (1998, p. 10, emphasis in the original). Hence, the meaning of musicking is to be found in the relationship between the music performance, the performer, the listener, time and place. In other words, one cannot expect to find the meaning or the consequences of the musical activity by separating the individual aspects of that activity – for example by looking at the listener separated from the rest of the musical context, time and place.

Included in Small’s understanding of musicking is *any* activity at *any* level related to music. Consequently, at a concert performance, not only is the composer, the performer, or the audience musicking, but also the ticket collectors, piano movers and cleaners. Small appreciates the distinction between what the performers and the cleaners are doing, but maintains that all these different activities add up to a single event. Although I can understand Small’s reasoning, I still would not categorize the activity of selling tickets, cleaning or moving furniture as musicking. If I were to define musicking, it would be all direct involvement with *music*. Musicking, as defined by me, would consequently involve composing music, reading music notation, playing or singing music, and listening to music, in any context. It could also be discussed whether passive music listening should be defined as musicking. If music is played on loudspeakers in the location where you are doing your grocery shopping, but you do not notice it, are

you then musicking? However, what is active and what is passive music listening? As a point of departure, I would claim that there should be *some* active involvement related to the music as to define it as an activity, and therefore as musicking. Such activity could be to actually notice the music being played or to choose what music to listen to, whether the purpose of the music is to analyse its musical structures, or to function as background music played at a dinner party.

### **3.1.2 Active versus passive music listening?**

There often exist an articulated dichotomy between active and passive music listening. Active music listening is usually understood as listening attentively to the music and directing one's entire focus to the music. In contrast, the notion of passive music listening is normally used when music is heard while one is simultaneously doing other activities, and the music is not the centre of one's attention. I would like to challenge this dichotomy. Clarke, Dibben and Pitts (2010, p. 65) also note that "[t]his distinction between 'active' or 'focused' listening and 'passive' or 'background' hearing is a theoretical simplification, and auditory experience often shifts between varieties of listening that may not always fit neatly into either of them". Indeed, listening to music as the prime object of attention seems to be an exception to, rather than the average, practice of everyday music listening (Clarke, et al., 2010). Further, the authors note that people seem to perceive and comprehend the music also when they do not purposely attend to it: "they dance, tap their feet, move in synchrony to certain aspects of musical structure, and respond to music in ways that suggest that they have taken in and understood the music, even if it is not their main focus of attention" (2010, p. 77).

Gomart and Hennion (1999) argue that music listening (by amateur music lovers) is a mix between activity and passivity. Similar to the use of drugs, use of music involves a form of self-abandonment and of being under the influence of something else, they assert. However, in order to be moved, active work must be done. To 'abandon oneself to music' is thus not exclusively passive. Instead, it involves the participation of the subject as she prepares for the event. In order to be taken over by the music, the

subject has to choose what music to listen to, and possibly get ready by placing herself in a situation where she can permit herself to abandon herself to the music. In this way, the listener works as an active agent who willingly prepare for a 'passive' reception of the music. "The user passes between active and passive. That is, between 'I am manipulated' (because I agree to it) and 'I manipulate' (an object which is stronger than myself)", Gomart and Hennion writes (1999, p. 243). Thus, the authors note, the subjects condition the arrival of pleasure. They further explain this exchange between activity and passivity:

The subject – expertly seized – passes between activity and passivity. The user strives tentatively to fulfil [sic.] those conditions which will let him be seized and taken over by a potentialized exogenous force. 'Passivity' then is not a moment of inaction – not a lack of will of the user who suddenly fails to be a full subject. Rather passivity leads to action, potentializes action. The greater the strength of the constraints and the more she abandons herself to what can happen, the more strongly it can indeed happen and the more she feels herself (Gomart & Hennion, 1999, p. 243).

When it comes to the use of MP3 players, one can easily imagine that the music is not the centre of the subjects' attention, as they usually carry out other activities while listening. In this sense, one could describe the listening as passive. But, relating to Gomart and Hennion's argument, the subject must condition the music and herself so that she can allow the music to play in harmony to her activities. That is, the listener must make an active choice about what music to listen to, as well as where and when to listen. Further, she decides whether to listen to an artist, an album, a playlist or at random, and at what volume level, according to where she is and what she is doing. These choices are made based on the listening context: what mood the listener is in, where she is headed, what she is doing, her environment, time of the day and so on. This context decides the purpose of the music listening. Thus, the music is chosen based on needs, goals and intentions (c.f. Sloboda, 2005c). When these choices are made, the subject can allow herself to focus on other things than the music. Still, the music is chosen for a reason, and most likely affects the way the listener perceives her situation. In this sense, the listener moves between activity and passivity. Hence, the dichotomy between active and passive becomes



less clear, and one can rather say, with Gomart and Hennion, that music listening – and listening to MP3 players – is a mix between active and passive. It is important to make this clear so that mobile music listening – as a form of musicking – is not looked upon as a ‘lesser’ form of listening. Rather, it is obvious, here too, that the listener is an active agent who makes active choices.

### 3.1.3 Affordances of music

The psychologist J. J. Gibson (1966) was the first to introduce the notion of *affordances*. The idea is that objects afford certain things to its users. For example, a ball affords rolling, bouncing and kicking. A stone of the same size would not afford these same things. Affordances are in other words the functions or values of an object, the opportunities it offers to its user. Gibson writes:

I have coined this word as a substitute for *values*, a term which carries an old burden of philosophical meaning. I mean simply what things furnish, for good or ill. What they *afford* the observer, after all, depends on their properties. [...] [T]he human observer learns to detect what have been called the values or meanings of things, perceiving their distinctive features, putting them into categories and subcategories, noticing their similarities and differences and even studying them for their own sakes, apart from learning what to do about them (Gibson, 1966, p. 285).

DeNora (2000, 2003) later introduced this idea in relation to music. Music *affords* certain things to its listeners. DeNora explains that “focus shifts from *what* music depicts, or what it can be ‘read’ as saying ‘about’ society, to what it *makes possible*. And to speak of ‘what music makes possible’ is to speak of what music ‘affords’” (2003, p. 46). The concept of the affordances of music have proven fruitful, and has therefore been adopted by several music scholars (e.g. Clarke, 2003; Ruud, 2002). What then can music afford? In examples by DeNora (1999, 2000, 2003) and Clarke (2003), it is shown that music may, among other things, afford different forms of physical engagement or bodily movement, emotional catharsis, mood regulation, structural listening, concentration, synchronized working, construction of social life and group solidarity. When listening to music on MP3 players,

one can imagine that the music can afford physical and mental regulation, re-construction of time and place as well as re-construction of one's perception of the environment.

Just as important as the idea of affordances is DeNora's notion of *appropriation*. For Gibson, objects afford certain things based on their properties, independent of how people appropriate them. However, DeNora, among others, argues that an object's affordances are based on how an individual chooses to relate to and behave towards the object. For example, as Clarke (2003) writes, a wooden chair affords sitting on to a human being, but to a termite it would rather afford eating. Further, the wooden chair could afford use as a weapon by a person in danger, or use as fuel by a person who needs it. Clarke explains that changing *needs* affects affordance – and thus changes how we *appropriate* the same object. The effects of music, are in other words conditioned by how music is acted upon; how listeners respond to it and integrate it into their actions. DeNora writes:

[T]he concept of affordance extends developments within reception theory, emphasising music's effects as depended upon the ways that those who hear it respond to it; how they incorporate it into their action; an [sic.] how they may adapt their action (not necessarily or in most cases consciously) to its parameters and qualities. It posits music as something acted with and acted upon. It is only through this appropriation that music comes to 'afford' things, which is to say that music's affordances, while they might be anticipated, cannot be pre-determined but rather depend upon how music's 'users' connect music to other things; how they interact with and in turn act upon music as they have activated it (DeNora, 2003, p. 48).

Drawing on this argument, DeNora asserts that music is not a stimulus that 'acts' on the listener; rather, the powers of music are composed by the listener, and derive from the ways the listener interacts with the music. Hence, the MP3 user is not 'acted upon' by the music, but re-constructs her experiences through the way she *appropriates* the music.

## 3.2 TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF

'Technologies of the self' is a concept first introduced by Foucault. It has since been adopted in different settings to describe how people appropriate different means to take care of themselves. DeNora (1999, 2000) writes of music as a technology of the self – by which she describes music as a medium through which people attend to themselves. She relates this to the affordances and appropriations of music, that is, what music makes possible (DeNora, 2003). According to Foucault, technologies of the self:

[...] permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1997b, p. 225).

According to Foucault, technologies of the self are operations on the self that subjects employ in order to transform themselves. There are several practices that can be described as such operations, for example writing a diary (Rose, 1996; T. B. Schei, 2007). Listening to music can also be included as such an operation on the self (DeNora, 1999). This means that music is only one of several operations – or means – that can be employed as a technology of self. That is, music is not exclusive or 'magical', but posits several qualities that make it a valuable tool in self-care. How then can music listening work as a technology of the self? DeNora explains:

One of the first things music does is to help actors to shift mood or energy levels, as perceived situations dictate, or as part of the 'care of self'. [...] music is an accomplice in attaining, enhancing and maintaining desired states of feeling and bodily energy (e.g. relaxation); it is a vehicle they use to move out of dispreferred states (e.g. stress, fatigue). It is a resource for modulating and structuring the parameters of aesthetic agency – feeling, motivation, desire, comportment, actions style, energy (DeNora, 1999, p. 37).

DeNora argues that music is 'clearly' an existing technology of self as it helps people to regulate emotions and bodily energy, as well as stress, motivation, and so on. Although neither DeNora nor I would describe music as magical, one of my informants does exactly that: "A lot of music is almost

magical. It makes you really... you feel the energy, the music energy rushing through you, you feel it working”, he says (male, 27 years). This man describes music as “magical” because he can feel the energy from the music working. There must in other words be something in the music that works on the self: the body and the mind. But, relating to DeNora (2003), it is probably not the music *as such* that ‘works’ on the subject. Rather, the music works because of the relationship between the subject and the music – what the music affords and how it is appropriated. In other words, in the ways that this subject appropriates the music – that is, by conditioning himself to be ‘taken over’ by the music (c.f. Gomart & Hennion, 1999) – the music becomes a technology of the self.

Schei (2007) relates technologies of the self to *tacit knowledge*.<sup>18</sup> I understand this as a subconscious or unconscious knowledge that individuals possess concerning what is good for them. Relating to the use of MP3 players, I believe individuals choose to listen to their MP3 players to take care of themselves, but that this is sometimes a subconscious action. According to Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2007), Batt-Rawden (2007a) and DeNora (2003, 2007), to use music as a resource in affect regulation, self-care, or as a technology of health promotion, is not always a conscious activity. Still, this use of music can be described as a technology of self, as they are “operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” that are acted out in order to attain a certain level of happiness – or well-being (c.f. Foucault, 1997b).

As seen, technologies of the self are techniques that subjects employ in their relation to themselves:

Technologies of the self take the form of the elaboration of certain techniques for the conduct of one's relation with oneself, for example requiring one to relate to oneself epistemologically (know yourself), despotically (master yourself) or in other ways (care of yourself) (Rose, 1996, p. 29).

According to Foucault, these ‘techniques of the self’ are “[...] the procedures, [...] suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends,

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<sup>18</sup> For an introduction to and discussion of tacit knowledge, see Polanyi (2000/1966).

through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge” (Foucault, 1997a, p. 87). Foucault (1997b) gives an account of the history of the understanding of ‘care of the self’, which was understood as the *knowledge of self* in ancient philosophy and Christian traditions. Later, in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods, the *concern with oneself* rather than the knowledge of self was emphasized. In Stoicism, technologies of the self were concerned with “the progressive consideration of self, or *mastery over oneself*” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 238, emphasis added). To *know yourself*, *master yourself* and *care for yourself* stand out as three main aspects of technologies of self (Foucault, 1997a, 1997b). As we have seen, Foucault (1997b, p. 225) describes technologies of the self as “operations on [...] bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being”. Music listening can be understood as such an operation, and can be related to *self-knowledge and identity* (DeNora, 2000; Frith, 1996; Ruud, 1997b; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2002), *self-mastery* (Batt-Rawden, et al., 2005; Laiho, 2004; North, et al., 2004; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Skarpeid, 2008; van Goethem & Sloboda, 2008) and *self-care* (Batt-Rawden, 2007a; Bergland, 2006; DeNora, 2007; Ruud, 1997a, 2002, 2008; Sloboda, 2005c; Sloboda, et al., 2001). In the following quote, DeNora demonstrates how music is used as a resource in everyday-life, and upholds that music is indeed a technology of the self:

[...] I think it is fair to suggest that music is clearly an available technology of the self. In relation to the self, music provides a rich array of cultural resources for self constitution and reconstitution over time: it may serve as a model or template for temporal phenomena (such as forms of conduct or other social processes); it may be perceived to offer many types of semiotic particles that may be construed as ‘emblems’ for self-identity; it may provide a medium that comes to carry conventional or biographical associations (DeNora, 1999, p. 53).

Thus, music can be said to be a technology of the self, and the present study is based on this notion. As this research is concerned with the relation between music listening and well-being, it is this aspect of self-technologies that will be illuminated. This means that this study will be more concerned with the aspect of *happiness* than those of purity, wisdom, perfection, and immorality (c.f. Foucault, 1997b).

The use of the word 'technology' can be somewhat confusing in the context of the present research, because it acquires a double meaning when it is used in reference to the use of MP3 players – which is a technology designed for music listening. Because the MP3 player is a technology that offers music listening, it can be said to be a technology of a technology of the self. However, when I speak of technologies in the forthcoming, it is in reference to Foucault and his notion of self-care.

### 3.3 HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

The context of this study is *music and health*. Can engagement with music maintain, improve or enhance positive health? To answer this question, one must begin with an understanding of what health is. What does it mean to move towards positive health? I will begin this section with a short introduction to different understandings of health, and then look into so-called *salutogenic* health and quality of life. The section will end with a brief outline of how music may work as a technology of health.

#### 3.3.1 What is health?

*Health* is a concept with several different understandings (see e.g. Blaxter, 2004; Mæland, 2005). Schei (2009) explains that the concept is difficult to define because health is a matter of what is good for a person. In the same way that people have different understandings of what is 'good' and what a person 'is', people have different understandings of what 'health' is. Mæland (2005) differentiates between a minimum of three different interpretations of health: health as *absence of illness*, health as *resource*, and health as *well-being*.

The understanding of health as *absence of illness* relates to the traditional biomedical model of health. The biomedical model is based on and dominated by the principles of biological sciences. This model is mainly concerned with disease, which it is the purpose of medicine to cure. That is, biomedicine normally focuses on ill health rather than health (Blaxter, 2004). The body is viewed as a biological machine, and disease is the result

of a defect in the machinery (Hjort, 1994). The problem with this definition is that the human being is more than merely a biological machine. In contemporary biomedicine, psychological factors have been given a more prominent role. Thus, ideas about diverse and interrelated causes of ill health have been incorporated in modern medicine. Still, Blaxter notes: "Social and psychological causes of ill health – stress, unhappiness, life events – are admitted as agents of disease, or contributing factors, but they are not themselves defined as ill health" (2004, p. 15). Even if biomedicine has taken a more holistic approach, admitting social and psychological influences on health, the main focus is still on ill health, resulting in a negatively oriented approach to health (Blaxter, 2004).

Health as 'absence of illness' implies that "[t]he healthy are those who are not biologically disadvantaged" (Blaxter, 2004, p. 5). This understanding of health was common for a period in the mid-twentieth century. However, this interpretation created several problems in defining 'disadvantage'. Especially in the field of mental health, definitions of abnormality and biological disadvantages were problematic in describing ill health and good health. Mental ill health does for example not reduce life expectancy or fertility, which were often used as the criteria for disadvantage. A more subjective view, where an individual's own experiences of symptoms or perception of illness are in focus, might be more fruitful. The problem with a subjective approach like this is that it becomes even more difficult to define a norm. Blaxter notes:

It is commonly demonstrated in studies of populations that to experience no symptoms of ill health at all – never to have pain, mild dysfunction, infection or injury – is in fact highly abnormal: most of us, most of the time, can identify something which we might call a symptom of an illness. [...] Any definition of health as the absence of self-perceived illness has to deal with the fact that this perception varies widely among individuals and depends on situations (Blaxter, 2004, p. 6).

The rare experience of no symptoms of ill health also makes the World Health Organization's definition of health challenging: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1946). This constitution was signed in 1946

and entered into force in 1948. The definition has not been amended since then. However, some have had trouble taking this definition of health seriously, as it seems to be utopian and idealistic, and not very realistic (Blaxter, 2004; Hjort, 1994; Mæland, 2005; E. Schei, 2009). Nonetheless, WHO's definition opens up for an understanding of health that is not exclusively about pathogenic, biomedical health. Included in their understanding of health is also mental and social well-being, woven together with physical well-being. Thus, WHO proposes a holistic view on health.

Health as *resource* is a view which focuses on the individual's strength to function and resistance against the strain and stress one is exposed to throughout life (Mæland, 2005). This relates to Hjort's (1994, my translation) definition of health: "Health is to have a surplus of energy to deal with the demands of everyday life". In his view, positive health is related to four interwoven aspects: well-being, coping, surplus of energy, and social support. Hjort relates *well-being* to feeling good about oneself and the world, both when it comes to body, mind, and social life. Zest for life, joy and optimism are related to this aspect. At a higher level, Hjort also relates well-being to friendship, love, happiness and hope. Accordingly, this aspect becomes similar to the thinking within positive psychology, which I will look into in section 3.4. *Coping* is about overcoming or dealing with disease, illness and difficulties. Hjort relates this notion to *internal coherence*, a concept first introduced by Antonovsky (1979), which I will look into below. *Surplus of energy* is about having a reserve, something to draw on, when it comes to dealing with everyday life. Finally, Hjort argues that *social support* is necessary to be able to manage life and to feel good.

Hjort's definition of positive health leads us to the understanding of health as *well-being*. This understanding emphasizes physical and psychological vigour, an experience of well-being and harmony, having good relations to other people, and being able to make use of oneself in a positive manner (Mæland, 2005). These aspects of health can be experienced despite of disease. In English language, it has become common to differentiate between *disease* and *illness*. Illness is understood as the subjective experience of ill health, while disease is the more objective, medical defined state of 'a defect in the biological machinery' (Blaxter, 2004; Hjort, 1994).



Consequently, having a disease does not presuppose a subjective experience of illness. Indeed, there are many examples of people talking about being in good, or even excellent, health while their medical record documents a different story (Blaxter, 2004; Fugelli & Ingstad, 2001, 2009; Hjort, 1994). An objective, biomedical definition of health is therefore not sufficient. One joint norm regarding health seems to prove impossible. Rather, health can be viewed as subjective and relational.

An understanding of health as resource and well-being, as well as subjective and relational, fits within the social model of health. This model views health as holistic: Health is a positive state of wholeness and well-being (Blaxter, 2004). The model is contextual, in that it locates biological processes within their social environments. The person is not merely seen as a system of various bodily parts, but as a whole: "Holism describes the view that the whole cannot be explained simply by the sum of the parts, just as 'healthiness' cannot be explained by a list of 'risk factors'" (Blaxter, 2004, p. 18). Health is understood as a positive state rather than simply the absence of disease. This view correlates with the health definition from WHO, as well as Hjort's definition of health. This is also the understanding of health that the present study is based on. Particularly, Antonovsky has been an important figure within the social model of health. His notion of salutogenic health and sense of coherence will be addressed in the next section.

### **3.3.2 Salutogenic health**

As an alternative to the biomedical perspective on health – which emphasises a dichotomy between the healthy and the diseased – Antonovsky (1979, 1987) offered what he called a *salutogenic* understanding of health. This way of thinking turns the focus towards what promotes health instead of what generates disease. Antonovsky asked the question of why some people seem to stay healthy despite having experienced major trauma or being in the risk group of developing certain diseases. Thus, he did a complete turnaround: Instead of asking why some people become sick, he asked why some people stay healthy. He developed the concept of *sense of coherence* as a theoretical answer to this question.

The concept draws on the idea that people who have a sense of coherence in life, that is, people who perceive life as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful, have a better resistance towards disease than people who have a low sense of coherence. People who perceive the world as making sense and being predictable (comprehensible), manageable with the resources available, and making emotional sense (meaningful) seem to cope better with situations and consequently maintain their health. Antonovsky defines the sense of coherence (SOC) concept as follows:

*The sense of coherence is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 19, emphasis in the original).*

The salutogenic orientation is holistic, in that it is concerned with the person as a whole, not just with the sickness of the patient. Antonovsky is thus concerned with the whole story of the person rather than simply her diagnosis. Further, by asking about the factors involved in maintenance of positive health, this view emphasises a person's coping resources. This involves the idea that stressors are not essentially negative. Rather, Antonovsky maintains that stressors are omnipresent, and should not necessarily be reduced. Instead, "the consequences of stressors are viewed not as necessarily pathological but as quite possibly salutary, contingent on the character of the stressor and the successful resolution of tension" (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 12). Thus, it is the coping resources of a person, not the stressors she encounters, which are of importance. A person with good coping resources – or a high sense of coherence – is likely to cope well with various stressors, and accordingly maintain positive health. A person with a strong SOC is more likely than a person with a low SOC to see a situation as a challenge and consequently attempt to cope with it. If one does not appraise the situation as meaningful, or if one does not believe to have the resources necessary to deal with it, one is less likely to invest energy and effort in trying to cope with the challenge. A strong sense of coherence accordingly becomes an important resistance resource.

A significant aspect of Antonovsky's theory of health is that he sees disease and health as a continuum rather than as dichotomies. He calls this the health ease/dis-ease continuum (1979, 1987). Disease is placed on the one end of the scale, and health on the other. "The salutogenic orientation proposes that we study the location of each person, at any time, on this continuum", Antonovsky explains (1987, p. 4). This implies that a person is not ill or healthy, but always moving towards one of the poles. To simply ask about the factors resulting in a specific disease easily becomes a too narrow focus when it comes to explaining disease and health, Antonovsky claims. If we instead try to find answers to what facilitates a person's movement towards the salutary end of the continuum, we might begin to understand which factors are relevant to all diseases, and thereby find more general answers which might be fruitful when it comes to decreasing human suffering (Antonovsky, 1979). Accordingly, the salutogenic understanding of health is positive and resource oriented: Salutogenesis seeks to find answers to why people move towards the positive end of the health ease/dis-ease continuum by focusing on their resources.

Antonovsky stresses that he does not dismiss or make light of pathogenesis and the work which is based on the pathogenic understanding of health. This is also an important part of health care – if one is ill, one needs medical care. What he proposes is a more holistic thinking when it comes to understanding how and why people move towards the positive pole of the health ease/dis-ease continuum. The answers, Antonovsky proposes, is to be found in a person's sense of coherence.

### **3.3.3 Health as quality of life**

In the context of this study, I relate health to an experience of *life quality*. Ruud (2002) notes that how lay people experience health is often related to vigour, surplus of energy and a positive state of well-being. This conception of health is similar to Hjort's understanding of health (see above), and Ruud remarks that a lay understanding of health may be said to equate health with a notion of quality of life.

During the years 1997-2000, Fugelli and Ingstad (2001, 2009) performed a study on how lay people understand the concept of health. They carried out

80 qualitative interviews with people aged 16-93 years, located in five different parts of Norway. The authors identified six essential elements in the interviewees' conceptualizations of health: well-being, function, nature, humour, coping, and energy. Three qualities emerged as essential: wholeness, pragmatism, and individualism:

The lay perspective on health is characterized by three qualities:

- Wholeness. Health is a holistic phenomenon. Health is interconnected with all aspects of life and society.
- Pragmatism. Health is a relative phenomenon. Health is experienced and evaluated according to what people find reasonable to expect, given their age, medical condition and social situation.
- Individualism. Health is a personal phenomenon. Every human being is a unique person. Therefore health and strategies for health must be individualized (Fugelli & Ingstad, 2001, p. 3600).

In Fugelli and Ingstad's study, *well-being* reappeared in the subjects' explanations as a vital and superior aspect of health (Fugelli & Ingstad, 2009). Thus, a lay understanding of health can be described as a subjective experience of a 'good life'. The authors further note that well-being, quality of life and health are closely interrelated in people's understanding of 'the good life'. In contrast to WHO's definition of health, 'the good life' is not necessarily a *perfect* life. Thus, the interviewees seemed to be realistic in what to expect of their health, and expressed that 'generally well' is 'good enough'. People do not seem to expect a state of complete well-being, but believe that their ability to cope with the challenges of everyday life and maintain a positive mood is decisive in sustaining good health. According to Fugelli and Ingstad's research, a lay perspective on health correlates with a positive, holistic, and subjective understanding of health. "People emphasise health as resource, health as a holistic experience, and health as a personal, situational phenomenon", Fugelli and Ingstad write (2001, p. 3603, my translation). The perspective on health as resource, as well-being, and as the ability to cope shows a relationship to Hjort's definition of health, as we have seen above. This understanding of health is further similar to some definitions of quality of life.

There are many understandings and definitions of quality of life, but in recent years, subjective experiences and perceptions have in large part

replaced objective perspectives (Camfield & Skevington, 2008; Mæland, 2005). In 1995, the World Health Organization defined quality of life like this:

An individual's perception of their position in life, in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept, affected in a complex way by the person's physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, and their relationship to salient features of their environment (WHOQOL Group, 1995: 1404, in Camfield & Skevington, 2008, p. 765).

Camfield and Skevington note that this definition of quality of life – which has been widely accepted – strongly converges with definitions of subjective well-being (Diener, 2009; Diener, et al., 2005). After reviewing literature on quality of life and well-being, they suggest that subjective well-being (SWB) and quality of life (QoL) are close to synonymous with each other. Well-being *is* an important aspect of quality of life, and Næss (2001a, 2001b) suggests a definition of quality of life *as* mental well-being. Næss articulates her definition of quality of life in these words:

An individual's quality of life is strong in the degree to which the individual's conscious cognitive and affective experiences are positive, and low in the degree to which the individual's conscious cognitive and affective experiences are negative (Næss, 2001a, p. 10, my translation).

This definition of life quality includes both cognitive and affective experiences, and is understood as the experience of well-being, a basic feeling of happiness. Næss (2001a) explains that this definition is equivalent to definitions of subjective well-being. Hence, she confirms Camfield and Skevington's claim that QoL and SWB may be seen as synonymous.

Næss' explanation of quality of life is by definition related to the individual, not society, although aspects of the society may influence an individual's life quality. Further, the concept is related to *experiences*, not something one has or does, one's environment or personal traits. So far, I agree with Næss' definition. However, Næss sees quality of life as something different from

health, as she understands health as 'absence of disease'. Here, I disagree. If we want to take the lay perspective on health seriously, we have to consider that health is understood as well-being, function, nature, humour, coping, and energy (Fugelli & Ingstad, 2001, 2009). Thus, as mentioned, a lay perspective on health comes close to the conception of life quality.

Næss divides the concept of life quality into four groups, which to some degree converge with Hjort's (1994) four aspects of positive health (well-being, coping, surplus of energy, and social support):

- activity
- social relations
- self-concept
- basic feeling of happiness

*Activity* does not refer to physical activity, but to experiences or emotions related to activity. *Engagement* is mentioned in particular by Næss (2001a, p. 72). Engagement is described as appetite and zest for life, interest for and commitment in something outside of oneself which is perceived as meaningful. This comes close to Hjort's *surplus of energy*.

The concept of *social relations* is similar to Hjort's *social support*, and is described as having good, interpersonal relationships, and to have a close, mutual relationship to at least one other person. Although love seems to be vital for all human beings, and is one of the basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for social relationships probably differs from one person to another. One of the informants in Fugelli and Ingstad's study says:

And then there are people that I know, if they're allowed to be by themselves a little, they're happy. If they're going out to be with people, they sit and dread it an entire week in advance, before they're going to this festivity, and when they come home, they don't sleep that night, because there's so much on their minds. So in that way, they're best off being by themselves... at least that they can decide themselves. So I think that only if you're allowed to do what you want... because we're so different (male in his forties) (Fugelli & Ingstad, 2001, p. 3604, my translation).

This quote is presented here not to say that social relations are not important, but to illustrate that people have different needs.

*Self-concept* is related to confidence in oneself and one's abilities and competence. Included in this concept are also the experience of one's coping abilities, the experience of being useful, and the experience of living up to one's own standards. Accordingly, it can be related to Hjort's concept of *coping*.

*Basic feeling of happiness* is said to be the aspect which is closest to the concept of quality of life. While the three other aspects may be seen as causalities that are of special importance to life quality, basic feeling of happiness may be said to define quality of life. It is described as a fundamental feeling of happiness, delight, harmony and well-being, and the experience of life as meaningful. It also involves the absence of low spirits, discomfort, pain, anxiety, and worries. It is in other words similar to *subjective well-being* (Diener, 2009; Diener, et al., 1997), and correlates with Hjort's notion of well-being.

I base my understanding of quality of life primarily on Næss' definition, but see health *as* quality of life, with reference to the social model of health, Hjort's definition of positive health, and the lay perspective on health. To congregate health and quality of life leaves out important physical aspects of health. It is not my intention to narrow neither the concept of health nor the concept of life quality – which in some contexts may be seen as a broader term than health (Mæland, 2005) – but to make an account of how I choose to use the concepts in relation to this study. Because it makes sense to focus on only certain aspects of such broad concepts, I have chosen to narrow the focal point to concentrate on the positive, resource-oriented social model of health. Further, I have chosen to focus on mental health. This focus then correlates with Næss' definition of life quality, which spotlights mental well-being.

As the definition of quality of life correlates with the concept of subjective well-being, I will mainly speak of well-being throughout the thesis. The concept of well-being can be placed within the framework of positive psychology, and I will elaborate on this concept within section 3.4.1.

### 3.3.4 Music as a technology of health

In his introduction to the anthology *Music in Mental Health Work with Children and Youth [Musikk i psykisk helsearbeid med barn og unge]*, Ruud (2009, p. V) writes: “What we call health is about experiencing sense of coherence and vigour in everyday life, vitality and solidarity. Music is a resource we can draw upon to find hope and strength to live a life with meaning in creative company with others” (my translation). In his 2010 text, he writes:

We may make use of music to change behavior or sometimes alleviate or cure ill health. We may use music to regulate mood and emotions or maintain a preferred state. We turn to music to work through pain and sorrow. In all these cases different conceptions of health may be operating. Musicking may be curative, palliative, preventative, or health promoting (Ruud, 2010, p. 104).

Hence, musicking is seen to have diverse functions regarding health. In Norway, different aspects of this relationship has been documented in e.g. Aasgard (2006b), *Music and Health [Musikk og helse]*. Here, it is written about music with children in hospital care (Aasgaard, 2006a), music in psychiatric practice (Solli, 2006), music therapy with adolescents suffering from anorexia (Trondalen, 2006), music in correctional services (prison) (Mortensen & Nilsen, 2006), music with elderly (Kvamme, 2006), music and health in the local society (Stige, 2006), and music in interaction with people with life style related illnesses (Batt-Rawden, 2006). In short, music is used in different situations where one wishes to increase the quality of life of the participants. A recurring theme for the mentioned writings, however, is interaction and solidarity. Music is used in activities where two or more people are interacting to promote well-being, health, and quality of life.

In the present study, the *individual* and *solitary* activity of music listening is in focus. Is the social interaction related to musicking decisive for maintenance or improvement of life quality and health? Or is it possible that private music listening may result in some of the same outcomes?

DeNora (2007) focuses on music as a technology of health in situations where social interaction is not necessarily a part of the music activity.



Instead, she is concerned with the effects of music on cognitive, affective and bodily aspects related to everyday music listening. She links the effects of music on health to affordance and appropriation, and states that “Music’s role as a health technology depends [...] on how it is appropriated and on what it affords through this process” (DeNora, 2007, p. 276). She refers to her own study on music in everyday life as well as Batt-Rawden’s study on music listening and health promotion (Batt-Rawden, 2007a), and concludes that music works as a resource for self-maintenance and self-stabilisation. The respondents appropriate music to accomplish tasks that are related to self-care and self-stability:

This maintenance includes many aspects of self associated with mental health and mental strength, that is, with the ability to cope with adversity, stress-management, self-monitoring, and self-awareness. It is possible to see individuals here acting as lay-therapists to themselves [...] (DeNora, 2007, p. 280).

According to DeNora, then, individuals may use music as a form for ‘self-therapy’. Hence, the social aspects of interaction and solidarity do not necessarily need to be present in the musical activity in order for the individual to gain therapeutic effects.

Ruud (2004) links music listening to health because of its effects on increased emotion awareness. He claims that we become more aware of our emotions when we listen to music, and that music allows us to clarify how we feel. When music is related to health and quality of life, it is often because of the strong emotional experiences that are caused by music. Music can change mood, produce joy, and mobilise strength and vitality (Ruud, 2004). Ruud (2010, p. 107) also notes that “music listened to for pleasure might sometimes also be applied as a way to care for ourselves in stressful situations”. He further links music listening to self-care, and relates this to new technologies:

What we could term “musical self-medication,” sometimes based upon the new music technologies with personal and portable soundtracks in MP3 players and smart phones, involves taking care of one’s energies, bodily states, emotions, cognitive orientations, memories, moods, in short our physical and emotional well-being. In this is a new form of musical self-caring; music is a part of the

technology of self (DeNora 2000) directed toward defining and performing health (Ruud, 2010, p. 173).

We see that music listening can have positive effects on people's self-management, emotional life, and coping abilities. These effects may produce favourable outcomes on health and life quality. It is probable that everyday music listening can enhance well-being, and therefore lead to improved quality of life. Well-being and quality of life are concepts that are studied within the field of positive psychology, and I have chosen to use positive psychology, which will be looked into below, as a theoretical reference to the study on mobile music listening.

### **3.4 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

Positive psychology is a rather 'new' movement within the discipline of psychology (Jørgensen & Nafstad, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, here we need to be careful, as Csikszentmihalyi responds such to the question of whether positive psychology is 'new': "Of course not. Who ever claimed it was?" (2003, p. 115). Although Martin Seligman (as president of the American Psychological Association) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi may be said to be some of the first to initiate the movement toward positive psychology at the end of the nineties, it has roots far back in time. However, as Csikszentmihalyi (2003) notes, insights – even the most obvious – need to be revisited every few generations, "so that their truth can be restated within the evolving context of knowledge" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 115). The core root of the field is the Aristotelian tradition (Jørgensen & Nafstad, 2004). The focal point of positive psychology is positive experiences as well as positive character and virtues – in line with Aristotle's idea of human nature. Thompson (2005) defines positive psychology thus:

The focus of positive psychology is on adaptive functioning including the human capacity to maintain emotional well-being despite setback, major trauma, and the ups and downs of ordinary life (Thompson, 2005, p. 202).

In other words, in line with Antonovsky's salutogenic theory (1979, 1987), positive psychology is concerned with human *resources* and *positive functioning*. Again, there is a shift in focus away from the pathological aim to repair damage towards enhancing innate resources and positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi articulate, "[...] psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best" (2000, p. 7). In answering the question of "why positive psychology is necessary", Sheldon and King (2001) address the negative bias that, in their view, can be found nearly everywhere in theoretical psychology. They believe this bias "prevents psychologists from perceiving many important human processes, outcomes, and strengths" (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 217). As an alternative to the 'negative biased' psychology, or the psychology that focuses on what is wrong rather than what is right, positive psychology – at the subjective level – is about "valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

Critics of the field (e.g. Lazarus, 2003) have accused positive psychology of merely being "happiology". As a response to this, Seligman and Pawelski (2003) argue that positive psychology is concerned with more than pleasant emotions. They believe that a positive life also includes strength, virtue and meaning. "Thus positive psychology is not, and has never been, just happiology. It is the study of three very different kinds of positive lives: the pleasant life, the good life, and the meaningful life", they maintain (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003, p. 161). Moreover, critics have argued that happiness and positive thinking is being overemphasized at the cost of our understanding of life difficulties. However, positive psychologists do not suggest that psychology should abandon the negative and simply focus on positive virtues, as they are charged for by Lazarus (2003). Seligman and Pawelski underscore the intention of the positive movement: "As we have taken pains to emphasize, psychology as usual is important and necessary, and positive psychology is intended as a supplement, another arrow in the quiver, and not a replacement for this endeavour" (2003, p. 159). Certainly, neither do I believe that pathological psychology is not necessary. I do not suggest that all psychology should move in the same direction as positive

psychology, but I do believe that this field can offer important knowledge about human functioning. Life quality, achieved in one way or the other, seems to be important to all human beings, and insight into well-being and positive experiences helps us to understand how and why people experience and enhance positive emotions. As I have a positive, resource-oriented approach to the study on mobile music listening, positive psychology works well as theoretical framework for this study. From the field of positive psychology, I particularly draw on theories on well-being. Therefore, in the following I will describe the theoretical understandings of the term and how I use it in this study.

### **3.4.1 Well-being: eudaimonia and hedonism**

The notion of well-being can be divided into two main understandings of the term: *psychological well-being* and *subjective well-being*. These two understandings stem from two directions within the field of positive psychology, the *eudaimonic* approach and the *hedonistic* approach, respectively. This distinction was first made by Aristotle, and is now used within psychology to identify the aspects of a good life. Whereas hedonism typically focuses on happiness and positive feelings per se, eudaimonia is typically more concerned with self-actualization and the meaningfulness of engaging in certain activities (Haybron, 2008; King, 2008).

The division between eudaimonia and hedonism can take form of an almost moral division, where hedonism is criticized for being concerned simply with happiness, whereas eudaimonia is seen as an interest in something which is more and better than merely being happy (King, 2008). But, as King (2008) points out, the distinction between eudaimonic and hedonistic thinking is perhaps artificial and unnecessary. She illuminates how research literature is full of examples of intertwinement between eudaimonia and hedonics, and points to the fact that Aristotle himself, who has mostly been identified with eudaimonia, viewed pleasure as an essential part of eudaimonic living. King quotes Aristotle from his discussion on eudaimonia in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Happiness ... is the best, noblest, *most pleasant* thing in the world, and *these attributes are not severed*” (Aristotle, 350

B.C.E./1998 C.E., p.17, in King, 2008, p. 433, emphasis added by King). King argues:

Perhaps the distinction between eudaimonia and hedonism is not so much about being happy versus not, but concern over identifying the roots of that happiness. If eudaimonia can be boiled down to feeling happy for the right reasons (e.g., “I volunteered as a literacy tutor”) versus the wrong ones (e.g., “I just got a new sports car”), then once again, we can see from the empirical evidence that the dichotomy has been drawn too sharply. [...] It is actually quite remarkable that, apparently, subjective well-being is sensitive to the dynamics of eudaimonics – the better we live, the better we feel” (King, 2008, p. 433).

So it is possible that both psychological well-being (PWB) and subjective well-being (SWB) boils down to being happy, but as a consequence of different points of departure. Thus, the two kinds of well-being might also take different form, at least in theory. Although I agree with King that there probably should not be such a sharp dichotomy between eudaimonic well-being and hedonistic well-being, I will look into some of the theories that exist concerning the two.

### **3.4.1.1 Psychological well-being**

Eudaimonic well-being, or psychological well-being, is characterized by a focus on self-actualization, personal growth, skill development and meaning making (Haybron, 2008; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). Psychological well-being is thus seen as a consequence of for example experiencing meaning in activities. Ryan and Deci (2001) explain eudaimonic well-being like this:

The term eudaimonia is valuable because it refers to well-being as distinct from happiness per se. Eudaimonic theories maintain that not all desires – not all outcomes that a person might value – would yield well-being when achieved. Even though they are pleasure producing, some outcomes are not good for people and would not promote wellness. Thus, from the eudaimonic perspective, subjective happiness cannot be equated with well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 146).

The last sentence from this quote creates some confusion. King (2008) argues, as seen above, that both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being are about being happy, but that the roots of that happiness differ. As she points out – it seems that the roots of eudaimonic well-being, such as experiencing meaningfulness and personal fulfilment, also lead to subjective well-being, in that it increases a person's pleasant emotions. But, as Ryan and Deci (2001) touch upon, eudaimonic well-being is seen as something *more* than merely being happy, and therefore cannot be equated with happiness. In their research on subjective well-being and psychological well-being, Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) conclude that PWB and SWB are related, but still distinct from one another. They point out that “[...] it is the strongly existential aspects of PWB (i.e., purpose in life and personal growth) that most cleanly separate from the affective and life quality assessments of subjective well-being” (Keyes, et al., 2002, p. 1017).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) have offered a theoretical model of PWB which includes six dimensions of human actualization, or wellness: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, environmental mastery, and positive relatedness. Subjects with high scores on *autonomy* are independent, self-governing and able to resist social pressures; they are able to regulate behaviour, and evaluate themselves by personal standards. Those with high scores on *personal growth* see themselves as growing and expanding, have feelings of continual development, are open to new experiences, and have a sense of realising their potentials. High scores on *self-acceptance* include acknowledgment and acceptance of various aspects of oneself, both good and bad qualities, and a positive attitude towards oneself as well as one's past life. A person who scores high on *purpose in life* has goals and a sense of directedness in life, has a sense of meaning in both past and present life, has beliefs that give purpose to life, and has aims and objectives for living. *Environmental mastery* include a feeling of mastery and competence in managing the environment, effective use of surrounding opportunities, the ability to control intricate selections of external activities, and the ability to select or create an environment that are suitable to personal needs and values. Finally, subjects with *positive relations with others* have warm, rewarding, and trusting relationships with others; they have strong empathy and are concerned about the well-being of others; and they understand the dynamics of human relationships (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

We thus see that PWB is an intricate experience that includes several aspects, mainly related to the experience of meaning and mastery in life.

### **3.4.1.2 Subjective well-being**

In hedonic theories, well-being is associated with pleasure (Haybron, 2008), or more precisely, with high levels of positive affect and low levels of negative affect (e.g. Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). Put differently, a subject's well-being is defined by the balance between pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Regulation of emotional well-being can therefore theoretically be done either by up-regulating positive affect or down-regulating negative affect (Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). Together with life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect form a threefold structure of SWB – often summarized as happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Whereas positive and negative affect are reflections of one's immediate experiences, life satisfaction is an evaluative, enduring appraisal of one's life. It should be noted that studies on SWB frequently include cognitive appraisal of life satisfaction as well as affective indicators of happiness (hedonic well-being) (Keyes, et al., 2002). Thus, SWB is seen as something more than hedonic well-being, including both affective and cognitive evaluations. One definition of SWB, proposed by Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997), is articulated like this:

Thus a person is said to have high SWB if she or he experiences life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experiences unpleasant emotions such as sadness or anger. Contrariwise, a person is said to have low SWB if she or he is dissatisfied with life, experiences little joy and affection and frequently feels negative emotions such as anger or anxiety (Diener, et al., 1997, p. 25).

An important characteristic of SWB is that it focuses on the personal experiences of people. This means that SWB is based on subjects' own perspectives and views of their lives, and is therefore not defined from outside by a researcher or practitioner (Diener, 2009; Diener, et al., 1997). Another vital aspect of SWB is the interest in lasting states of a person, not just temporary affects. A person's moods and emotions normally change throughout the day, and Diener et al (1997) call attention to the fact that the things that result in happiness at the moment are not necessarily the

same which lead to enduring well-being. Thus, researchers within the field of SWB are concerned with the durable feelings of well-being, not merely momentary emotions (Diener, 2009; Diener, et al., 1997)

It is subjective well-being the current study is concerned with. However, as will be discussed later, I do not believe in a dichotomy between positive and negative emotional experiences, at least when it comes to music listening (see e.g. Vist, 2009). Therefore, I do not feel entirely comfortable with the notion of *hedonic* well-being. But this study does not attempt to illuminate the effect of music listening on eudaimonic well-being; that is, self-realization and growth. Simply put, the study looks into whether mobile music listening might make the subjects feel better. What 'feeling good' might involve is a complex question, which will be discussed to some degree in chapter 6 (self-regulation). 'Feeling good' is consistent with SWB, and SWB is therefore the notion that I choose to use throughout the thesis. As seen, SWB is defined as something more than hedonic well-being. Further, there is some disagreement on the dichotomy between negative and positive affect (Diener, 2003; Lazarus, 2003; Seligman & Pawelski, 2003). Thus, my reservations towards the notion of SWB are perhaps unnecessary.

It is important to note that SWB is not identical to mental health. A person who is satisfied with her life and experiencing a majority of pleasant emotions can still be delusional. Thus, as pointed out by Diener et al (1997), SWB is not adequate for psychological health. However, SWB is one aspect of psychological well-being, and has the strength of being based on the subjects' own perspectives. Also, there seem to be fruitful outcomes of experiencing positive affects. Although I do not always find a clear dichotomy between positive and negative emotions, some affects have a more noticeably positive valence. Indeed, some emotions have been defined as positive by researchers. Particularly, Fredrickson (2000, 2005b, 2006) defines *joy*, *interest*, *contentment* and *love* as positive emotions. She argues that the experience of these emotions have favourable consequences for the individual, which I will look into in the following.



### 3.4.2 Positive emotions

Fredrickson (2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2006) has carried out research on the consequences of positive emotions, and has developed the *broaden-and-build* theory. The theory assumes that positive emotions increase the cognitive and behavioural repertoire available to individuals (*broadening*). In the long run, this promotes the construction of a stable and articulated repertoire of psychophysical and behavioural resources, which support individual adaptation to the environment (*building*). Accordingly, positive emotions have favourable consequences for the individual experiencing them both at the moment when they are experienced, and for the future.

Certain 'negative' emotions promote specific action tendencies. In a life-threatening situation, for example, a *narrowed* "thought-action repertoire" (Fredrickson, 2005a) promotes actions that are quick and decisive and have immediate benefits. Such actions have saved our lives throughout time. In contrast, positive emotions do not endorse specific action tendencies, but seem to *broaden* subjects' immediate repertoires of thoughts and actions in several ways. For example, Fredrickson (2005a, p. 221) claims that *joy* "creates the urge to play, push the limits, and be creative – urges evident not only in social and physical behaviour, but also in intellectual and artistic behaviour". *Interest* generates a wish to explore, open up to new information and experiences and thus develop the self. *Contentment* produces the desire to savour current life conditions and integrate them into new views of oneself and the world. *Love*, when experienced within the context of safe, trusting relationships, yields the urge to explore, play with, and savour the loved one. These tendencies to play, explore, savour and integrate broaden our modes of thinking and acting (Fredrickson, 2005a). Fredrickson maintains that the broadening of our thought-action repertoires which is generated by positive emotions is beneficial because "broadening builds enduring personal resources" (Fredrickson, 2005a, p. 221). Through the experience of positive emotions, people become more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated, and healthy individuals, according to Fredrickson (2005a, 2005b).

Positive emotions might also stimulate psychological resiliency. Fredrickson (2005b) argues that if positive emotions broaden the capacity of cognition and facilitate creative thinking, they should also enable coping

with stress and difficulty. Resilient people are assumed to 'bounce back' from negative or stressful experiences quicker and more efficiently than non-resilient individuals. They are thought to use positive emotions to achieve effective coping, since they are characterized as optimistic, zestful, curious, and open to new experiences (Fredrickson, 2005a). The experience of positive emotions should further produce improved well-being over time, because their effects on expanded cognition increase the probability that people will also feel good in the future. In all, experiencing positive emotions seem to have positive consequences, and Fredrickson concludes:

The bottom line message is that we should work to cultivate positive emotions in ourselves and in those around us not just as end states in themselves, but also as a means to achieving psychological growth and improved psychological and physical health over time (Fredrickson, 2005b, p. 120).

As we have seen, positive emotions are essential to subjective well-being, and should therefore be promoted to increase SWB. It could be assumed that high levels of SWB, according to Fredrickson's line of reasoning, also support enhanced psychological and physical health in the long run. In any case; SWB does influence our *perception* of health, which shows a relationship between subjective well-being and subjective health (Diener, et al., 2005). The question here, then, is whether music listening, and mobile music listening in particular, influences the listener's subjective well-being.

### **3.4.3 A note on measuring subjective well-being**

Several studies have attempted to measure subjective well-being and how it is affected by different stimuli. However, many of these studies, some recapitulated by Larsen and Prizmic (2008), use stimuli which influence is taken for granted. For example, different words have been used in some studies to induce specific emotions (e.g. Musch & Klauer, 2003, in Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). The problem with these kinds of studies, as I see it, is that a certain reaction to each word is expected from all the participants. As an example, the words *murder*, *cancer* or *agony* have been used to induce negative emotions in the participants. Control words, which are supposed

to be neutral, are e.g., *taller*, *signal*, *whatever*. Or the word *failure* has been identified by the researchers as emotionally consistent with the word *hatred* and emotionally inconsistent with the word *flower* (Hietanen & Korpela, 2004, in Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). In short, the researchers identify some words with negative emotions, some with neutral emotions, and some with positive emotions. The trouble with this, as we know from people's emotional reactions to music (DeNora, 2000; Frith, 1996; Ruud, 1997b), is that a person's emotional reactions can be highly individual. People can have very different experiences with a certain piece of music, for example, and will therefore react differently to it when they hear it again. Whereas one person might experience feelings of pleasure or happiness, another person might feel agonized when listening to the same music piece. I would think that this could also be the case concerning different words. Based on their former experiences, different words should mean different things to different people, and therefore induce different emotions when introduced by a researcher. I am therefore sceptic to the validity of research findings based on a belief in universal emotional reactions to words, video clips, etc.

Other studies have measured well-being using different methods. For example, self-report surveys have been frequently used (Diener, et al., 1997). In these reports, the subject reports the frequency of pleasant and unpleasant affects. The Satisfaction With Life Scale is an example of a self-report survey, which is shown by Diener et al (1997):

Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item.

Please be open and honest in your responding.

7 – Strongly agree, 6 – Agree, 5 – Slightly agree, 4 – Neither agree nor disagree, 3 – Slightly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 1 – Strongly disagree.

- In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- The conditions of my life are excellent.
- I am satisfied with my life.
- So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

(Diener, et al., 1997, p. 27).

The idea behind self-reports is that the subject is in a fortunate position to report on her experiences of well-being, because only she can judge whether her life is satisfying. Other examples of measuring SWB are the respondents' ability to recall positive versus negative events, their frequency of smiling, or gathering reports from their families and friends. These methods have been used to eliminate among other things response biases, memory biases, and defensiveness (Diener, et al., 1997).

Self-reports seem an appropriate way of measuring SWB, as they are based on the respondents' own judgments. Such measurements can for example show average levels of SWB in different cultures, and illuminate differences in SWB in wealthy countries versus poor nations. They can tell us something about levels of SWB among subjects in different contexts, or among groups of subjects at different stages of life. Thus, quantitative measurements of SWB can illuminate the relationship between different life conditions and the well-being of the people living under such conditions. However, these measurements tell us little about the SWB of individuals. Also, self-report surveys or other quantitative methods do not allow the individual to report on her well-being or life satisfaction at a more extensive, detailed level.<sup>19</sup>

In the present study, which is qualitatively based rather than quantitatively, the aim has not been to measure SWB in one way or the other. Rather, the study aims to illuminate a possible relationship between private, mobile music listening and SWB. This potential relationship will become visible in the subjects own narratives of music listening experiences. Although SWB is a central theme, the study will not be concluded with any numbers to show how high or how low the subjects' well-being is when they listen to music. It will instead give insight into the subjects' relationship with music, and how their mobile listening habits might influence their SWB, based on their own words, seen in the light of theories on positive psychology and well-being.

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<sup>19</sup> For more on measurement issues, see e.g Diener (2009)

### 3.5 SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter has been to give an overview of the conceptual framework that makes up the basis for the present research. The study can be placed in the point of intersection of music psychology, music sociology, and music and health. This involves a rather eclectic approach to the research. Instead of focusing on one theoretical approach, I have chosen to incorporate several theories that can shed light on the research questions.

The study is based on a constructivist, pragmatic music understanding, where music is viewed as a resource affording certain things to the listener. Meaning is believed to arise in the music-listener interaction. The listener is seen as an active agent who is *musicking* and making active choices regarding the listening situation. Thus, the listener is not taken to be a passive recipient of the music, but an active part of the music-person relationship.

Theories on *health* and *positive psychology* make up the foundation of the theoretical framework. The research is based on a *positive* view on health, as the approach to the research questions is positive and resource oriented. Hence, the study is based on an understanding of health as salutogenic (Antonovsky, 1979) and as equivalent to *quality of life*. Further, quality of life is understood as *subjective well-being*, which is defined by positive psychology as a threefold structure of life satisfaction, high positive affect and low negative affect. Positive psychology is concerned with human resources and positive human functioning, and therefore reflects my approach to the field of research.



## **4. METHODOLOGY**

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The findings in the current study are based on interviews with twelve Norwegian adults. The research is placed within the hermeneutics, and aims to provide insight into the subjects' use of their MP3 players and their experience of this use. This chapter will give an account of the methodological issues related to this study, starting with a look at the hermeneutic tradition. The account will not address all aspects of the hermeneutics, but a brief introduction to the tradition and the methodological consequences of placing this study within the hermeneutics. The following sections will discuss the qualitative interview and the researcher as a research tool, plus the alternative methods that were considered. After that, the different stages of the research process are explained, from the selection of the participants, the interviewing, through the analysis. A section is reserved for a discussion about validity in qualitative research in general and this study in particular, before the final section looks into some ethical considerations concerning the present study.

## 4.1 A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

This study is placed within the hermeneutics, which are about understanding and interpreting meaningful phenomena (Gadamer, 1975/2004). While the original purpose of the hermeneutic tradition was to analyse biblical and ancient classical texts, the movement later widened its focus to include all texts, and even speech and acts (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). An important idea about the interpretation is that the interpreter can come to understand subjects differently than they understand themselves, because the interpreter might have a broader or different supply of knowledge (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Kjørup, 1996). This involves a belief that I might gain a different understanding of the relationship between the subjects' use of their MP3 players and their subjective well-being than they have themselves. Because I have knowledge of theories concerning music listening on the one hand and well-being and health on the other, I might be more able to interpret the subjects' use of MP3 players into a meaningful phenomenon related to music listening and well-being. Thus, my *preconceptions* become vital (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Gadamer, 1975/2004; Kjørup, 1996).

The hermeneutic circle is well known. The idea is that we can only understand a phenomenon by relating its parts to the whole. However, the whole is made up of parts, and can therefore only be understood based on these. Hence, the hermeneutic circle becomes an interchange between the parts and the whole. Because this interchange results in a constant increase in understanding, the circle has been developed into a spiral, where new understanding is expanded by alternating between immersing in the parts and the whole. This is the circle of the *objectivist* hermeneutics. The circle of the *alethic* hermeneutics is somewhat different. Instead of alternating between the parts and the whole, the alethic circle is based on an interchange between preconceptions and understanding, or 'preunderstanding' and understanding, in the words of Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000, p. 53). Within the objectivist hermeneutics, there is a notion of division between the researcher (subject) and the object which is being studied. This implies certain objectivity in research. The alethic hermeneutics challenge this idea. Rather than correspondence between subjective thinking and an objective reality, the alethic hermeneutics



believes in the *uncovering of something hidden*. A general objective set is impossible to establish. Instead, preconceptions are always present, and the results will bear the stamps of these. One can say that the current study is placed within the alethic tradition. However, the two approaches should be regarded as complementary rather than total opposites, and it is also possible to combine the perspectives (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). This study rests on an alethic belief that understanding of a phenomenon is increased through interchange between fore-meanings and understanding. But it is also based on the relationship between parts and the whole, and the continuing hermeneutic spiral. The leading modern supporter of the objectivist approach, Betti (1962/1980, in Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000), does not accept the preunderstanding-understanding circle as a substitute for the part-whole circle, because it supposedly converts the dialogue between the researcher and the object of research into a monologue of the researcher alone. The alethic response to this is that the distinction between subject (the researcher) and object (the researched) is artificial (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). I believe in a combination of the two perspectives. There should be a dialogue between the researcher and the researched, but I do not believe in an objective reality as completely distinct from the researcher (subject). With a combination of the perspectives, it is possible to merge the objectivist circle and the alethic circle into one hermeneutic circle:

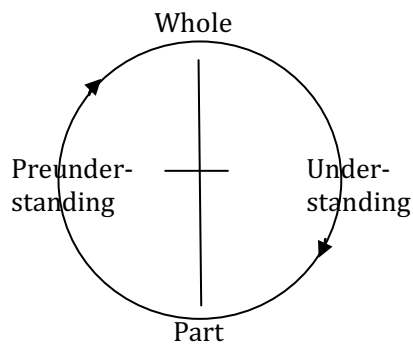


Figure 1: The hermeneutic circle, based on the basic version in Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000, p. 66).

While the parts are related to the whole, the 'text' is also related to its *context*. That is, the phenomenon should be interpreted within the context in which it takes place (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). The subjects in the present research live in a certain time period, in a certain culture. A single event of listening to their MP3 player must be seen in relation to the rest of their life-world, that is, what culture they live in (e.g. Western, urbanised, individualistic, autonomous), what their personal status is (e.g. educated, married, father), where they are situated (e.g. on the bus, in the city), where they are headed (e.g. on the way to work), what their surroundings look like (e.g. crowded, hectic), and so on. All these aspects must be integrated in the analysis of the phenomenon. In short, to understand the *meaning* of mobile music listening, the event cannot be separated from its context.

Because I am concerned with the life-world of the informants, the research also links to phenomenology. Phenomenology is concerned with people's experiences (van Manen, 1990). An interpretation of phenomenology is "to go to the everyday world where people are living through various phenomena in actual situations" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 8). The similarity between hermeneutics and phenomenology is that they are both concerned with meaning (Giorgi, 1992). However, phenomenology is interested in the *conscious* experiences of people (van Manen, 1990). I believe, on the other hand, that music used as self-care can sometimes be an unconscious experience (c.f. Batt-Rawden, 2007a; DeNora, 2007). Also, phenomenology has originally been concerned with *description* of phenomena rather than *interpretation*. Giorgi claims that "[...] the motive for interpretation is usually a situation of doubt, ignorance, or unclarity" (1992, p. 122). He therefore argues for a descriptive approach. I believe, on the other hand, that there is always some amount of interpretation in research. It is therefore better, and more honest, to be aware of the interpretation that takes place and try to make it explicit rather than to pretend that it is not there (c.f. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). In her PhD-research on music therapy improvisation, Stensæth (2007) takes on a hermeneutic approach, inspired by phenomenology. She asks the question "Phenomenology or hermeneutics, or both?" and writes that, although "[...] we can move *fairly close* to a phenomenon [...] I do not believe it is possible to get around

*interpretation* in a text like the present” (2007, p. 44). I agree with Stensæth, and therefore choose, like her, to place my study within the hermeneutics, with inspiration from phenomenology.

How does this affect my methodological decisions? To *go to where people are living* excludes research in “[...] experimental or artificially created test situations” (van Manen, 1990, p. 18). Rather, human sciences are concerned with the life-world of the subjects<sup>20</sup> and wish to meet them where they are naturally situated (Postholm, 2005; van Manen, 1990). I am interested in the experiences of the subjects, and have chosen to let them tell me about them in an interview-setting. However, this involves interpretation, as the phenomenon is already somewhat interpreted by the subjects when they tell me about it: “The interview is an expression of the interpretive work of the subject, both in relation to relevant aspects of life and in connection to the interview situation” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 261). As the researcher, I also interpret the subjects’ experiences both during our interview conversation and later during the analysis. This is in accordance with the hermeneutics.

Finally, this study is based on the postmodern belief that there is no objective reality (Kvale, 1996; Lincoln, 1995) and an emphasis on contextualization rather than generalization (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Kvale, 1995; Seale, 1999; Østerud, 1998). This will have some implications for the findings, as the point is not to generalize, but rather to focus on the experiences of a few subjects. I will get back to this in section 4.7.5 (transferability of the findings).

#### **4.1.1 Research metaphors**

Kvale (1996) describes two contrasting metaphors for qualitative research: *the miner* and *the traveller*. The miner uncovers knowledge, “[...] unpolluted by any leading questions” (Kvale, 1996, p. 3). The knowledge is then tested against “[...] an objective, external, real world or to a realm of subjective, inner, authentic experiences” (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). The traveller is, on the

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<sup>20</sup> van Manen believes “persons” is a better term than “subjects” or “individuals”, as the latter can refer to animals or plants as well as people, while “person” refers to the human being. I nevertheless choose to use the term “subjects” as the term for participants in a research project.

other hand, an explorer that “[...] asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as “wandering together with” (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). The traveller metaphor acknowledges interpretation of meaning; the investigator ‘remoulds’ the subjects’ stories into new narratives. While the miner metaphor reflects an understanding of knowledge as something given, the traveller metaphor refers to a postmodern understanding of knowledge as constructed through the interview conversation (Kvale, 1996). As yet another metaphor for research, Alvesson and Sköldbberg refer to *mushroom-picking*, which resembles the miner metaphor: “All the talk about the collection of data, the capture of data, the codification and classification of data, and so on, points to a metaphor of this kind” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 281). While this metaphor may reflect some of the practical aspects of research, Alvesson and Sköldbberg perceive it as a naïve image of empirical research that does not include more reflective research ideals. The understanding of knowledge as construction is essential to qualitative, reflective research:

The acknowledgement that any empirical material is a construction, and consideration of the interpretive character of all observations, interview statements, questionnaire answers and the like are important elements of reflective research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 261).

The idea of metaphors, according to Alvesson and Sköldbberg, is to “[...] provide suggestive concepts that in practical ways can facilitate our own processes of reflection, and help us to resist the temptation to get stuck in a favourite position” (2000, p. 285). Metaphors should *stimulate reflection*. Alvesson and Sköldbberg therefore recommend researchers to come up with metaphors that work for them. Placing my research within the hermeneutics and postmodernity, I obviously believe that knowledge is constructed and interpreted, and that it cannot be tested against an objective, neutral reality. I view the researcher as a subjective research tool, and thus value and emphasise the reflexivity of the investigator. The traveller metaphor therefore works for my research.

## 4.2 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Qualitative research seeks to grasp the meaning of phenomena in their natural setting: “[...] attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The current research is based on in-depth interviews with twelve users of MP3 players. By carrying out in-depth interviews, the wish has been to come close to the everyday life experiences of MP3 users and the meaning these experiences have for the participants. Flick (2006) explains the necessity of qualitative methods in these words:

Concerning research in psychology in particular, it is argued that it lacks relevance for everyday life because it is not sufficiently dedicated to exactly describing the details of a case in its concrete circumstances. The study of subjective meanings and everyday experience and practice is as essential as the contemplation of narratives (Bruner 1991; Sarbin 1986) and discourses (Harré 1998) (Flick, 2006, p. 12).

Hence, Flick argues for use of qualitative methods as a way of reaching the subjective meaning of everyday experiences. Studying the meaning of mobile music listening in everyday life, qualitative interviews seem to be an appropriate approach.

In addition to interviews, there are a few other methods, both quantitative and qualitative, that could have led to valuable insights. For example, the Experience Sampling Method is an interesting approach if one is interested in mapping out the everyday life practices of the participants. Sloboda et al (2001) employed this method to gather real life experiences with music. In their discussion, they point out that the downside of retrospective investigations such as interviews or questionnaires is that people tend to forget ordinary episodes. Instead, what they remember are the events that stand out: “[...] the everyday is, by definition, unmemorable. [...] The more mundane occurrences are simply forgotten and filtered out” (Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001, p. 417). The Experience Sampling Method, on the other hand, “allows individuals to record “on the spot” thoughts and feelings in real life everyday situations” (Sloboda, et al., 2001, p. 14). The participants in their study carried electronic pages for seven days and received messages seven

times each day of the study. At receiving a message, they were asked to fill out a response form. Although this method enables the researcher to gather everyday life experiences, I do not believe it is the best method for reaching in-depth information about the meaning and reflections related to these experiences. If, for example, a participant answers “because I like it” to the question “why do you listen to music?” the interview-setting enables the researcher to follow up with a question like “what is it about the music that you like?” I am not just interested in people’s habits and practices related to their MP3 use: I am interested in their reflections concerning this use. In other words, I am interested in *how* as long as it says something about *why*.

If I wanted to make a survey of the practices of MP3 use, I could also use supplementing questionnaires. This would give me the opportunity to make statistics of the findings, which would give a good overview of these practices. Among other methods, van Goethem (2010; 2008) employed a questionnaire in her study on music and mood regulation. The participants filled out a diary during a one week period, and were given a pre- and post-diary questionnaire. The questionnaires made it possible to map out that most participants regulated their affects on a weekly to daily basis, most of them used music often deliberately to regulate their affects and most participants used music most or equally often as other regulation devices (van Goethem & Sloboda, 2008). The diary and questionnaires were followed up by an interview in order to unravel the workings of the music as well as how the study had influenced the participants. A questionnaire is valuable if the aim is to make statistical findings and generalizations. Quantitative findings would be helpful in the sense that they could tell us something about how people in general use their MP3 players. However, these methods limit the depth and reflections in the information given. What I personally appreciate in the interview setting is the ability to ask follow-up questions and explore the information given by the interviewee. As mentioned, the purpose of my research is to reach the reflections of the subjects.

DeNora (2000) carried out ethnographic studies and observations as well as in-depth interviews in her research on music in everyday life. Observations are often used within qualitative research, which becomes visible in the literature on qualitative methods (Flick, 2006; Hatch, 2002;

Postholm, 2005; Silverman, 1997). According to Flick, observations “enables the researcher to find out how something factually works or occurs” (Flick, 2006, p. 215). It is also an appropriate method if the purpose is to study “people’s behaviour and their interaction with their environment” (Kvale, 1996, p. 104). A triangulation between observations and interviews could have brought out interesting data, as it would have shed light on both how people *talk* about their practices and how they actually *carry out* the same practices. There may very well be a mismatch between what one says and what one does. In the opposite case, the findings from the two methods might confirm and validate each other. In the present study, observations could afford information about listening context, the listeners’ body posture, their distance to other people, ritualized actions and so on. These may be subconscious actions. Nonetheless, I have chosen not to carry out observations. This is because I have been mainly concerned with the ‘inner workings’ and subjective experiences of the informants; their thoughts, emotions and reflections concerning their private music listening. Crucial to the decision not to carry out observations was the individual and private nature of MP3-listening: The users of MP3 players are the only ones who can hear the music, and consequently they are the only ones who know what is playing. More importantly, they are the only ones who know why they chose the specific music and how it affects them. Therefore, it seems more fruitful to talk to the MP3 users and let them tell me how they experience the use.

Group interviews or focus groups were considered as a supplement or follow-up to the individual interviews. However, I did not consider focus groups to be particularly fruitful in this specific research project. Talking about a topic in a group setting could allow for new reflections on behalf of the subjects, but I was concerned that the issue of private music listening in relation to the aspects of emotions and coping would be too personal to talk about in a setting with new people. I therefore decided that if the interviews needed follow-up, individual interviews would be more suitable to find answers to the research questions. Follow-up interviews were considered during the analysis, but the data material was assessed as rich, and because of the time constraint of the project, I decided to work with what I already had instead of gathering more data.

A large part of qualitative research is based on interviews, with good reason, according to Peräkylä (2005): “By using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes” (2005, p. 869). Qualitative interviews are of particular value because it enables the researcher to understand the subjects’ life world and to reach the meaning of their experiences (Kvale, 1996). Kvale simply asks the question: “If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?” (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). The characteristics of qualitative methods are that they take place in a natural setting and attempt to grasp the meaning of individuals’ everyday lives (Hatch, 2002). The qualitative interview thus seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of the subjects (Hatch, 2002; Kvale, 1996).

### **4.3 THE RESEARCHER AS A RESEARCH TOOL**

In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the most important research tool (Postholm, 2005). This means that the researcher’s fore-conceptions and biases are brought into the study. “Researchers – be they natural or cultural scientists – are always members of a particular, historically and culturally conditioned, ever-changing ‘lifeworld’, and their practices are always already laden with theory and temporality (Helan 1997)” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 57). Hence, my personal and theoretical background forms my perspective on the phenomenon I study.

The research is influenced by my subjectivity from the beginning. It is I who have formulated the research questions, worked out the interview guide, carried out the interviews, prepared and analysed the empirical material. There is always an element of interpretation in a linguistic presentation of a phenomenon or experience, and my voice is always present in the text. What values and prejudices do I as the researcher bring to the research and the interpretation of such, and how does this affect the outcome of the study? How does the fact that I own and use an MP3 player affect my research of the use of MP3 players? How does my pre-opinion of this use



influence my questions and my interpretation of the interviews? There is a certain danger that I will try to interpret the empirical material so that it is in accordance with my own fore-meanings. It becomes crucial to be aware of this risk and to reflect upon the effect of my biographical and theoretical background. As Gadamer puts it:

The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 271f).

Independent of their own background, researchers should be curious and open to the stories of the informants. The fact that I own and use an MP3 player makes me committed to the research. Alvesson and Sköldbberg recommend a strong feeling for the field of study, and insist on this "as an important criterion for good research" (2000, p. 275). My previous experiences make up a frame of reference that helps me to form an opinion and meaning of the researched phenomenon. The fore-meanings of the researcher should therefore act as a resource rather than an obstacle to good research. However, research represents a (re)construction of reality, and the researcher must reflect upon the reasons for making particular interpretations. I will elaborate on this in section 4.7.2 (reflexivity).

## 4.4 THE SELECTION

The study is based on interviews with healthy, adult participants, aged eighteen and above. Except from age, the only criterion for participation was that the respondents should be regular users of MP3 players. The choice to study adult MP3 users was based on the fact that there have been conducted several studies relating to teenagers and music (Laiho, 2004; North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Skarpeid, 2008; Tarrant, et al., 2002; Wells & Hakanen, 1991). Although teenagers make up an important group of MP3 users, they are not alone in this use, as my sample shows. I therefore believe it is important not to restrict research to this group, and have accordingly chosen to focus on adults. This means that the informants have some experience with other personal stereos such as the Walkman and Discman. This has made it possible for them to

compare and evaluate the devices – which might have resulted in broader reflections than what adolescents would be able of. At the time of the interview, the informants owned MP3 players with capacities ranging from four gigabytes to 160 gigabytes, which they had owned for a time period ranging from two to five years.

To my knowledge, the subjects are healthy. This is a study within the field of music and health, and as such could also have looked into how ill people cope by listening to music. Because there already have been carried out studies on this topic (Batt-Rawden, 2007a; Bergland, 2006; Skarpeid, 2008), I have chosen to focus on how ‘ordinary’ people might use music as a strategy to cope with everyday life. This means that the findings may be relevant to a larger group, both ill and healthy people.

To recruit participants, I posted information about the study at different locations in Oslo and circulated it via email to acquaintances, asking them, in turn, to forward the information to their own contacts (appendixes 2 and 3). Three of the informants contacted me after seeing a poster,<sup>21</sup> one contacted me after reading about the project in the Norwegian media,<sup>22</sup> and eight contacted me after being referred by a mutual friend. The latter ‘snowball sample’ seemed, therefore, to be a more effective way of reaching informants. I also conducted a test-interview with an acquaintance that I decided to include in the sample. Including an acquaintance in the data may have some implications regarding the information produced in the interview. The interview is a *co-production* of knowledge between the interviewer and interviewee; the interaction between the two is therefore essential to the outcome (Rapley, 2001). When the investigator and informant know each other, the subject may respond in a certain way to the researcher’s questions, and the researcher may respond in a particular way to the subject’s stories, based on expectations and the knowledge they have of each other. Also, the researcher may feel more loyal towards an acquaintance, and may therefore present the subject differently than someone she has no relation to. I do not believe the interview I carried out

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<sup>21</sup> A few more people contacted me after seeing a poster. I chose not to include them in the study with regard to age and gender.

<sup>22</sup> A journalist from a Norwegian newspaper interviewed me in summer, 2009. This interview was quoted in several other media outlets.

with the acquaintance differs much from the other interviews, and therefore chose to include it in the sample. When it comes to the reporting, the subject will be anonymous, so I will feel no need to protect the person out of the ordinary. I would assert that I feel just as loyal towards the rest of the subjects, who have been willing to participate in the research and to whom I have promised anonymity.<sup>23</sup>

The participants live in Oslo and the surrounding areas. Most of them live or work in Oslo, which places this study in an urban context. Incidentally, most of the subjects seem to have some sort of higher degree, except for one eighteen year old, who was still in high school at the time of the interview. This was not intended, as I tried to make a selection based on differences in gender, age and background. The way the subjects were recruited, most of them via mutual acquaintances, is probably the reason why so many of them are educated, since people in the same kinds of social sets usually belong to the same social class. This makes my sample imbalanced, as the subjects must be said to be from the same social background. I have not considered eloquence, specific experiences or the like. However, there is a possibility that the subjects in my sample are more eloquent than people with no education. There is also a possibility that they use their MP3 players in other ways than people from different social sets. I wanted the sample to be fairly representative of urban MP3 users. However, I acknowledge that the choice of method, the number of informants and the way of recruiting cause some restrictions regarding representation. Still, I wanted to include different people in the study. The sample therefore includes a fifty-fifty division of males and females with a variance in age from eighteen to forty-four. Because the eldest subject in my sample is in the mid-forties, the informants can be said to represent so-called 'young adults'. This may be due to the fact that elderly people use MP3 players less commonly (Vaage, 2010).<sup>24</sup>

How many subjects should I include in the sample? Kvale says that you should "interview so many subjects that you find out what you need to know" (1994, p. 165). New interviews should be conducted until further

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<sup>23</sup> See Vist (2009) for her reflections on including interviews with acquaintances in the data.

<sup>24</sup> A woman in her mid-fifties volunteered for an interview, but we were unable to find a time to meet.

interviews generate little new knowledge. My initial plan was to carry out about twenty interviews, but I was clear that if I felt I had enough material at an earlier stage, I would not carry out more interviews than I considered necessary. However, how do you know for sure that no new knowledge could be generated? What if the next interviewee is the one with a different story to tell? It is still necessary to make a selection and at one point decide that there is enough information. After twelve interviews, I evaluated the empirical data as enough to begin working with. Still, I was open to conducting new interviews if there were more questions that needed to be answered, or if the material was scarce in any way. However, analysing and working with the interview material, I discovered I had enough data to answer my research questions. Because most research is conducted within a limited time period, one must consider the amount of data that one is able to go through. If I were to carry out more interviews, the material could become too large to handle thoroughly. I therefore decided that twelve interviews were enough, and concluded that I would not spend time on conducting new interviews. Kvale stresses that a large amount of transcripts easily can become too much to deal with, referring to the “1000-pages question”:

One thousand pages of transcripts is generally too much to handle. The material is too extensive to overview and to work out the depth of the meaning of what was said. The analysis is too time-consuming and is likely to lead to a superficial product, unfinished due to external time constraints (Kvale, 1996, p. 179).

Because conducting qualitative interviews is time-consuming, it limits the number of subjects I could include in the study. This means that the research will not result in general laws. Nevertheless, this method was chosen because I am more interested in the individuals’ experiences than in universal knowledge. Instead of focusing on the subjects’ external behaviour, in which case a quantitative method such as the Experience Sampling Method would be adequate (Sloboda, et al., 2001), I aim to shed light on the meaning of the subjects’ experiences.

The twelve informants in the present study are:

1. Female, 26 years; 30 gb iPod
2. Male, 26 years; 8 gb iPod
3. Male, 44 years; 120 gb iPod
4. Male, 43 years; 4 gb iPod
5. Female, 27 years; 8 gb iPod
6. Male, 24 years; 4 gb mobile phone
7. Female, 24 years; 60 gb iPod
8. Male, 27 years; 16 gb iPod
9. Female, 37 years; 16 gb iPod, 1 gb iPod shuffle, 2 gb mobile phone
10. Female, 18 years; 30 gb iPod
11. Male, 37 years; 8 gb iPhone, 256 mb MP3 player
12. Female, 43 years; 8 gb iPod

## 4.5 THE INTERVIEWS

Ten interviews were conducted in January and February 2009, one interview was carried out in June 2009 and the final interview was conducted in August 2009. The main focus of the interviews was the research question *can the MP3 player function as a medium for musical self-care, and if so, how?* To interrogate this inquiry, I posed the following questions: How does the MP3 player work as a medium for 1) management and regulation of mood, thoughts and emotions? 2) management of focus and energy? 3) construction of boundaries around one's self? In accordance to these questions, I worked out a guide with twenty-something interview questions (appendixes 5 and 6).

The interviews took place in my office and lasted about an hour. I invited the subjects to my office because this is a quiet room where we could work

uninterrupted. In case this should have been inconvenient for the informants, I also told them that we could meet elsewhere, as long as we would avoid interruptions. One of the informants thus invited me to her workplace where the interview took place in a small conference room. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed continuously. I chose to finish the transcription of each interview before conducting another in order to be able to improve the questions or make changes to the way I carried out the interview. For this purpose, I chose not to carry out more than two interviews in one week, and to have at least one day "off" between each interview. Not many changes were done, but a few questions were added to the interview-guide and a few were omitted during the interview-process. A question that was omitted concerned the music itself: "What is it about the music that makes you want to listen to it? Is it text, melody, rhythm, mood...?" This question seemed to be out of place regarding the rest of the interview conversation. Another question was difficult for the subjects to understand: "How do you experience yourself in relation to your environment when you listen to music?" This question was therefore simply changed to "How do you experience your environment when you listen to music?" The question "What is the reason behind your music listening? Is there any difference in whether you are at home or outside?" was simplified to "Is there any difference in how you listen according to whether you are at home or outside?" A few questions were naturally added to the conversations and therefore also added to the interview guide. These questions were: "Does it happen that you use music to guide thoughts in a specific direction or to block thoughts? How?"; "Is there any difference in the listening experience when you listen to loudspeakers versus headset?"; "If you listen to music for the purpose of experiencing mood or emotions, do you do this to the same extent outside among people as at home? How is the experience of this?"; and "How would it be without the MP3 player?"

The interview guide worked as a guideline to the semi-structured interviews. I began each interview by telling the subjects that there were some topics that I wanted to explore, but that they were free to talk unreservedly about the issue. The benefit to the semi-structured interview is the ability to follow up the answers given by the subjects. This enabled me to explore their stories and reach a deeper understanding of the topic.

Smith (1995, p. 12) summarizes the advantages of the semi-structured interview like this: "It facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and enables the interview to enter novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data". The flexibility of the interview allowed me to improvise during the interview and focus on certain aspects of the subjects' stories that appeared interesting. It also allowed me to free myself from the interview guide, asking the questions in an order that appeared natural in the course of the conversation, giving a better flow to the interview. The disadvantages of the semi-structured interview, according to Smith, is that it "[...] reduces the control the investigator has over the situation, takes longer to carry out, and is harder to analyse" (1995, p. 12). In the present case, the advantages of carrying out semi-structured interviews have been appraised as greater than the disadvantages.

Interviews can differ in their focus on description versus interpretation of a phenomenon. Where phenomenology originally has been more concerned with the descriptions of experiences, the hermeneutics emphasize the interpretation of meaning. I am concerned with interpreting the meaning of the use of MP3 players, and parts of this interpretation took place during the interview. Kvale (1996) refers to this as interpreting questions, involving rephrasing an answer; "you are saying that...?" and trying to clarify; "is it correct that you...?" By following up the subjects' answers and trying to clarify the meaning of what they were telling me, parts of the analysis actually took place in the interview setting:

In such forms of analysis – interpreting "as you go" – considerable parts of the analysis are "pushed forward" into the interview situation itself. The final analysis then becomes not only easier and more amenable, but will also rest on more secure ground. Put strongly, the ideal interview is already analyzed by the time the tape recorder is turned off (Kvale, 1996, p. 178).

An example of such an interpreting question is the following, when I got back to a topic later in the interview, posing a question formulated as "you mentioned that... is this true?":

*But since we are now on the subject of thoughts, you mentioned that you distract yourself from your thoughts; do you use music in this way?*

Yes, I use it to get my thoughts away from work, unwind, because I use a long time to manage to wind down (12: Female, 43 years).

Another example of an interpreting question used during the interviews is the following:

Often, you can be somewhere where [...] there is a kind of atmosphere in the room, either because there are people there or there's something with the place. Then you can use music to [...] create your own little private room.

*Do you find that you can pull back from your surroundings with music, or how is it?*

Yes, I think so. Absolutely. Yes, it's a bit like that. You simply separate yourself from your surroundings (1: Female, 26 years).

In the latter example, I reformulated the informant's answer, using other words, checking if her experience of creating a private room could be described as pulling back from the surroundings. Questions as those presented above can also be understood as leading questions, in the way that it is easy for the informant to simply answer, "yes" to the query. An objection to interview research is that it rests upon leading questions, and is therefore not reliable (Kvale, 1994). Smith (1995) points out that interview questions should be neutral rather than leading or value-laden. "One may say you are attempting to get as close as possible to what your respondents think about the topic, without being led too much by your questions" (1995, p. 15). This is exactly what I tried to do during the interviews. However, a few times the informants had trouble expressing their experiences or thoughts on the subject. This put me in a dilemma – how explicit could I be about the theme at hand without putting words in the mouth of the informant? I tried to help by suggesting a few alternatives, without pushing the informant. My experience was that they often were able to communicate their experiences more easily after we had spoken for a while. Also, some people are more eloquent than others, which is something I as an interviewer have to accept. One of the informants, a man in his forties, had trouble putting his emotions into words. At the end of the interview, he expressed:



*Is there anything else you'd like to add?*

I can't think of anything in particular. I think we've been through most of the topics.

*Uhum. Yes. I think at least I have most of it.*

(Pause.) But not everything is easy to put into words.

*No.*

In a way that I've given a lot of thought.

*No. A lot of the use is perhaps not so conscious, or perhaps you don't think a lot about why you, eh*

No, it's not like I think about why I chose that record, or why I did it. But when I look through the playlist, there is of course something that makes you stop there and choose that, but it's hard to say exactly what it is (3: Male, 44 years).

This informant was perhaps the one who was the least conscious about the relationship between his music listening and his emotions. At the same time, he was also the one who expressed most explicitly that "music is therapy". My challenge was to try to understand how and why he felt that music could function as therapy. For this man, who had not given these issues much thought, it became difficult to explain what he meant by such statements. Most of the other informants were on the other hand quite reflected about their music use.

Another dilemma, which occurred to me after conducting several interviews, is that I tried to avoid leading questions perhaps at the expense of exploring the themes thoroughly. Being afraid of leading the subjects made me hold back some interrogative questions. There is always a search for balance between reaching valuable data and pushing the subject to talk about more than she is willing to. I realize that I probably could have pushed the subjects further in some contexts without crossing the line. These are sensitive judgements, however, and I continually considered what questions to ask and which ones to leave out.

Kvale (1996) points out that all questions are leading. Instead of avoiding them, one should rather be aware of where they are leading, and what consequences this has for the information produced. I also want to shed light on the fact that the subjects did not seem to be so easily led. There are several examples of me posing a question that generated the reply: "No, that

is not the case.” One example is from when I challenged an informant about possible negative aspects concerning the social aspects of MP3 use:

*Do you think there’s something negative with the fact that you all withdraw from one another [when you listen to your MP3 players]?*

No. No, I’ve thought a bit about that. No, actually it’s an advantage on the boat, because there you’re extremely closed in all the time. So the fact that you can put on your iPod and withdraw a little is actually just fine when you’re so cooped in (12: Female, 43 years).

In this sense, leading questions could also be used to clarify and challenge the stories told in the interview. Accordingly, it becomes important not to avoid leading questions, but to be aware of them and acknowledge their affect.

#### **4.5.1 Written reports**

As a complement to the interviews, I asked the informants to write down an actual experience they had with their use of the MP3 player. I told them to write down concrete details such as where and when, why and how they chose to listen to music in this episode (appendixes 7 and 8). Hatch (2002) points out that the process of writing involves a different kind of reflection than discussing experiences with others. “The most obvious strength of journals as data is that they can provide a direct path into the insights of participants,” says Hatch (2002, p. 141). These data are also somewhat different because they are not developed through the researcher, but come directly from the informant (Hatch, 2002). Still, the researcher has to interpret the data, and the informant is aware that she is writing for the researcher. The quality of the data is nonetheless different, because it is not passing directly through the researcher.

The purpose of the written reports was to supply as well as confirm the information from the interviews. I therefore asked the informants to do the writing subsequent to the interviews. Hence, the informants knew the focus of the research, and could be writing a story in accordance to the research questions in order to please me, the researcher. Consequently, the validity of the reports may have been weakened. Asking the informants to write in advance of the interview could have solved this. Not having such a clear

conception of what the researcher was after could possibly have led to different stories, focusing on other aspects than what was talked about in the interview. However, my experience is that the informants' reflections increased during the interview, leading to an awareness of their MP3 use they did not necessarily have prior to our conversation. Thus, some of the informants would probably have had some trouble writing about their experiences before they were asked about them in the interview. This does not automatically mean that writing subsequent to the interview resulted in richer stories. A problem with this method is that many people are more comfortable – and better at – expressing themselves orally than in writing. This became obvious when I read the reports, of which some were quite short, and lacking the in-depth information I had hoped for. Two of the informants chose not to hand in a written report. One of them was reluctant to *write* about her experiences, as she was more comfortable talking about them. She thus offered to participate in a follow-up interview instead. The other informant was busy with his studies and felt he had said everything of interest in the interview. Because of the scarceness of the reports, I base the analysis on the interviews, and consider the reports as supplementary.

## 4.6 THE ANALYSIS

Analysis does not begin after the interviews are finished, but is part of the entire research process (Hatch, 2002; Kvale, 1996). First, decisions are made about the design of the study. During the interview, decisions are made about what to ask and how to follow up the subject's answers. When transcribing the interviews, decisions are made about what to include and what to leave out. "These decisions involve an informal kind of data analysis", Hatch notes (2002, p. 149).

Hatch (2002) recommends starting the analysis early, as this will enhance the quality of the research. Analysis at an early stage makes it possible to plan the forthcoming data gathering based on the early findings. This is the reason why each interview was transcribed shortly after it took place, and before another was conducted.

### 4.6.1 Transcription

Each interview recording was transcribed within a few days after the interview took place. Most of the interviews were transcribed the day after it took place, so that the actual conversation was still fresh in my mind. This helped me to remember some of the gestures that the informants used to clarify or underline what they were saying (e.g. knocking on the table, using hands to illustrate), and I could make a note about the gesture in the transcription. It also helped me to remember the conversation when the recording was unclear. In general, the recordings were clear and easy to understand. There were only a few places I could not make out what was said.

The interview conversation was transcribed in full. That is, I did not leave out any parts of the conversation in the transcription. However, when the interview is quoted, I have chosen to leave out sounds that has no meaning, certain repetitions of words that yield no meaning, and words that are merely used as ‘filling’, such as “you know”, “like” and similar oral wordings. The oral language and the written language are two different ones, and I have purposefully adapted the transcriptions of the informants’ oral utterances into a more readable written form. This is both for the purpose of the reader and for the purpose of ‘protecting’ the informants against appearing less intelligent than they are, which could easily be the case if their oral language was not edited (Kvale, 1996). Further, personal names and names of places that could jeopardize the anonymity of the informants have been removed from quotes used in the present text.

The transcriptions were done in Norwegian, as all the informants speak the Norwegian language. I did not transcribe in different dialects however, even if an informant spoke a different dialect than the ‘official’ Norwegian language. When a quote has been used in the final text, a professional translator has translated it. There is a certain danger in translation, as some of the original meaning in the quote could be lost. I have read each translation carefully, and changed it if I did not think the meaning of the translation was correct according to the original quote. Still, I acknowledge that translating the original narrative to another language is not ideal, and that some nuances are most likely lost in translation. Nonetheless, I believe the core meaning of the subjects’ utterances has been retained.

## 4.6.2 Categorization

When beginning the more formal, structured analysis, there are several approaches to analysis of interview texts. I have been inspired by Giorgi (1985), Smith (1995) and Kvale (1996). Giorgi (1985) offers four steps in a phenomenological method of analysis, so-called meaning condensation: First, the researcher should read the entire transcript to attain a general sense of the whole. The researcher then reads the transcript from the beginning in order to distinguish 'meaning units', focusing on the phenomenon which is being studied. Going through the meaning units, the researcher should then look for the psychological perspective they contain. Finally, the researcher should combine the meaning units into a consistent account concerning the subject's experience (Giorgi, 1985).

Here, the interview is reduced to smaller meaning-units. As Kvale (1996) comments, looking for natural meaning units and explicating their main themes may help in analysing extensive and complex interview texts. Meaning-categorization is another similar way of analysing interviews (Kvale, 1996; Smith, 1995). Smith (1995) describes how to code an interview-transcript: He proposes that you make a code for each theme, and every time a theme is found in the text, the code should be used to mark the location in the margin. Further, the material should be rearranged according to the codes by putting together all the occurrences of each theme. The categorization helps to structure the interviews and gives an overview of the different themes (Kvale, 1996). Kvale also uses this approach to be able to quantify the findings. This is not a goal for the present study. Still, I have chosen to use meaning categorization as an approach to analyse the data material, with inspiration from Giorgi's meaning-condensation.

### 4.6.2.1 Step one: open coding

Boeije (2010) refers to the first round of breaking down the data into meaningful units – which I refer to as categorization – as *open coding*. In this phase, not much emphasis is put upon the relevance of the research material, since it is still too early to know what will be of value and what will be irrelevant. I followed Smith's course of action, gathering the occurrences of a theme in one category. Some people choose to base the

categorization on themes that emerge from the interview-transcripts, but according to Kvale (1996), categories can also be formulated in advance of the analysis or be taken from theory. As a starting point, I used my main interview questions as codes (that is, names for the categories), namely *mood regulation, management of emotions, regulating energy-levels* and *creating/maintaining boundaries*. The categories, along with the questions, were based on previous research findings that suggest that these are some of the reasons why people listen to music (Bull, 2000, 2007; DeNora, 2000; Juslin & Laukka, 2004; North, et al., 2004; Skånland, 2007; Sloboda, et al., 2009; Sloboda, et al., 2001; van Goethem, 2010). In order to avoid overlooking important and unanticipated aspects of the data, I did not restrict the analysis to the predetermined categories, but remained open to emerging categories. I categorized the interviews during the summer of 2009, and ended up with seven main categories and 26 sub-categories (see table 1). The seven main categories were *Use of MP3 players; The music; Boundaries; Physiological; Affective; Cognitive; and Identity*. Thus, *Boundaries* was the only category that was remained, with new subcategories. 'Mood regulation' and 'management of emotions' were put under the main category *Affective* and 'regulating energy levels' was put under the main category *Physiological*, which also included 'sleep' and 'stress'. The emerging category *Cognitive* included 'thoughts', 'concentration', 'focus', and 'motivation', while the main category *Identity* included the subcategories 'identity', 'self-esteem', 'memories', and 'personal music'. Everything that had to do with the music and the use of the MP3 players were put under the last two main categories.

The categorization was carried out by reading each transcription while making notes in the margin. Using Word, the topics were thereafter collected within each category. Smith (1995) notes that one should be aware that while refining the categories, one removes oneself further away from the original interview-text and -context. It is therefore wise to go back to the original transcripts once in a while to remind oneself of the individual interviews and their context. To avoid overlooking important aspects in the interviews, and to remind myself of the original context of the conversation, I read each transcription at least twice.

The *meaning* of the subjects' statements was decisive for the categorization. For example, if a subject stated that, "I listen to music to shut out the surroundings" this was put in the category of boundaries. Equally, statements like "when I listen to music, people see that I'm not available" and "when I listen to music I don't have to listen to other people talking" were put in the same category. However, all the categories are linked together. For example, being able to shut out the surroundings makes it easier to focus on one's own state of being and thus regulate mood or energy.

Hatch (2002) differentiates between what he calls typological and inductive analysis. In the inductive analysis, the categories emerge from the data, while the typological analysis is based on predetermined categories.<sup>25</sup> This implies that my analysis has been based on what Hatch labels a typological approach, which has its strengths and weaknesses:

The primary strength of typological analysis is its efficiency. Starting with predetermined typologies takes much less time than "discovering" categories inductively. The potential weakness is that applying predetermined categories will blind the researcher to other important dimensions in the data (Hatch, 2002, p. 161).

Hatch stresses that all qualitative research is based on "[...] inductive rather than deductive information processing" (2002, p. 161). However, he claims that what he labels inductive analysis works less well for research that is based entirely on interviews or studies where the focus of the research is narrow. This implies that a strict inductive method would work less well for the present study, which is based on interviews. However, as new categories emerged from the material as additions to the categories that were formulated in advance of the analysis, the current research must be said to be based on a typological-inductive analysis.

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<sup>25</sup> This is perhaps more commonly referred to as deductive analysis (e.g. Boeije, 2010).

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Use of MP3 players</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use</li> <li>○ Loudspeakers vs headsets</li> <li>○ Home vs outside</li> <li>○ Much music</li> <li>○ Radio</li> <li>○ The importance of the MP3 player</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. <b>The music</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Music choice</li> <li>○ Music experience</li> <li>○ Music's effects</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. <b>Boundaries</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Boundaries</li> <li>○ Environment</li> <li>○ Private time</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. <b>Physiological</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Energy</li> <li>○ Sleep</li> <li>○ Stress</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. <b>Affective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Emotions</li> <li>○ Mood</li> <li>○ Alone/lonely</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. <b>Cognitive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Thoughts</li> <li>○ Concentration</li> <li>○ Focus</li> <li>○ Motivation</li> </ul> </li> <li>7. <b>Identity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identity</li> <li>○ Self-esteem</li> <li>○ Memories</li> <li>○ Personal music</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
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Table 1: Categorization of the interviews, step 1.



#### 4.6.2.2 Step two: axial coding

The analysis continued as I wrote about the findings. Here, theory was merged with the data, which brought out new understandings of the phenomenon. This led to some adjustments of the categories, and I chose to divide the data in three main categories: *The use of the MP3 player*; *The MP3 player as a technology of self-regulation*; and *The MP3 player as a technology of coping*. Hence, the categories I started out with were modified as new theory was incorporated in the analysis. Boeije (2010) refers to this modification of categories as *axial coding*: “The relationships between salient categories (axes!) and subcategories can be generated, modified, refined, elaborated or even rejected throughout axial coding” (Boeije, 2010, p. 108).

I came to understand that much of what was talked about in the interviews was related to self-regulation, and so the different categories *cognitive*, *affective*, and *physiological* were merged into the overarching category self-regulation. When it came to the creation of boundaries and private space, it became clear that this was part of a coping strategy, and I chose to place it within the category coping. The subcategory ‘stress’ was also moved into this category. The two main categories *use of MP3 players* and *the music* were merged into one category, as these two aspects were linked together. The question of identity has for the most part been left out of the final text, as the issue is somewhat on the side of the research focus.

As I kept writing, the categories were further refined (see table 2). For example, I found it interesting that several of the informants compared music listening to meditation, and chose to include this as a subcategory to *cognitive*. It also became clear that an important function of the MP3 player was its ability to facilitate unwinding, particularly after work. ‘Unwind’ was thus also added as a subcategory to *cognitive*. The aspect of control appeared to be an important side of coping, and was therefore added to this category. The hierarchy of categories was also refined, leading to four levels of categories.

- 1 **Use of MP3 players**
  - Use
    - Routines
  - Music experience
    - Loudspeakers vs headsets
    - Home vs outside
  - Much music
    - Music choice
    - Music's effects
    - Radio
  - The importance of the MP3 player
- 2 **Self-regulation**
  - Cognitive
    - Thoughts
    - Unwind
    - Meditation
    - Concentration/focus
  - Affective
    - Mood
    - Emotions
  - Physiological
    - Energy
      - Working out
      - Sleep
- 3 **Coping**
  - Boundaries
    - Environment
    - Private time
    - Personal music
  - Control
  - Stress and coping

Table 2: Modified and refined categorization of the interviews, step 2.

Notably, the twelve informants are quite unanimous in their experiences. In other words, there is little dissonance to be found in the interviews. Of course, the informants are twelve different individuals, and their use of - and experience with their MP3 players are not identical from one person to another. Still, in general, I find that their narratives are roughly in agreement with each other.

### 4.6.3 Interpretation

The meaning-categorization involves a great deal of interpretation: "The interpreter goes beyond what is directly said to work out structures and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in a text" (Kvale, 1996, p. 201). Closely connected to the interpretation is the researcher's focus and fore-meanings (Gadamer, 1975/2004). The researcher's fore-meaning and expectations are key for meaning to emerge, according to Gadamer (1975/2004):

Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 269).

He goes on to explain that the process of interpretation starts with "fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones" (1975/2004, p. 269). Our fore-meanings stem from our personal background and our professional standpoint as well as the theories we have studied and the research we are inspired by. Although Gadamer claims that there can be no understanding without fore-meaning, he stresses that one cannot rely completely on these fore-conceptions. We must remain open to the meaning of the phenomenon of our study and be conscious of our own biases, "so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 271f). However, "[...] it is difficult, if not by definition impossible, for the researchers to clarify the taken-for-granted assumptions and blind spots in their own social culture, research community and language" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 6). This makes it essential for the researcher to

continually reflect upon her research, her biases and the premises for her interpretations. I have strived to keep my fore-meanings in mind, and have worked to shed light on my own biases. However, as Alvesson and Sköldbberg notes, it is difficult to elucidate taken-for-granted assumptions and blind spots. Although I have continually aimed to reflect upon the grounds for the interpretations I have made, I do not believe they are free of my biases. This is one of the reasons why the qualitative researcher becomes such an important research tool, and why the same findings cannot be reproduced by a different researcher. The findings are constructed in the dialogue between the researcher and the researched phenomenon. I have also chosen a theoretical framework for the interpretations, which have worked as the 'spectacles' through which I see the phenomenon. A different theoretical framework would lead to different interpretations, but I assess the framework I have chosen as appropriate to answer my research questions. This leads to what questions I have posed during the interpretation.

While perhaps there has been too much focus on leading interview questions, leading questions posed during the analysis has been underrated, according to Kvale:

In interview research, too much emphasis has been placed on the influence of leading questions in the interview situation, whereas the leading influence of questions put to the interview texts through their analysis has been neglected (Kvale, 1996, p. 177).

Analysis consists of asking questions to the data material (Hatch, 2002; Kvale, 1996), and the questions asked depend upon the focus of the research. The process of asking questions to the text can be named the hermeneutic *dialogue* (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). The point is that hermeneuticians neither take a 'monologic' stance such as that of positivism, nor do they act as passive recipients of the text. By asking questions to the text, and listening to it, they enter into a dialogic form. Different approaches lead to different questions, which lead to different meanings of the text (Hatch, 2002; Kvale, 1996). Naturally, my fore-meanings also enter into the questions posed (Kvale, 1996). The questions I posed during the analysis focused on why the subjects choose to use their MP3 players, why they listen to music, how the music affects them, in what

circumstances and at what time they listen to music and why, that is whether they are conscious about how the music affects their experiences and so on. The aim was to figure out whether the MP3 player works as a medium for musical self-care, and so I continually asked whether and how the music can afford self-care for the listener.

The interpretation was carried out by reading through each category and making notes in the margin about the content and meaning. A summary of the main findings within each category was then written. In this process, the categories were somewhat modified, and further refined as I was writing the thesis, as explained above. *Theory* played a major part in the interpretation. Reading the transcribed interviews in the light of theories on subjective well-being, self-regulation, stress, and coping clarified the relationship between the informants' use of their MP3 players and the issues of self-care and subjective well-being. Placing the data material within this specific theoretical framework thus highlighted the aspects of the subjects' music listening which helped me answer my research questions.

## 4.7 QUESTIONS ABOUT VALIDITY

The challenge to qualitative research is that it is often viewed as 'soft' research: it is said to be unscientific, subjective, or only exploratory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Kvale (1994) refers to ten standard objections to the qualitative research interview, namely that the research interview:

1. is not scientific, but only common sense
2. is not objective, but subjective
3. is not trustworthy, but biased
4. is not reliable, but rests upon leading questions
5. is not intersubjective; different interpreters find different meanings
6. is not a formalized method; it is too person-dependent
7. is not scientific hypothesis-testing; it is only explorative

8. is not quantitative, only qualitative
9. is not yielding generalizable results; there are too few subjects
10. is not valid, but rests on subjective impressions (Kvale, 1994, p. 147f).

These responses may be traced to a positivistic paradigm. Although the naturalistic paradigm has achieved its own trustworthiness by now, researchers within this tradition can still be met by objections such as those above. I will therefore discuss criteria of validity in naturalistic, qualitative research as opposed to criteria in the positivistic tradition. The traditional positivistic paradigm has generally differentiated between internal and external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Østerud, 1998). While internal validity refers to whether or not the research studies the phenomenon it is made out to study, external validity is a matter of the degree to which it is possible to generalize the findings. Within the positivistic paradigm, validity also involves the criteria of reliability and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability is about the ability of the findings to be repeated or reproduced by a different researcher. Objectivity is often seen as the contrast to subjectivity, which refers to the experiences of the individual subject, while objectivity refers to the experiences of a number of subjects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).<sup>26</sup>

In sum, there are four criteria of validity within what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as the conventional paradigm: Internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. These criteria do not fit well with

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<sup>26</sup> Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose a framework for naturalistic inquiry where they set up four evaluative criteria as analogous to positivism's criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity; namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The problem with these criteria, according to e.g. Holt (1991), is that they are met with methodological techniques such as prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation, negative case analysis, member checks, etc. Thus, through following certain methods, the naturalistic researcher can develop more trustworthy interpretations, according to Lincoln and Guba. Holt, on the other hand, does not believe that this evaluative endeavor is achievable. According to him, "the trustworthiness criterion and associated techniques proposed by Lincoln and Guba [...] contradict the nature of the interpretive task" (Holt, 1991, p. 60). Holt believes instead that interpretations should be judged on their insightfulness and their ability to convince the reader, and not on methodological techniques applied by the researcher. Being aware of the criticism of Lincoln and Guba, I have nonetheless chosen to refer to them where I find it relevant to do so, but also refer to Holt's critique where I find it necessary.

qualitative research. Because of the small number of participants and the focus on contextuality, generalizability is not possible nor wished for (Butler-Kisber, 2010), and the findings can seldom be reproduced by a different researcher. Moreover, the decisive role of the researcher makes it hard to be objective in the traditional sense of the word.

Because the word *validity* still carries with it a set of positivistic understandings, it has become preferable to evaluate instead naturalistic inquiry based on its *trustworthiness* or *credibility* (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Transparent descriptions of the research process, like the kind I have aimed to offer throughout this chapter, become essential. Throughout the entire process, the reflexivity of the researcher works as an important tool in establishing trustworthiness. *Transparency* and *reflexivity* thus become essential criteria for trustworthiness in naturalistic work (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Butler-Kisber, 2010). I will in the coming sections focus on intersubjectivity and reflexivity as criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research. I base these parts mainly on theory, but also discuss intersubjectivity and reflexivity in the present research. In the continuation, I discuss the trustworthiness of the interviews, the credibility of the analysis, and the transferability of the findings in the present research. I choose to focus on *trustworthiness* and *credibility*, but use *validity* as a collective term for evaluation of quality in the research, based on naturalistic criteria.<sup>27</sup>

### 4.7.1 Intersubjectivity

A loss of belief in an objective reality is a characteristic of the postmodern era: “The conception of knowledge as a mirror of reality is replaced by knowledge as a social construction of reality”, Kvale says (1996, p. 239). Within the constructivist paradigm, one omits to question the accordance

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<sup>27</sup> Brynjulf, Malterud and Midtgarden (2009) have aimed to develop an agenda of evaluation in qualitative research. They want to shift focus from fixed *criteria* of validity towards reflexive dialogue through use of an evaluation *agenda*, focusing on engagement, processing, interpretation, critique, usefulness, relevance, and ethics (EPICURE). Thus, they challenge evaluation based on methodological techniques (c.f. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The authors’ EPICURE is reflected in the present discussion, although not explicitly. A common theme in all the aspects of the acronym is *reflexivity*. As this appears as one of the most important metacriteria, I have chosen to spend some space on it.

between the text and the reality, and shift focus to whether or not the text can be accepted as credible or trustworthy among a relevant group of researchers (Østerud, 1998). A text can be said to have a high degree of validity if it succeeds in convincing the competent reader that the researcher has met with the rules of the genre (Østerud, 1998).

In the social sciences, the criterion for objectivity is usually replaced by 'intersubjective agreement' (Kvale, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Østerud, 1998). Intersubjective agreement implies that several observers agree on a phenomenon. However, a number of researchers reporting the same phenomenon is no guarantee of truth (Kvale, 1994). In this context, Kvale quotes Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People*, although put to the extreme: "The most dangerous enemy of truth and freedom is the compact majority ... The minority is always right" (Kvale, 1994, p. 152). I personally do not wish to use the word 'objective' when it comes to (qualitative) research, nor is the aim to produce 'objective' knowledge. However, it makes sense to pursue intersubjective agreement, as this should increase the trustworthiness of the research process and findings.

We may differ between arithmetic intersubjectivity, which refers to measurements done by independent observers, and dialogical intersubjectivity, which "involves a rational discourse and reciprocal critique among observers identifying and interpreting a phenomenon" (Kvale, 1994, p. 152). In the present research, I mostly rely on the dialogical intersubjectivity in the interviews. In this conception, the interview holds a fortunate position because "it consists of a conversation and negotiation of meaning between the interviewer and his subject" (Kvale, 1994, p. 153). As a qualitative researcher, I believe that knowledge is produced in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (c.f. Kvale, 1996). And, as Kvale (1995) points out, "the medium of a discourse is language, which is neither objective or universal, nor subjective or individual, but intersubjective." Thus, the conversations I have had with the informants are seen as intersubjective, in that knowledge and meaning have emerged through the conversations.

The research has also been discussed with my peers during its different stages. These conversations might be seen as ways of establishing intersubjective agreement within the research community I belong to.



Further, I believe these conversations have added to my reflexivity as a researcher. 'Peer audits' are recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to establish dependability and confirmability. Holt (1991) challenges this belief. He does not believe that peer audits can add to the trustworthiness of the interpretations:

The interpretation an auditor brings to the researcher's data is just as idiosyncratic as the researcher's original interpretation. Even if the auditors are multi-disciplinary, they still cannot capture the full range of possible interpretations. They are bounded by the social science discipline as a whole, Western ways of thinking, a time-bound theoretical position, and undoubtedly many other factors. Also, [...] it is hard to believe that detached auditors could ever adequately grasp the relationship between the observer's experience and his or her interpretations (Holt, 1991, p. 61).

Although official peer audits have not been implemented during the present research, the research process and the results have been discussed in colloquiums with peers that belong to the same institution as I, and peers belonging to other institutions, both nationally and internationally. Presentations and discussions have also taken place at seminars, symposiums, and conferences, nationally and internationally. Although I agree with Holt that these conversations do not necessarily add credibility to my work or interpretations, I believe these discussions have helped me to become more aware of my own biases and shortcomings. I therefore consider all these dialogues as ways to further establish trustworthiness in the present research.

#### **4.7.2 Reflexivity**

Reflective research has two basic characteristics, according to Alvesson and Sköldbberg: Careful interpretation and careful reflection. All references to empirical data are "the *results of interpretation*" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, emphasis in the original). However, interpretation does not take place in a neutral environment by a neutral researcher. Consequently, the second element, reflection,

turns attention 'inwards' towards the person of the researcher, the relevant research community, society as a whole, intellectual and cultural traditions, and the central importance, as well as problematic nature, of language and narrative (the form of presentation) in the research context (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 5f).

Gadamer (1975/2004) explains that interpretation always begins with fore-conceptions, and that meaning can occur only because the researcher is studying the phenomenon with certain expectations. However, he points out the importance of being aware of one's own biases:

Thus it is quite right for the interpreter not to approach the text directly, relying solely on the fore-meaning already available to him, but rather explicitly to examine the legitimacy – i.e., the origin and validity – of the fore-meanings dwelling within him (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 270).

The danger of fore-meanings, according to Gadamer, is that they can go unnoticed, and give rise to misunderstandings. We cannot trust our preconceptions completely, but need to remain open to the phenomenon studied (Gadamer, 1975/2004). Again, the researcher's ability to reflect upon her research and her biases is essential in the process of validation. "Reflection occurs when one mode of thought is confronted by another," according to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000, p. 247). To reflect upon one's research means to think about and consider the ways that the entire context of the research can affect the relations with the object studied. This involves "investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 245). This is an ambitious goal, as it can often be difficult to become conscious of the cultural context in which we find ourselves. I have aimed to give an account of my personal and academic background earlier (see chapter 1, section 1.4), as I believe this background gives rise to fore-meanings that influence the interpretations I have made throughout the research.

I acknowledge that the research has been carried out in a cultural and political context, which limits the transferability of the findings to different contexts (see section 4.7.5, transferability). My cultural background is

similar to that of the informants. This has perhaps led to a deeper understanding of their use of MP3 players. For example, I can relate to their daily commuting to work, using public transport in the city. It also means that I understand how living in a Western, wealthy nation is experienced, and what it means to live in the context of a Norwegian city. However, the similarity of cultural backgrounds might also have blinded me to the cultural context of the research. No differences in cultural or political experiences have 'stood out', and therefore not grabbed my attention. I have for example taken for granted the economic ability to buy an MP3 player, and not been surprised by the statistics that show that more than 50 per cent of the Norwegian population use an MP3 player daily. Moreover, I have nearly presupposed that all the informants have access to a computer, and therefore have the ability to download music and arrange their music on a computer. It has not surprised me that all the informants seem to be competent users of computers and the Internet. This competence is of course related to our cultural context, where computers and the Internet are used on a daily basis by a large group of people, and by many professions. The context of the Norwegian city has also been decisive for the findings in the present research. The 'need' for privacy and the tendency to keep a distance to other people is perhaps a Norwegian, or at least a Western, phenomenon. There may very well be more interaction between strangers in other countries – and even in other parts of Norway. Differences in such contexts would lead to different findings. In all, I have done my best to reflect upon my fore-conceptions and the importance of my theoretical and cultural background. Still, I acknowledge that I have probably not been able to become conscious of all my biases. I have chosen not to discuss the impact of the cultural or political context of the research to a greater extent, as this would demand a larger amount of space than I am willing to spend on the matter in the context of this thesis.

Alvesson and Sköldböck differentiate between reflectivity and reflexivity. While 'reflectivity' refers to the focused reflections upon the conditions for the research, 'reflexivity' has a multi-dimensional nature, "indicating that the levels are reflected in one another" (2000, p. 248). The idea is to remain open to different theories, interpretations, and logics. As mentioned, our fore-conceptions run the risk of dominating our interpretations. The ability to see various aspects is reduced if the researcher is relying on only one

theory, for example. "If one has worked a lot on a particular theory, one becomes, as a rule, emotionally attached to it", Alvesson and Sköldbberg say (2000, p. 250). This enhances the tendency to interpret the data so that it confirms the theory. Knowledge of more than one theory, on the other hand, opens up for multiple interpretations, which again can increase reflection. It may also be seen the other way around – increased reflection (as a result of knowledge of different theories, for example) may lead to multiple interpretations. The way Alvesson and Sköldbberg see it, the idea of reflexivity is "the very ability to break away from a frame of reference and to look at what it is not capable of saying" (2000, p. 246). In reflexive contexts there should be no heavy demands regarding theoretical consistency:

The point of reflection is rather to break away from consistency and a narrow focus on a particular aspect, to question weaknesses inherent in the mode of thought one embraces (and is easily imprisoned with), to break up and change a particular language game rather than expanding it (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 246).

The point of reflexivity is "to avoid getting stuck in a certain type of logic", Alvesson and Sköldbberg maintain, "without making sure that space and energy remain for other positions" (2000, p. 257). In the present research, I have chosen an eclectic approach to the research field. This includes the study of several theories from within different academic areas; musicology, music psychology, music sociology, health studies, and music therapy. As mentioned, I have chosen an approach that is mainly based on music psychology and – sociology, as well as music and health. Different theories have shed light on different aspects of the empirical material. I do not believe that knowledge of multiple theories has excluded influence of my fore-conceptions on the interpretations. However, using different theories in the analysis of the material have led to richer and broader results than would have been possible if I had relied on only one theory, or my fore-conceptions alone. I believe the study of different theories has heightened my levels of reflexivity, which again has led to the richness in the data – and the richness in the data has increased my reflections, allowing a continuous interpretation of the material.

Throughout this chapter, I have aimed at offering transparent descriptions of the research process and the choices I have made during the process. The previous chapters have presented the framework for the study as well as my background as a researcher, both personally and theoretically. Gathered, these chapters have hopefully shed light on some of my biases and fore-conceptions. The purpose is that the reader can use this information to evaluate the validity of the research. I will in the coming sections discuss the validity of the different stages of the research; the trustworthiness of the interview, the credibility of the analysis, and the transferability of the findings.

### **4.7.3 The trustworthiness of the interview**

The difficulty with everyday experiences, as Sloboda and O'Neill (2001) put it somewhat naively, is that they take place outside of a laboratory, and are therefore difficult to fully observe. The trouble of the interview as a research method is that everyday life is not necessarily memorable. Ordinary experiences can easily be forgotten or filtered out by the interviewee (Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001). This is the challenge to retrospect methods such as the interview. We do not save mundane everyday experiences. Rather, the extraordinary events stand out. Also, we do not save details, but wholes. When we recount an event, we reconstruct it based on our fore-conceptions (Gabrielsson, 2001; Vist, 2009). Still, the interview is a valuable approach as to reach previous experiences with music, because one avoids an experimental situation. Instead, the experience has actually happened in a person's life (Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001; Vist, 2009). I am not concerned with detailed descriptions of an actual event, and therefore do not see it as a problem if the recollections of my informants are somewhat modified. Instead, it is possible to view changes in memory as a way of constructing meaningful memories (Ruud, 1997b; Vist, 2009). These meaningful memories might say something about the *meaning* and *value* of the subjects' experiences with music and use of MP3 players in particular.

How can we know whether the subjects tell us the 'truth'? First of all, I trust that the subjects have told me what they believe to be true. I do not suspect

that they had any interest in tampering with 'reality'.<sup>28</sup> However, on a subconscious level, they may have wanted to please me as the researcher, and thus modified their answers so that they could tell me what they assumed I 'wanted' to hear. It therefore became necessary to validate the subjects' answers during the interview. I had the subjects confirm their answers, either by posing a similar question later in the interview, asking "so you are saying that...?" or making a summary together with the informant at the end of the interview, by going through the main themes and their answers; "you said that...?" In this way, the informants could either confirm or disconfirm the answers they had given during the interview. None of the informants appeared self-contradictory. Nonetheless, the summary at the end of each interview enabled me to confirm their answers, and thus enhance the credibility of the interview conversation.

It was also a possibility to validate the interviews in consultation with the informants after they took place by implementing so-called member checks. The subjects could have been given the opportunity to read and comment on the interview transcripts, and thereby to confirm or disconfirm what was said in the interview, and even to add new information. I chose not to send the transcripts to the informants for member checks, however. Vist (2009) discusses the necessity and outcome of such member checks in her PhD study. She asked her informants to read both the interview-transcripts and modified quotes, but her conclusion is that she does not recommend this to other researchers. This is because the extra effort from both the informants and the researcher was assessed as greater than the benefits. Vist's experience was that the informants showed little interest in reading the entire transcripts, and that only half of the subjects chose to read the final quotes. In the end, only two words were suggested to be changed, and so the results of the process must be said to be small. Vist concludes that it seems to be the formal validation of the research community that can be enhanced by such endorsements from the informants, and not the real validity of the material.

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<sup>28</sup> When speaking of reality, I need to refer back to the discussion on an 'objective reality', which I have already stated that I do not believe in. Therefore, if the subjects were to 'tamper with reality', it would be with their subjective reality, that is, their subjective experiences. In this sense, speaking about the 'truth' does not make much sense.

To have the informants read the modified and interpreted quotes is recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a validity-check, but others (e.g. Holt, 1991; Østerud, 1998) find this problematic. As Holt (1991, p. 60) notes: "This criterion contradicts the interpretivist's constructionist ontological assumption; a construction of a construction of a construction (a "triple hermeneutic" of sorts) does not add credibility." Thus, an agreement between the researcher and the informants does not necessarily enhance the trustworthiness of the results. Also, agreement cannot be expected. The differences in background of the researcher and the subjects make a high agreement on the analysis unlikely (Østerud, 1998). Further, the analysis is a merger of empirical data and theory, and the researcher interprets the subjects' experiences in a context of a theory that the subjects most probably have little knowledge. Therefore, they do not share the same frame of reference as the researcher, and cannot be expected to verify or reject the analysis based on a theoretical framework. Finally, I think it should be the researcher's prerogative to analyse the empirical data based on her context of knowledge. This is not to say that the subjects should expect to feel alienated in regard to the final analysis. I sincerely hope that the subjects in this study recognize themselves and their experiences in the present text.

#### **4.7.4 Credibility of the analysis**

One of the objections to interview interpretations is that "different interpreters find different meanings in the same interview", therefore the interview is not a scientific method (Kvale, 1996, p. 210). This objection rests upon a demand for objectivity in the sense that there is one true meaning, and the task of interpretation is to find this one, neutral truth (Kvale, 1996). Rather than representation of reality, interpretation becomes the central element in hermeneutic, qualitative research:

[T]here is no such thing as unmediated data or facts; these are always the results of interpretation. Yet the interpretation does not take place in a neutral, apolitical, ideology-free space. Nor is an autonomous, value-free researcher responsible for it (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 9).

As discussed previously, the personal, theoretical, cultural, and political background of the researcher influences the interpretations. Further, the interpretations take place in the context of either the interviewed subject, the general public, or the research community. This context also becomes the community of validation:

<b>Contexts of Interpretation</b>	<b>Communities of Validation</b>
Self-understanding	The interviewed subject
Critical common sense understanding	The general public
Theoretical understanding	The research community

Table 3: Contexts of Interpretation and Communities of Validation (Kvale, 1996, p. 214).

Interpretation based on *self-understanding* involves what the interviewee herself understands to be the meaning of her statements. It is a reformulation of “the meaning of the interviewees’ statement from their own viewpoints as these are understood by the researcher” (Kvale, 1996, p. 214). *Critical common sense understanding* goes beyond the interviewee’s self-understanding. It may be critical to what is said, but remains within a framework of common sense understanding. In the third context, a theoretical frame for the interpretation is applied. By *theoretical understanding*, the interpretation is likely to go beyond both the interviewee’s self-understanding and critical common sense understanding, incorporating theories in the interpretation. The three contexts may lead to different interpretations. They may be further distinguished, or they may come together. The theoretical frame might for example be part of the interviewee’s self-understanding. As an illustration, some of the informants in my Master’s study (Skånland, 2007) expressed that there was an important link between the music they listened to and their identity constructions, which is also formulated in theories on music and identity.

The three contexts of interpretation correspond to different communities of validation: The interviewed subject, the general public, and the research community. When the context of interpretation is the interviewee’s self-understanding, the informant decides the validity of the interpretation.



Here, the researcher tries to keep her interpretations “within the interviewee’s context of understanding as seen by the researcher” (Kvale, 1996, p. 217). Had I chosen to carry out the analysis of the present research within the framework of the interviewees’ self-understanding, it would have made sense to carry out member checks. It would be difficult to argue against member checks in such a case, because the analysis would depend on the views of the informants. They would have had to read the final interpretations and not only the interview transcripts in order to decide on the validity of the analysis. Because I have not carried out the interpretations within the context of the interviewee, I could choose not to implement member checks.

Within the context of common sense understanding, the interpretation does not depend on the approval of the subject interpreted, but upon whether the argumentation is convincing to the general public. In other words, it is up to the lay readers of the research report to evaluate the interpretation (Kvale, 1996). If the context of the analysis was the interviewed person or the general public, theory would not be incorporated into the interpretations, unless it made sense to the interviewee or the lay reader. This implies that I could not have used a theoretical framework for the analysis which the lay reader was unfamiliar with.

The present research goes beyond the understandings of the interviewees and the general public. Instead, the empirical material has been interpreted within a theoretical framework. This indicates that the context for the interpretations is theoretical understanding, and that it is up to the research community to validate these interpretations. The validity of the analysis within this context depends on “whether the theory is valid for the area studied, and whether the specific interpretations follow logically from the theory” (Kvale, 1996, p. 217). Thus, the judges of the validity of these interpretations need a certain theoretical competence. A community of researchers must therefore validate the interpretations.

#### **4.7.5 Transferability of the findings**

One of the traditional criteria for validity in research has been the positivistic demand of generalizability. This is said to be a form of *external*

*validity* (Boeije, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This demand rests on a belief in a neutral reality, and is based on quantitative findings. *Transferability* of the findings fits better with the nature of qualitative research. This agrees to the postmodern shift from generalization to contextualization:

In a postmodern approach the quest for universal knowledge, as well as the cult of the individually unique, is replaced by an emphasis on the heterogeneity and contextuality of knowledge, with a shift from generalization to contextualization (Kvale, 1996, p. 232).

To make transferability possible, the qualitative researcher should give an account of the time and context in which the research took place so that the reader may evaluate the transferability of the findings. The researcher must, in other words, provide transparent descriptions of the research process (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Butler-Kisber, 2010). It then becomes the reader's responsibility to make judgments about a possible contextual similarity. In the case of contextual resemblance, it is possible to carry out *similar* studies to the original one (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Østerud, 1998) or assume that the findings are transferable. However, as Holt (1991) argues, because of the dialectic relationship between the researcher and the researched, "the thick descriptions created in one context cannot be objectively transferred to a new context, nor could a judge objectively evaluate such a transfer" (Holt, 1991, p. 60). In other words, the results from one research-context cannot be automatically transferred to a different context, even if the contexts appear to be similar. Still, when descriptions of the research-context are provided, a certain idea about transferability should be possible. I will therefore say something about the context of the present research and possible transferability to other contexts.

Of course, not all MP3 users are the same. They are individuals with different listening habits, different needs, and different experiences. However, comparing my findings to other research done on personal stereo-use (Bull, 2000, 2007) and music listening in everyday life (DeNora, 2000; Greasley, 2008; Juslin & Laukka, 2004; North, et al., 2004; Sloboda, 2005c; Sloboda, et al., 2009; Sloboda, et al., 2001) makes it apparent that there are obvious similarities in how music is used. There are also some distinct similarities in how the informants in the present study experience

the music listening. This leads to the assumption that the findings from the current study should be transferable to other contexts. The contexts should be similar, nonetheless.

First of all, the study is carried out in a Western society – as are the other mentioned studies. The subjects live or work in Oslo, which places this study in an urban context. Carrying out a similar study in Eastern Europe, Asia, or in a rural environment could possibly produce different findings. For example, the subjects in my study value the ability the music affords of shutting out the surroundings. The surroundings are often perceived as stressful, and the music enables the listener to focus on something pleasant rather than people chatting on the phone or babies crying on the bus. These are characteristics of the city, where people tend to keep to themselves in spite of – or because of – the large amount of people. It may be that people in the countryside interact more on a daily basis, and therefore choose not to shut out the surroundings with their private music. People who live in different environments may in other words have different needs, and accordingly use their music differently. The fact that people live in a similar culture (e.g. Norwegian) should nevertheless open up for the possibility of certain transferable findings.

Next, the subjects are adult. Presumably, teenagers and children use music in different ways. We know for example that teenagers experience more intense emotions than adults do (Laiho, 2004). Does this mean that they have other needs when it comes to music listening? We must assume that teenagers listen to and use music somewhat differently from adults. Studies on music listening among adolescents (North, et al., 2000; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Wells & Hakanen, 1991) can give an idea of their listening habits. A study on adolescents' engagement with MP3 players (Bergh, et al., forthcoming) implies that these young listeners might incorporate their MP3 players in social interaction to a larger extent than the subjects in the present study. It is not given that the findings from the present study apply to children and teenagers, and should therefore not be transferred to this group unreservedly. Nevertheless, I have included some young adults in my sample, down to the age of eighteen. Some of the experiences of these young informants may be similar to those of some adolescents.

Further, the subjects are educated. This says something about social class. It is not given that people from different social sets use MP3 players in the same ways. They may for example have different personal needs, and consequently choose to listen to music for different reasons. We could nonetheless presume that some personal needs concern us all, independent of social class. When it comes to the needs of regulating energy levels, managing emotions, mood regulations and creating boundaries, it could be expected that these have a generic application. It may nevertheless be that people from different social sets listen to and use music in different ways according to these needs. Even so, some of the findings may be transferable. When it comes to social class, economy may be of importance. All of the informants in the present study have been able to pay for their MP3 player (unless it was given to them as a present). MP3 players are available at different price ranges, and the functionality of the players differs. It may be that the affordance of the MP3 player, and the way it is appropriated, differs according to functionality (and price), and might accordingly lead to differences in how it is used. Thus, economy may also lead to limitations when it comes to transferability of the findings, both when it comes to the ability to buy an MP3 player, and when it comes to differences in functionality of the players. That being said, the subjects in this study own players of different functionality and capacities. The latter should therefore not be a significant limitation of transferability.

Finally, the informants are presumably healthy. There may be differences in how people who experience positive health and people who experience negative health listen to music according to self-care and subjective well-being.<sup>29</sup> This study has focused on self-regulation and coping. Perhaps people who move towards the negative pole of the health ease/dis-ease continuum (Antonovsky, 1987) listen to music to cope with other aspects than those in this study. Also, they might regulate themselves in other ways, according to their experienced health. People who experience physical illness might for example listen to music to regulate pain (e.g. Bergland, 2006). It might also be the case that people in mental health care vent their

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<sup>29</sup> When I speak of health in this context, I refer to different understandings of the concept, both the biomedical understanding which is primarily concerned with physical health, and the social model which is concerned with a more holistic understanding of health, including well-being and quality of life.

emotions differently with music, than what the subjects in this study do (e.g. Skarpeid, 2008). It is possible that the use of music to vent emotions is not as efficient for certain individuals with mental health problems. They may not be able to 'finish' with their negative emotions, but instead remain in a negative mood. These possible differences in the effect of music listening imply that the results of the present study should not be transferred to people who experience health problems unconditionally.

Although there are only twelve subjects in the present study, and the report is based on these subjects' experiences and reflections regarding their use of MP3 players, I believe the findings will be valid for a larger group of people. First of all, I believe people who use MP3 players will be able to relate to some of the findings, whether they are young, healthy, uneducated, ill, elderly, educated, from the countryside or the city. Further, I believe that people who listen to music in general will be able to identify with some of the findings from the study. Although the research sample consists of a restricted number of people, I relate to other studies that have similar findings, namely that people use music according to personal needs. Hence, the *music listening* becomes the link. It should be up to the person who knows the context or people of current interest to make a judgement about similarities and transferability.

## **4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **4.8.1 Information and consent**

The study was reported to the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) during the fall 2008, and was approved by them (appendix 1). All the informants were informed about the focus of the research in advance of the interviews. They were further informed that the participants would be kept anonymous and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences on their behalf (appendix 4). The information was delivered by mail to each informant in advance of the interviews, and they had to give their free, written consent before we started the

interviewing. All the informants are over the age of eighteen, and have full competence to give their free consent.

### **4.8.2 Confidentiality**

The subjects' confidentiality has been attended to by keeping their personal information separate from the interview transcripts. Their names and contact information have been kept in a locked cabinet to which only I have the key. The cabinet is in my office, which has been locked at all times when I was not present.

The attention to the privacy of the subjects has been important to me. This is the reason why I have not made an account of their occupations and personal background, and have aimed to blur information about where they live or work. Nonetheless, I hope the informants will recognize themselves in the presentation of their experiences, even if their stories have been interpreted by me in the light of theories on self-regulation, coping, and well-being.

The purpose of the interviews was not to have the informants speak about sensitive topics. They were not asked about their personal health, private life, or other topics that were considered sensitive. Nonetheless, if the informants brought up a subject, I chose to follow their lead. This happened for example if they brought up subjects like divorce or similar topics. In general, I tried to be humble and not ask questions that could be perceived as uncomfortable. As discussed in section 4.5 (the interviews), I could perhaps have been more daring.

### **4.8.3 The interview situation**

The research interview is a form of conversation, but differs from the conversation of daily life because it is a professional one: It has structure and a purpose. Also, the conversation is not between equal partners; it is the researcher that controls the situation and guides the conversation (Kvale, 1996; Rapley, 2001). One must therefore be aware of the asymmetrical power relations in the interview-setting:

The qualitative research interview entails a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution of interviewer and interviewee. It is a one-way dialogue, an instrumental and indirect conversation, where the interviewer upholds monopoly of interpretation (Kvale, 2006, p. 484).

To call the interview a dialogue is misleading, Kvale asserts. It is rather a “one-directional questioning” (Kvale, 2006, p. 484), where the answers are given by the interviewee to serve the purpose of the researcher. The interests of the researcher lead the conversation. In some cases, the interviewer may even serve as a “Trojan horse”, constructing a warm and intimate atmosphere to inspire the interviewee to open up, but not necessarily telling her what the interview is about (Kvale, 2006). This brings out some important ethical issues, and overlooking the power relations in the interview may “seriously impair the validity of the knowledge constructed” (Kvale, 2006, p. 486). All the informants in the present research were informed about the research topic, the background for the research, and the aim for the research in advance of the interview. I considered this to be the most ethical approach, although I was worried that the subjects might give answers in accordance to the research topic, which was stated as the relationship between MP3-listening and life quality. This could have implications for the validity of the findings. In some interviews, the informant used the word “life quality”. In those episodes, I assumed that this word was chosen because they had seen it in the information about the study. However, the interview conversation lasted for about an hour and touched upon issues that were not obviously linked to life quality. I believe that the validation work that took place during the interview – the repetition of similar questions, the use of interpreting questions, and the summary at the end of the interview – contributed to the trustworthiness of the interview, and helped to eliminate ‘confirming answers’ from the informants.

The interviews took place in my office. I regard this and similar environments as a suitable context for the interview. This is not a sterile room, or a ‘cosy’, intimate setting. Hopefully, this made the informants feel attended to, but not so much that they spoke of more than they would feel comfortable with in retrospect. At one point, one of the informants started a

story with the words “well, this is kind of private, but...” Because the sentence began like this, I choose not to include this story in the final report. What we talked about was interesting, but I consider the informant’s privacy and anonymity more important.

Conducting the interviews in my office might however have reinforced the already imbalanced power relations. The office is not a neutral room, and could conceivably contribute to the fact that the interviews took place on my – the researcher’s – terms. Had the interviews taken place in the informants’ home, or a setting of their choice, the power balance might have changed somehow. One of the interviews did take place in the work environment of one of the informants. This was more convenient for the informant, and was her choice. The other informants were also told that they could choose a different setting for the interview if they found my office inconvenient. Thus, they were given the opportunity of choosing a setting for the interview that they were comfortable with. However, I do not believe that many of the informants were conscious about the possible shift in power relations, and therefore found it suitable to come to my office. From my point of view, I did not experience any difference in the interview setting or the findings from the interviews that were conducted in my office and that which took place at the informant’s workplace. In this sense, the choice of place might not have made any consequential impact on the power balance. Still, the interviews took place on my terms, based on my research interest and interview questions. Thus, the findings are based on my role as the researcher.

The choice not to carry out member checks adds to the fact that the research has been carried out on my terms. I have chosen to use the research community as community of validation rather than the informants (c.f. section 4.7.4, credibility of analysis). The choice not to carry out member checks was made based on the utility value of such checks (c.f. section 4.7.3, trustworthiness of the interview). However, the power relations maintain imbalance because I did not involve the informants in the analysis of the material. If they had been given the opportunity to respond to my interpretations, they might have felt more included in the research process, and perhaps more empowered. On the other hand, reading the unprepared interview transcripts might have made them feel



less intelligent because verbatim oral language normally appears as incoherent, and even confused, when written down (c.f. Kvale, 1996). If the informants had been given the opportunity to respond to the final interpretations, they might not have been able to make any comments, based on the fact that they are unfamiliar with the theories that have been used as framework for the analysis. To conclude, including the informants in a larger part of the research process might have made them feel more empowered, but I stand by my choice not to implement member checks based on my earlier arguments – the extra efforts from both informants and researcher seem to be greater than the benefits.

## 4.9 SUMMARY

The present research has taken on a hermeneutic, qualitative approach. Answers to the research questions have been sought through semi-structured interviews with twelve adult users of MP3 players who live or work in Oslo and the surroundings areas. The transcribed interviews have been categorized using meaning categorization. Through the steps of open coding and axial coding, three main themes emerged; *use of MP3 players*, *self-regulation* and *coping*.

The aim of this chapter has been to offer transparent descriptions of the research process and some of my reflections concerning this process. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out, the qualitative inquiry “can at best persuade” the reader about its trustworthiness. I hope to have made my choices during the course of the research transparent and open to evaluation, so that the reader has been made capable of making her own judgments about the validity of the research process.



## **5. USE OF THE MP3 PLAYER**

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize the use of the MP3 player, and give an overview of where and how the informants use their MP3 players. The experience of listening to private music outside of the home compared to music listening at home is examined; and the experience of listening to private music on headsets versus music on speakers is explored. The subjects' choice of music is also portrayed. This information should serve as background for the following chapters, which will go deeper into the relations between the listener and the music, and how the music can function as a resource for the listener.

## 5.1 WHERE AND HOW THE MP3 PLAYER IS USED

The subjects in the present study use the MP3 player most often while travelling, either by foot or by public transport. They use it daily to and from work, but also bring it along when travelling longer distances on trains or flights. Some of the subjects also use it in their car on a docking station, which means that they connect it to speakers. Some also use the players when they are in cafés on their own. Most of the subjects use it when they go for walks or work out, especially when they are jogging, but also when they are skiing or riding bikes. In addition, most of the subjects listen to their MP3-music at home via the MP3 player on docking stations or on the computer. Furthermore, they bring it to parties, which enables the subjects to play their own music (on docking stations) and be sure to listen to music they like. Several of the subjects say that they always listen to the player when they are on their own. Some even use it while working, whereas others find it hard to concentrate on their work when they listen to music. A number of the subjects use it when they do routine tasks, however. In short, the MP3 player is used in most situations.

The subjects describe the MP3 player as easy to use, convenient and easily accessible. This makes it easy to bring along, and most of the subjects take it with them at all times. Although some choose occasionally not to listen to their music, it seems that all of the subjects carry their MP3 player with them whenever they leave the house, 'just in case' – that is, they prefer to have music available in case of an opportunity for listening. The MP3 player is also desired if the subjects find themselves in an 'intermission' situation where they have to wait for something or there is nothing else to do. To bring the MP3 player becomes part of the daily routine of the subjects. They make sure to bring their keys, their money and their music whenever they leave the house:

It's become one of the things I check in the mornings; the bus pass, money, that's to say my card and wallet and stuff, mobile phone, iPod and keys. Five things have to be in place. "Yes, we're ready." In the beginning, I forgot it sometimes, but now it's part of the routine. In fact, now I never go, I think I almost never go out of the house without my iPod. In case something or other comes up where I've to sit

somewhere and wait, hang out somewhere, then I plug in and listen to something (4: Male, 43 years).

Bull (2000) also found that users of personal stereos chose to bring their players along 'just in case'. With the portable cassette player, the 'just in case' also extended to bringing extra tapes. This required extra effort on behalf of the listeners, who had to carry the extra weight of the spare tapes, in case they would want to listen to different music during the day. The subjects in the present study enjoy the ability to carry most of their music on a small player, and mention this as one of the advantages of the MP3 player compared to the portable cassette- and CD-players.

Music is a natural part of everyday life, according to my informants. They express that life would be poorer without their MP3 players and that music is an important part of their lives. The MP3 player is described as "enrichment in everyday life" (male, 44 years). Several of the subjects say that the MP3 player adds extra value to the situation they are in. While some say that they would be fine without the MP3 player – although they would be more bored – others say that they would find it hard to function without it. They all say that the music listening heightens their experiences. It becomes more pleasant to travel with the MP3 player. One of the subjects expresses that her iPod has come to mean so much that it has become a mandatory item:

I remember very well when I started going around with my iPod regularly, because I always have it with me. It's a mandatory item in my bag; it's always with me. And knowing that I have it, that if it becomes boring, if I'm a bit like, well, want to get that rush or something, then I don't need a cup of coffee, I need the iPod. So it means very much to me, absolutely (5: Female, 27 years).

Here, the *need* for music is articulated. This woman does not crave coffee to boost her energy, but says she prefers the iPod. She brings her music 'just in case', and seems to find comfort in knowing that she can turn to the music at any time. She also expresses an addiction to the player, but asks, "why not be addicted?" "It's a thing which is easy to become addicted to, it's a thing that affects you so much that you become... it's something you *want* to be addicted to because it's a good thing."

### 5.1.1 Different listening modes

The MP3 player offers different listening modes, which means that the subjects choose whether to listen to an artist, an album, a playlist or on 'shuffle'. The 'shuffle' function can be used either within a playlist, an album or artist, or within the entire music collection. When using this function, the subject leaves the choice of music to the MP3 player, and listens to the songs in incidental order. Some of the subjects use the random function when they cannot make up their minds about what to listen to. They let the player select music for them, and figure out what they want to listen to when they hear the music. They either continue to listen to the music at random, skipping the songs they do not wish to listen to at that time, or they switch to an artist or album once they find out what type of music they want to hear:

I put it very often on shuffle, to choose at random. I think it's real fun, because there are many old records that suddenly pop up that you hadn't thought about. If you were to sit down and say, "what do I feel like listening to right now," it's not always that easy. [...] And so in a way I will rediscover old records that I then want to listen to more (3: Male, 43 years).

Although the 'shuffle' function can seem random, leaving the listeners out of control of what they listen to, it is important to remember that this function is used within their own music collection. It is therefore not entirely accidental what kind of music the subjects listen to. Using the function within a playlist or a music genre gives the subjects more control of the music listened to, only in random order:

Yes, but I can also use shuffle within a genre. As I have a precise system for all the music I put in, also the genre. So then I can also shuffle within the chosen genres. As such, I can control the shuffle a bit (3: Male, 43 years).

The ability to make personalized playlists is another feature of the MP3 player. The subjects can create playlists with music for specific occasions, moods or times of the day, or simply gather their favourite music in a list. This gives the subjects even greater control of what they listen to, as they can plan and pick exactly those songs they want or 'need' to hear at

particular times, and gather them in a playlist. One of the informants has created specific playlists for each time of the day. He has a playlist for the morning, which consists of a specific type of music that gets him going without being too upbeat; one for the middle of the day with more tempo; and one for the evening with quieter music that helps him to calm down. In this way, he has the kind of music he 'needs' or prefers to listen to at particular times of the day ready and at hand.<sup>30</sup>

### 5.1.2 The radio

In addition to music, the MP3 player is used for listening to audio books and the radio. Some of the subjects divide the time spent listening between music, the radio,<sup>31</sup> and audio books, while others mainly listen to music. Some of the subjects who listen to the radio normally prefer programs without music. This is because the radio might play music that they do not care about, and they would rather choose music themselves. They even say that the music on the radio is sometimes a source of annoyance. For these subjects, then, the radio is mainly for talk shows, and not a source of music:

I notice that with the radio, I turn it off immediately if some music that I dislike is played while I'm listening to something. I'm rather quick at changing channels or turning off the sound. So there the iPod has a great advantage for my part. It's a little like that, I've thought about it a few times, I've become selective, because I only choose the highlights. Soon I'll stop listening to the radio completely and download only what I want to listen to [laughter], so it becomes like this bubble one lives in (4: Male, 43 years).

This man expresses that the possibility of downloading what he wants to listen to makes it easier to be selective. An important aspect of the MP3 player is the ability to fill it with music of one's own choice and to select music from a vast collection of personal music, thus avoiding music one does not care about.

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<sup>30</sup> For more on listening habits, see Skånland (2007).

<sup>31</sup> The subjects can either listen to the radio on their mobile phones, or to 'podcasts' on their MP3 player, which are downloaded radio-programs they can listen to whenever they want. This means that there is no need for radio-reception to be able to listen to podcasts.

Also in Bergmann's (2009) PhD study, it appeared that Swedish adolescents would often dissociate themselves with music on the radio. Several of the young participants in Bergmann's study claimed that they did not appreciate the music normally played on commercial radio- and TV-stations. Bergmann relates this to the desire for autonomy and individualism, and therefore notes that it appears to be important for the adolescents to create their own, personal musical taste. Individuals who listen to music on the radio are seen as less autonomous:

Because radio music cannot be influenced in the same way as music on a CD or an MP3-file in the computer, the individual who listens to radio music is conceived as doing a less active choice compared to individuals who listen to e.g. more narrow hard rock or punk genres. [...] For the person who wishes to separate herself from the crowd and appear as an unique individual, a *personal developed musical taste* seems to be of the utmost significance (Bergmann, 2009, p. 73, my translation, emphasis in the original).

Although the informants in the present study are older than the participants in Bergmann's study, and therefore not part of such intense identity negotiations, their reservation towards music on the radio may be understood as a way of creating a more autonomous identity. Being in control of the music appears to be crucial. One informant states that she would have appreciated to listen to a radio station where they played only music she liked, so that she would not always have to make the choices of what to listen to herself. She would have liked to listen to this sort of radio station for the purpose of discovering new music and being surprised by the music:

Yes, not having to decide what to listen to, but within a variety of music you mostly like. I don't want to risk listening to dance bands, so to have a kind of channel that would give me the music I like and present me to new things I like, in particular, that would be really excellent (5: Female, 27 years).

As long as this kind of radio station is not available in Norway, it seems that the subjects prefer to listen to their own music in order to have control over what they listen to. It is fine to listen to talk shows and audio books, but when it comes to music, the subjects would rather choose what to listen to,



and thus avoid listening to music that could possibly become a source of annoyance. Hence, the MP3 player endows the listeners with a high level of control over their auditory experiences and enhances their experience of autonomy.<sup>32</sup>

## 5.2 ROUTINES

Many of the subjects have specific routines in the way they use their MP3 players. A woman (24 years) puts on the MP3 player once she starts to travel, whether that means walking out the door or boarding the train. She says, however, that the music never really stops, because she usually listens to MP3s on her computer while getting ready, and then continues to listen to the MP3 player when she walks out of the house. Most of the subjects put on the MP3 player on their way out the door, which means that the music starts playing once they leave home:

*When do you put on the music, is it when you walk out the door?*

Yes, usually out of the apartment door and then I go down a few steps and then I sit down and arrange things and put on the headset and as I walk out of the front door it's on. But then it's out of the door, and by the time the door closes then the first notes and then it's just on.

*So you start with that?*

[Laughter] Yep. It's become a bit of a ritual maybe.

*It's something you do every day or?*

Yes, pretty much every day, unless it's so freezing outside that I'm not able to go without a beanie. I have this big headset (8: Male, 27 years).

This informant usually listens to his MP3 player every day (even on the day of the interview, when it was minus ten-fifteen Celsius degrees). He puts on his MP3 player on the way out of his apartment, finds the music he wants to listen to and puts on the headset so that he hears the first notes of the music

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<sup>32</sup> Although the informants can use their MP3 players for radio- and audiobook-listening, my main concern has been with music. I will therefore focus on the informants' mobile music listening in the following.

as he walks out of the building. Another informant puts on the iPod as part of her outer clothing, and presses play as she walks out the door:

*When do you turn on your player, is it when you leave home, or when do you usually turn it on?*

Yes, usually I put on my jacket and iPod and stuff. In a way it's like putting on your outer clothing, I put it on and go out.

*So then it's with you as you walk out the door?*

Yes, it is (10: Female, 18 years).

Some of the subjects also have specific music they listen to at certain times of the day, or even times of the year. One of the informants has made specific playlists for each time of the day, as we saw above. He listens to one type of music in the morning, another type during the day, and yet another in the evening:

Yes, it's a rather special pattern, because I've made specific playlists for breakfast for example. Then I have one for the evening, called 'calm'. These are mostly used in the morning and in the evening. Those two. So it's a very fixed pattern, really.

*So in the evening you use music that preferably calms you down?*

Uhum.

*And in the morning, how is it then?*

Then it's happy music, but not very up-beat tempo, just a little. I mean you don't put on, how can I say, now I never listen to techno, but that kind of music with full blast and racket. In the morning it has to be something that gets you started, sort of a calm start. Concretely, for example 'Elle Melle' and 'Vamp' and 'Oslo Gospel Choir' and some others like these.<sup>33</sup> It's a good start in the morning. And when the breakfast is over and such, for example on a Saturday, that's when you've got time to sit and play with it, then I switch over to things with full blast after breakfast until lunch and stuff. Then it switches again.

*Can you take your music with you, when you're listening to your Hi-Fi at home, is it like that, that you can then take your iPod and go out while you continue listening?*

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<sup>33</sup> 'Elle Melle' and 'Vamp' are Norwegian bands which play popular music with inspiration from folk music, jazz, and rock.

Yes, it is. Absolutely. If you get going properly, with a good sequence of songs, then of course you'd like to continue the flow, so you just put on the iPhone and load some songs in the same genre (11: Male, 37 years).

This informant says that if he 'gets going' and listens to a good sequence of songs on his stereo, he brings his iPhone to continue to listen when he leaves home. In other words, the music continues when he walks out of the house, as in the case of the woman portrayed earlier. One woman describes it as a habit and an addiction to listen to the MP3 player on her way to work. It is a good start to the day, she says:

*Do you have any routines? Is it something that you put on the moment you walk out of the door from home?*

Yes yes yes yes. Absolutely. Yes, it's a crisis if the battery is flat. Yes, really, it's like "yes, I'll bike to work without anything in my ears, but it'll be ok I guess". Yes, I'm actually almost entirely addicted to listening. But it might as well be the radio on the way to work. It's sort of built-in. It becomes a habit. But it's good, and the day is new and, yes, lovely to listen. So it's a routine (12: Female, 43 years).

As we can see, the MP3 player is a part of the subjects' everyday routines. This implies that the MP3 player and the mobile music is an integrated part of their everyday lives. It is not reserved for special occasions, but is used as part of their morning rituals, to and from work, and during the day. It is always available and enables the subjects to listen to music whenever they want, wherever they want.

### **5.3 LISTENING AT HOME VERSUS OUTSIDE**

Listening to music outside of the home is perceived as a different listening experience from listening to music at home. The MP3 player supports private listening, but at the same time, the listener often finds herself surrounded by other people. One informant thus describes the listening experience as "my music in a world full of people" (female, 26 years).

A man (37 years) says that his experience of the music often is heightened when he is outside of the home, because he is out in the 'real world' and relates the music to his environment. He also explains that the listening experience outside of home can intensify his emotions, because he uses the music to remove himself from the surroundings, and creates a bubble where he can focus on himself. This makes the contrast between him and the surroundings more apparent, and thus amplifies his experiences, he explains.

Listening to one's own private music outside of the home often helps to create a personal space, as the music facilitates a shift in focus from the surroundings to oneself. Within this space, the subjects can choose to listen to music without taking other people into consideration. Especially those who have partners or families that they need to consider when listening to music at home perceive this as an advantage. For these subjects, listening to music at home includes negotiations and compromise. The result is that they listen less to music at home, and often to music that is not their first choice. The MP3 player offers a personal space where they can listen to exactly the music they want, and at the volume level they like. Referring to his MP3 player, a man with wife and children says that he is "[...] allowed to go back to [his] youth, to play loud music and not think of anyone else" (male, 43 years). He explains that the way he uses his MP3 player is similar to the way he used to listen to music before he had children:

Sure, I have to say that I listen much less to music at home than I did before. There are children, TV, and so many other things. I'm not so keen on TV but I watch TV like most people. But there are so many things going on all the time, and there's no time to sit down and listen to music. And I notice that when I come home, that when 'Radio Norway' and things like that is on, which plays hit-tunes from the last forty years, then I almost get the creeps, it's like, "thanks." It's hard to compare, but I think that maybe the way I use the iPod now is more like I used to play music earlier, before we had children, earlier when I lived alone and things like that, I used to play much more music at home. Now I have even stored away the vinyl records, so what's left is the lowest common denominator of the collection, that everyone can sort of- which can be played when there are visitors or be played and everyone can bear to listen to it. So there I think I've compromised

quite a lot [laughter]. It's kind of like being allowed to go back a bit to your youth again, to play loud music and not think of anyone else (4: Male, 43 years).

For this man, the MP3 player takes on a vital role in allowing him to listen to his own, personal music without having to make compromises. Moreover, it allows him to spend *more* time listening to music, and enables him to recreate his earlier listening-habits, which have been significantly transformed after he set up his own family. Thus, the MP3 player enables him to create his own, valuable listening-space.

Although the man from the quote above explains that he can listen to the MP3 player without thinking of anyone else, listening to music in the streets or on the bus can nevertheless make the subjects self-conscious. One informant expresses that she is worried that other people might hear what she listens to through her headphones. This may have consequences for what kind of music she chooses to listen to, as the music is often perceived as personal or private.<sup>34</sup> Other subjects are concerned about 'keeping the façade' when they are outside of the home. This may also have consequences for what kind of music they choose to listen to, because some music brings out emotions that they might not want to handle in a public environment. It might feel safer to go deeper into emotions at home, and to work through them in a private context. One of the informants says that "I guess I can go much deeper into the different feelings at home than what one dares do in public, for example on the bus and such" (female, 18 years). This may suggest that the music on the MP3 player is in fact not appropriate for dealing with difficult emotions in public environments. This informant explains that if she wants to listen to sad music, she finds a seat in the back of the bus, because "even if you want to reach down to it, you don't want to share it with the entire world". Further, the same informant says:

But it depends, if you know that you're going on a half-an-hour bus ride for example, and just had a fight with someone or if something has happened, then you might choose to do it because you know you have a fair amount of time. So probably you see what you can allow yourself (10: Female, 18 years).

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<sup>34</sup> See Ruud (1997b) for more on music and identity.

Even if one is reluctant about going into painful or unpleasant emotions in public, the ability to use personal and private music on the MP3 player to deal with difficult emotions when they appear may be valuable. As this informant articulates it: “then you can address the difficulty there and then”.<sup>35</sup>

### 5.3.1 A sonic ‘security blanket’

According to some of the informants, it is easier to experiment with new music at home. They prefer to listen to music they already know, so-called ‘safe music’ when outside. There might be several reasons for this. At home, the subjects are already in a safe environment, and can therefore listen to unfamiliar music without worrying about their unknown reactions to the music. Out on the street, the need for specific music becomes more apparent because the music is often used to promote a particular mood. The subjects are not interested in spending much time finding the ‘correct’ music, and thus bring music that they already know:

Perhaps I listen to different types of music when I’m out and when I’m at home, I think. I tend not to change the music on my MP3 player as often as I would’ve liked. So I hear the same thing on and on, while at home I maybe listen to more kinds of music, new albums and such. Maybe I use the music at home more to explore new types of music, while on my MP3 player I have perhaps more music that I know I like. Even though I try to incorporate a couple of new albums there, too. But actually I seldom listen to new albums; it often is good old familiar pieces. [...] I think sometimes it’s hard to choose things I don’t know much about, because I just grab the MP3 player quickly and just push start and put it back again, since I am normally on the go, and therefore it’s much easier to put on something I recognize (8: Male, 27 years).

The informants’ personal music can be understood almost as a sonic ‘safety blanket’ – something which they recognize and which provides them with a feeling of familiarity and safety when in an ‘unfamiliar’ environment. This

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<sup>35</sup> I will elaborate on use of the MP3 player as a tool to regulate mood and emotions in chapter 6 (self-regulation).

'unfamiliar' environment should be understood as being away from home. When at home, that is, in safe and well-known surroundings, they allow themselves to listen to new and unknown music. Hence, it seems that being in a 'safe' environment allows them to explore music, which they do not know how they will react to. When in an 'insecure' environment, the music can function much as a 'security blanket', and the informants choose to listen to familiar music that they know how they will react to.<sup>36</sup>

As will be touched upon below, the informants mostly listen to their Hi-Fi when at home. While one of the subjects (female, 18 years) prefers to listen to her MP3 player on headsets even when she is at home, few of the other subjects use their MP3 players in this way at home. One of the subjects explains that he does not want to isolate himself from his partner when they are together (male, 24 years).<sup>37</sup> Thibaud (2003, p. 332) notes that "[i]t is paradoxical that access to public space is associated with the beginning of private listening whereas entering the private realm is associated with openness towards the surroundings". I believe this behaviour can be partly explained by the role of music as a provider of security.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Thibaud notes that "[l]istening with headphones establishes a 'sonic bridge' between domestic and public spaces" (2003, p. 333). This sonic bridge establishes an "auditory continuity", according to Thibaud (2003, p. 334). As we saw above, the informants commonly put on their MP3 players as part of their outer clothing, pressing play as they close the door behind them. It is also common that they begin listening to their Hi-Fi at home, and continue to listen to the same music on their MP3 players as they leave home, thus creating obvious 'sonic bridges'. This can be explained by the fact that the informants enjoy the music and want to continue to listen to it, but it can also be understood as the informants bringing the feeling of being at home – that is, a safe place – with them as they venture into public spaces.

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<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that the informants do not *only* listen to familiar music when outside. One informant (female, 26 years) says for example that she can experiment with new music while jogging.

<sup>37</sup> However, the informants may choose to use their MP3 player with a headset if their partner is busy doing something else, and they do not want to disturb him or her with their music.

<sup>38</sup> I further believe this behavior can be explained by music's role in creating private space, functioning as a technology of self-regulation and coping, which will be interrogated in chapter 6 and 7.

### 5.3.2 A sonic 'bubble'

The music at home is often described as background music. The subjects generally listen to the music on speakers while they are doing something else. While this might also be true for the use of MP3 players, it often has a different purpose: The use of the MP3 player is usually described as creating space for oneself, where one can focus on one's thoughts or state of being. This space is described as a 'bubble', and typically consists of the music and the listener, and nothing else:

It's the feeling that you've shut out other things and you are in a way somewhat protected from the surroundings. You've got much more control everywhere, then you regulate some input, into the head, so you can sort of choose a bit which sensory impression, audio or visual, should dominate [...]. You can close your eyes and just listen to music, then there's absolutely nothing else. Then I don't think of things around me at all, then I can just sit and listen to music and there can be lots of people standing around me, but it doesn't matter (6: Male, 24 years).

This experience of being in a 'bubble' is seemingly heightened by the use of headsets or earplugs. The music goes directly into the ears, and the headset can create a sense of a physical wall between the listener and the environment. The experience of listening to music on headsets is therefore likely to be different from the experience of listening to music on loudspeakers.

## 5.4 LISTENING TO HEADSETS VERSUS LOUDSPEAKERS

When it comes to listening to music on headsets versus speakers, most of the subjects say that there is a difference in sound quality. They therefore usually choose to listen to speakers when they are at home. Several of the subjects listen to the MP3 player on a docking system or to MP3-files on their computer. However, in some cases the informants choose to listen to music via headsets as a consideration to their partner, as mentioned previously. One of the subjects prefers headsets either way because "the



music is more inside your head on headsets” (female, 18 years). A number of the subjects have the same experience; the music becomes more intimate when they listen to it on headsets:

*Do you think it is different, to listen directly into your ears or through the loudspeaker?*

I've thought about that many times, whether I find it different. And I think when I listen on the headset, it becomes more, I get a more intimate experience of the music, it becomes more, just mine, while on the loudspeakers, even when I'm all alone in the room, it is more public, in a way. It becomes closer maybe, when I have the headset on, and so I feel that it becomes stronger, it becomes more invasive when I listen on the headset. It is difficult to ignore, because the music is more isolated than on the loudspeaker (1: Female, 26 years).

Several of the informants talk about a more intimate listening experience on headsets, and enjoy this intimacy:

*Do you think there is a difference between listening to [music] on loudspeakers and directly in your ears?*

Yes, I think there's a difference in that – very much the feeling that when you listen on the loudspeakers – you are in a way, there may be others there, and many people can share it, and you are in a way not locked up in your bubble. But when I listen to music on my own, then I feel that you're conscious about it, then I just want to listen to music, just on my own, it is not for anyone else. It's only me who wants to listen on my own. But I don't feel I'm alone when I listen to music on the loudspeakers, because you share it with others.

*Yes, but what if you are alone in the room, and have [music] on the loudspeakers?*

No, even then I feel that I'm still in a way out in the open. I hear other things. I hear other movements much more; I can suddenly hear an ambulance, suddenly the bus driving by. You hear all the other sounds, so that the sound kind of, *there's* the sound and you're sitting *there*. While when you listen to music in your ears, you have in a way taken it inside and enclosed it. [...] So then you can just turn the sound up a little and then you have absolutely nothing else. Whilst you can never turn up the volume on those [the loudspeakers] so that you can block out everything else (6: Male, 24 years).

This informant appreciates the experience of being by himself, listening on his own and being enclosed by the music. It appears that he prefers to disconnect from his surroundings so as to be able to focus entirely on the music. Even if this man enjoys listening to music on headsets, he would never use headsets at home, when he is alone, he says. It would feel unnatural, he explains. Nevertheless, the experience of the music is different on speakers. In agreement with this man, another informant explains that she prefers to listen with headsets because the music becomes closer, and it creates a space for her to be alone:

*How is the experience of that space, can you describe it?*

Oh, it's very nice. And I think it's almost better to listen to music on the iPod than in a room, because I'm much closer to the music. I'm much closer; the music is inside me in a way. In other words, it becomes much clearer. I've never thought about it before, but the experience of having the music inside your ear is completely different from listening to it on a Hi-Fi. The sound is better, the sound is much clearer and then I'm all alone with it. But I'm the kind of person who likes to be alone sometimes. And that's where I can. And it's wonderful. I walk the dog, too, and I find it wonderful on a Saturday morning, no one else is up yet. I used to before, as well, when I didn't have an iPod, so I went for walks, but now I can go for a walk with music, I've got that, too (12: Female, 43 years).

This woman describes being alone with the music as wonderful: "the music is inside me in a way [...] and then I'm all alone with it." Bringing the music while walking the dog is further described as heightening the experience; she appreciates being alone with the dog, and experiences that music adds value to this situation. Moreover, this woman talks about the music being more 'clear' when she listens to it on headsets. Another woman says that she hears more of the details in the music when she listens to it on headsets:

*Do you think there is any difference - I mean the experience itself, between listening on loudspeakers and on a headset?*

Yes, I think so, certainly. Firstly, it's more private, because everything is shut off. Moreover I don't hear so much from outside, because I have quite good headsets that shut off noise. But when listening on loudspeakers, I don't feel that I actually notice all the details. [...]

Because then the music becomes more general, while here [holds her hands over her ears] I notice everything, each tiny detail, everything, all the ups and downs, all the instruments, too. While on the loudspeakers I may not hear the use of a trumpet. If you know what I mean. Here I hear everything.

*Yes, as then the music comes much closer in a way?*

Yes, or it becomes more detailed, because you get everything directly in, right? (7: Female, 24 years).

While a number of the informants enjoy listening to music on headsets, others express that the quality of the sound is unsatisfactory and can sometimes reduce the experience of the music. One informant (male, 27 years) prefers to share the music with others, and therefore likes better to listen on loudspeakers. Also, he feels more liberated when he listens to music on speakers, he says, because he is free of the MP3 player and all its wires. Whereas this man likes to share the music experience with other people, most of the subjects appreciate the ability of listening to their private music and thus creating their own, personal space.<sup>39</sup>

## 5.5 CHOICE OF MUSIC

One of the most prominent traits of the MP3 player is that there often is room for a vast amount of music on a small player. This is one of the qualities of the player that the subjects appreciate the most:

I have a lot of music on it. One of the best things when I got the iPod player, or when I first started with an MP3 player, was that I could have so much variety. As before there was often so much stress because I had to carry with me a whole CD holder, because I didn't know what I felt like listening to later on during the day, when I was on my way home or something. I think also it was wonderful that there was so much space that I could have a wide variety of music. Also, music that I don't know, I think it's good to have, because then I can, if I feel like it, listen to new music. So in that way I have a lot of, there's a lot of different stuff in there (1: Female, 26 years).

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<sup>39</sup> More on personal space in chapter 7.

The new technology makes it easier to discover new music, because one easily can download songs from the Internet, instead of physically going to the music shop to buy a CD. One subject (male, 44 years) expresses that this makes it easier to get to know new artists, and thus expand one's musical horizon. Another important aspect is that the MP3 player gives the subjects time to listen to the music:

If you are to become familiar with new music, you often need to give it some time, and listen to it properly. And that's the possibility the MP3 player provides. So I think that allows me to listen to much more varied music, and several artists and types of music than I did before the MP3 player became such big part of my life. It contributes to expand my musical horizon (4: Male, 44 years).

The MP3 player enables the listeners to listen to music whenever they want. Consequently, the subjects spend more time listening to music after the advent of the player. As expressed by the informant above, this allows him to explore more varied music and thus expand his musical horizon. Even if they already have several gigabytes of music, some of the subjects wish for MP3 players with even larger capacity:

[...] I think it's rather important to have a medium with which you can listen to music, and I need the type of MP3 player that has a lot of space. I think sixty [gigabyte] is far too little, as I have after all 300 gigabytes [on the computer]. So sixty won't do, because I like to get all the music there together, to be able to, if I, I know that I have such wide range of moods sometimes that if I don't hit it on the spot, I become a little grouchy (7: Female, 24 years).

This woman explains that she needs music to match her emotions, and the vast choice of music enables her to listen to music according to her large spectrum of emotions. Her experience is however that 60 gigabytes of music might not be enough, and she wishes she could carry her entire collection of 300 gigabytes of music with her at all times. Another subject feels that she has enough music on the MP3 player to deal with her different emotions, and appreciates the ability to easily bring a large collection of different music:

I'm really glad to have the possibility to have so much different music. If I had to have a Discman, I think I would have been obliged to go

around with a CD package with different music. For that's what's so practical, that you don't need one CD with one kind of music. You can in a way have all the music you need. So if something unexpected happens, you can manage it in a way (10: Female, 18 years).

This woman appreciates the ability her large collection of music provides her to find music that meets her desires at all times. Consequently, she can always find the right music to help her manage her different needs.

### 5.5.1 Finding the 'right' song

Even if the subjects have several gigabytes of different musical genres on their MP3 players, they usually spend time on selecting the music they put on their MP3 player, and some of them never delete music from their player once they have put it there:

I'm very picky about what I choose. What I upload in my iPod, in my opinion, subjectively, is very good. So the music there, what is put in stays in generally. It's not like I keep on changing it all the time. I've never emptied my iPod. It's only the small things that get changed. But now, eight gigabytes, and what's that? About six thousand songs. There's space for that (5: Female, 27 years).

The subjects are particular about the music they listen to, and articulate that there is a 'correct' and a 'wrong' type of music for every occasion. They usually choose music according to their mood, and there is a 'correct' music for the mood they are in. They do not always know what they want to listen to before they press play, but they do know what they do *not* want to listen to. Often, they figure out what to listen to while they are listening. This means that they start to listen to a specific kind of music, and if they conceive the music as 'correct' according to their mood and state of mind, they continue listening to this music. If they perceive the music as 'wrong', however, they are quick to change it. In this way, they can try out different kinds of music until they find the music they want to listen to at that particular time:

Sometimes I have no idea at all what I want to listen to, but I know I want to listen to something, so then I put on random, and so it does it for me. And other times I choose random and it goes through song

after song, and then number five is just right and then I continue on that, then I find the album or that artist and then I just continue with that. Because, sometimes I just don't know what I want.

*But what is it that makes it feel right?*

Well, it just does, just now I have to listen to that. Or, for example, let's say that I listen to Electronics and so Alice in Chain and then to Michael Jackson and then some kind of romantic classical music. And I listen to these and they are not quite right, I like them all, after all they are in my collection, but just then I wasn't in that mood. I find it a little too harsh and I'm maybe not quite Michael Jackson, it's too fussy, and then suddenly the romantic classical music comes, and it's like, ahh [pleased sigh], it was exactly what I wanted, but I didn't know it beforehand, it just comes up on its own (7: Female, 24 years).

'Correct' music is often described as music that corresponds to the mood the subject is in, or responds to her emotions in a way that 'feels right'. The subjects often search through their music collections for the correct song to match their mood:

Sometimes it's a little difficult, because in a way I have to find the feeling. That one, "oh, that one feels right, no, maybe it's the other one" [laughter]. So sometimes I go through all the albums, and then I think, "this can't be that big a deal, I can just choose a track". But sometimes I feel it's right in a certain situation and it's like different types of situations. And I've wondered about that, why it is like that? "No, I feel that it's right to listen to a little more rhythm, no now I've to have something slow, or now I have to listen to some folk music, or classical maybe?" And it simply depends somewhat on my mood (12: Female, 43 years).

It appears that the informants are particular about what they listen to, and they can spend time on finding the 'correct' song. Even if they have a vast amount of varied musical genres stored on their MP3 players, it is not insignificant *what* they listen to at any specific time.

### **5.5.2 Diverse musical tastes**

It is perhaps typical for the 'new' generation of listeners to listen to several different musical styles and genres. As mentioned earlier, the accessibility

of music via the Internet, as well as the large disk capacity on many MP3 players, makes it easier to explore and listen to different types of music, perhaps leading to an expansion of one's musical taste. The impression I get from talking to my informants is that they listen to all kinds of music, from pop and rock, folk music, metal, and jazz, to classical music and opera:

You may have understood it, but my music taste spans over almost all genres. Some I reject, and the various genres of music fit in the different situations. So I listen to everything from classical to opera and all the variants thereof, over to folk music and some kletzner and East European Balkan and through to Norwegian and Swedish Ballads, all the way to Black Metal of almost the worse kind. And all these I use actively according to different moods (11: Male, 37 years).

This man states that he listens to a wide variety of music, and I get the same impression from the other informants. They do not seem to be 'faithful' to one genre, although music from the popular genre appears to be the dominating genre. When this informant is so explicit about his diverse musical taste, it may be that he tries to impress me, the music researcher. Expressing one's musical taste can be seen as an identity marker (Bonde, 2009; Ruud, 1997b; Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001), and having a diverse taste may be seen as a status symbol. However, I did not ask the informants directly about which music they listened to, but still understood that they all listened to a variety of music. Different music appears to meet different personal needs.

### 5.5.3 Music's 'effects'

DeNora (1999, 2000) points out that music does not 'work' on people as a stimulus, but function as a means for, e.g. regulating moods, energy levels or focus because of the way individuals orientate to and interpret the music. The musical work itself therefore often becomes less relevant. More explicitly, DeNora (2000, p. 61) says that "the concept of musical 'work', the total work as a, or indeed *the*, meaningful unit, is mostly irrelevant". The music's 'effect' is rather related to the context where it is used, personal associations to the music and the like (DeNora, 1999, 2000, 2006; Ruud, 2008). The same music can therefore mean different things to different

listeners. Indeed, the same music can mean different things to the same listener in different situations. As one of the informants puts it: "I feel that a lot of what I listen to can be perceived very differently according to what mood I'm in" (male, 24 years). Another informant says:

I have one band which is extremely like that, if you're in a bad mood, then it can be the saddest thing in the world, we're actually talking about one and the same song which can make you cry in a second, and if you're in a good mood then it's just "yes!" It's fantastic. So it can be used in both ways. It's really great music. And it's like that with several [songs] (10: Female, 18 years).

Because the perception of music is so personal and context-dependent, I have chosen not to interrogate what specific music my informants listen to, but rather focus on how they use their music, and why they choose to listen to music in different contexts.

A vital aspect of the use of the MP3 player is that the listener herself can choose what music to listen to. She can therefore make choices about what to listen to according to her own mood and emotions, her personal needs or goals. The MP3 player is thus an empowering device that provides a high level of control over auditory experiences, as well as the experience of oneself and one's environment, which we will see in the following chapters.

## 5.6 SUMMARY

As we have seen, the MP3 player is used in most situations. The informants always bring it with them, even if they do not plan to listen to it, 'just in case'. Because of its availability and ease of use, the subjects can easily bring a vast amount of music with them at all times. In most situations, therefore, the player provides the subjects with the music they want or 'need' to listen to. Most of the subjects listen to several different types of music, ranging from classical music to heavy metal. Different types of music are commonly used to suit different moods.

I have shown that the listening experience at home differs from the experience of listening to private music outside. In addition, it appears that



listening to music on headsets is understood as a different experience from listening to music on loudspeakers. This does not necessarily mean that the music cannot have the same functions in different listening contexts. Specific for the MP3 player is however that the music is always available. Moreover, the listening experience is private, even if the listener is surrounded by other people. Listening to MP3 players is therefore often described as being in a 'bubble'.

In sum, the MP3 player empowers the informants with a high level of control over what to listen to, when to listen and where to listen.



## 6. MP3 PLAYERS AS A TECHNOLOGY OF SELF-REGULATION

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I will in this chapter aim to elucidate how the MP3 player can be used as a technology of self-regulation, both psychologically and physiologically. This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part looks into theories on self-regulation. Here, I will present definitions that mirror my understanding of what self-regulation is. This section will also shed light on why self-regulation is important, and will focus on affect regulation in particular. The following three parts interrogates the role of mobile music in cognitive regulation, affect regulation, and bodily regulation. Although I have looked into these aspects separately, I believe aspects of cognitive, bodily, and affective regulation are intertwined. I do not think thoughts or bodily reactions can be separated from mood and emotions, as I do not think mood, emotions or thoughts can be separated from bodily experiences (i.e. DeNora, 2000; Engelsrud, 2006; Grewe, Nagel, Kopiez, & Altenmüller, 2007; Lilliestam, 2009; Thayer, Newman, & McClain, 1994). For the sake of clarification, I have in this context nonetheless chosen to look into each aspect more or less separately.

## 6.1 WHAT IS SELF-REGULATION, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

As Carver (2004) points out, the term self-regulation means different things to different people. Writings on self-regulation are often concerned with destructive behaviour such as smoking, drinking, unsafe sex, drug abuse and violence (e.g. Hirschi, 2004; Hull & Slone, 2004; Sayette, 2004; Wiederman, 2004). In other words, there seem to be an emphasis on *behaviour*. In addition to this focus, however, the attention towards affect regulation has increased during the last two decades (e.g. Erber & Erber, 2000; Gross, 1998, 1999; Gross & Muñoz, 1995; Larsen, 2000; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004, 2008; Thayer, et al., 1994; Vandekerckhove, von Scheve, Ismer, Jung, & Kronast, 2008). This regulation can be said to be part of *basic regulatory processes* (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004), and it is this form of self-regulation I am concerned with.

Vohs and Baumeister (2004, p. 2) propose one definition of self-regulation as to include “any efforts by the human self to alter any of its own inner states or responses”. Schmeichel and Baumeister (2004) explicate the definition of self-regulation as the self acting on its own responses, not on itself *per se*. The goal is to alter these responses:

Self-regulation involves the self acting on itself to alter its own responses. Strictly speaking, the self does not regulate itself as a whole. Emotions and thoughts are not the self, but are felt and thought (and possibly controlled) by the self. Regulation of the self’s responses is usually initiated with the goal of achieving a desired outcome, such as improving one’s mood or avoiding an undesirable outcome (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004, p. 86).

The authors make a point that self-regulation is highly related to self-control; so much, in fact, that they use the terms interchangeably. Self-regulation can however happen automatically, and is therefore not synonymous with control. But when a subject deliberately and consciously tries to alter its responses, a certain amount of self-control is essential for a successful outcome.<sup>40</sup> Gross (1999, p. 558) points to a favoured distinction

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<sup>40</sup> Control, not least the *experience* of control, is an important aspect of MP3 use (Bull, 2001b, 2005, 2007). This includes both the experience of control over oneself and the experience of control over

between conscious and unconscious regulatory processes, but believe it is more useful to “think of a continuum of processes that vary in the degree to which they are controlled, effortful, and conscious versus automatic, effortless, and unconscious”. It seems that the informants in this study can use music to regulate and control their moods, emotions, thoughts and energy levels. But it also seems that they can use the music on the MP3 players unconsciously to regulate their responses. When the regulation happens unconsciously, the aspect of control becomes less apparent.

My understanding of self-regulation is based on the mentioned definitions, and encompasses controlling thoughts (including guiding thoughts onto a particular track, focusing on certain topics, disconnecting and shutting off thoughts), regulating moods and emotions (including maintaining, enhancing, altering and venting affects) and regulating bodily energy (either increasing or decreasing energy, including preparing for sleep).

The importance of self-regulatory behaviour concerns self and identity, health issues, social aspects and culture (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004). Many of these aspects are related to *behaviour*, however, such as alcoholism, eating and exercising habits, crime, and so on. When it comes to affect regulation, which is my main concern, several authors call attention to its relatedness to (mental) health issues. Back in 1995, Gross and Muñoz argued that regulation of emotions was a crucial element in mental health (Gross & Muñoz, 1995). Later, other research has pursued this claim. Larsen and Prizmic (2004) point out that ineffective regulation of negative affect probably is a significant factor when it comes to explaining depression and mood disorders. This view is supported by Grewal and Salovey (2006), who posit a relationship between the ability to manage one’s emotions (or emotional intelligence – defined as the ability to perceive, understand and manage emotions) and mental health. Put differently, there seems to be a relationship between *low* emotional intelligence and some forms of mental illnesses (Grewal & Salovey, 2006, p. 113). In their own words, “there may be reason to believe that managing emotions might also be extremely

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social interaction and the environment. Or, as Bull (2007, p. 3) puts it: aesthetic, cognitive and social control. I will return to this matter in chapter 7.

important in maintaining good health” (Grewal & Salovey, 2006, p. 114). Referring to several other studies, Fave (2006) also concludes that the capacity of regulating and understanding one’s own emotions is essential when it comes to health and well-being. Larsen and Prizmic (2004) go on to claim that affect regulation is crucial for subjective well-being. The regulation strategies used to maintain subjective well-being consists of regulating positive affect and negative affect, most often by increasing positive affect and decreasing negative affect (Larsen & Prizmic, 2004).

Gross and Muñoz (1995) further make the point that emotion regulation is vital to adult function. Emotion regulation skills are fundamental in all situations; solitary or collective, public or private. “[...] when emotions become dysregulated”, they say, “it is clear that something is very wrong” (Gross & Muñoz, 1995, p. 155). Moreover, they point out that although emotion regulation in adulthood is so pervasive that it seems to be taken for granted, we must not overlook its importance in general mental health.

### **6.1.1 Affect regulation**

Mood and emotions often contain important information for the individual who experiences them. It is important to feel both joy and sorrow to evolve, and affects are an important source of feedback:

If living a good life is living a life in which one learns and evolves, it is necessary to feel both the joy that accompanies hard-won success and the unpleasant sting of regret that often follows bad decisions. Emotions are therefore an invaluable source of information and feedback (Fridja, 1996; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1998) (Grewal & Salovey, 2006, p. 104).

However, these affective states can sometimes last long after their function is completed (that is, the feedback has been perceived), and consequently become dysfunctional. “The ability to self-regulate affective states – the ability to hang up after getting the message – is thus a crucial part of effective and adaptive psychological functioning”, says Larsen (2000, p. 129). Larsen and Prizmic (2004, p. 40) point out that there are several definitions of affect regulation, but that most of them include the concept that “in the process of monitoring and evaluating affective states,

individuals take action either to maintain or to change (enhance or suppress) the intensity of affect, or to prolonged [sic.] or shorten the affective episode". People find different tactics and strategies for affect regulation, among which music listening can be one such tactic.

According to Gross (1999, p. 556), emotions and mood are part of the larger affective family that also includes stress responses and emotion episodes. It can be hard to separate mood and emotions, and I have found it difficult to do just that. This is in part due to the fact that there are overlaps in the way we speak about emotions and mood in everyday language, and partly due to the way the informants have talked about emotions, feelings and mood interchangeably.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, there have been attempts of explanatory definitions. Emotions can be defined as relatively short and intense reactions to goal oriented changes in the environment (Juslin, 2009; Juslin & Laukka, 2004). Moods usually last longer than emotions, and are less intense. In addition, moods are not oriented towards a fixed object or incident, whereas emotions mobilise the body in a reaction linked to a specific phenomenon. While moods inform us about our inner states, our emotions inform us about the environment and external incidents (Juslin & Laukka, 2004; Larsen, 2000). Larsen and Prizmic offer this clarification:

If the feeling tone is strong, has a clear cause, and is the focus of conscious awareness, then we use the term "emotion" to refer to those feelings. However, if the feeling tone is mild, does not have a clear cause or referent, and is in the background of awareness, then we use the term "mood" (Larsen & Prizmic, 2004, p. 40).<sup>42</sup>

Among the members of the affect family is also emotion episodes. Whereas emotions are relatively short lived, emotion episodes are more extended, and include the social context as well as the sequence of responses as they emerge (Gross, 1998). I have chosen not to distinguish between emotions and emotion episodes in this context. The way I see it, distinctions between

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<sup>41</sup> In Norwegian, there are two different words that are translated into 'mood' in English; "stemning" and "humør". The different meanings of these two words can most easily be explained by two examples where one would use the two words separately: 1. "The mood [stemning] was set with candlelight", 2. "I am in a bad mood [humør]". These two words have also been used interchangeably by my informants.

<sup>42</sup> For more on common features and differences between mood and emotions, see e.g. Larsen (2000) and Gross (1998).

emotions, emotion episodes and moods may be more obvious in a theoretical context than in applied settings. Emotion episodes seem to be something in between emotions and moods, especially when it comes to duration. This makes it harder to differentiate between these branches of the affect family in real life, and is probably also the reason why my informants speak of emotions and moods interchangeably.

Even if I have tried to differ between moods and emotions, I recognize that I have not been able to keep the two completely apart, mostly due to the reasons stated above. Because there are some distinctions between moods and emotions, I have nonetheless divided the regulation of these into two categories, rather than gathering the different strategies under the (within this context) more general term 'affect regulation'.

#### **6.1.1.1 Mood regulation**

Larsen describes a model of mood regulation that he compares to a thermostat:

[...] a desired temperature is set on the thermostat (the set point) and current temperature in the house is continuously monitored and compared to the set point. If the comparator detects discrepancies then temperature-regulating mechanisms are called into action (either heating or air conditioning). The goal is to reduce the discrepancy between the set point and the current temperature (Larsen, 2000, p. 132).

Larsen assumes that mood regulation functions in the same way, only it is mood, not temperature, which is being controlled. For this model to make sense, people need to have a desired mood to which they can compare and adjust their current mood. When incongruities appear, they begin regulating their mood. However, this model assumes that the regulatory processes are conscious. Larsen calls the model a "control theory model of mood regulation". As mentioned above, self-control and self-regulation are often treated as synonymous. However, I am not sure that these processes are always conscious. Even if individuals do consciously make use of self-regulatory practices, I do not believe that they always have a desired mood, a so-called set-point, which they regulate their mood towards. Rather, it seems that my informants can figure out what mood they want to be in by



searching through music for what 'feels right'. That being said, some of the subjects speak about conscious processes for changing a current mood into a desired one. One of the informants says: "I know what to do to get into certain moods" (female, 27 years).

#### **6.1.1.2 Emotion regulation**

Gross (1998, p. 275) defines emotion regulation as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions". He points out that the regulatory processes can be automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious. The processes include increasing, maintaining, and decreasing negative and positive emotions. Gross (1998, 1999) claims that emotion regulatory processes and emotion generative processes are closely intertwined because adult emotions are almost always regulated. Although he upholds the necessity of distinguishing between emotion and emotion regulation, it may be that I speak of both interchangeably because of the close relationship and the difficulty of telling the two apart (Gross, 1998).

Juslin (2009, p. 131) claims that "[p]eople use music to change emotions, to release emotions, to match their current emotion, to enjoy or comfort themselves, and to relieve stress". In their questionnaire study of 141 music listeners, Juslin and Laukka (2004, p. 231) found that 49% of the participants often used music to change their mood (seldom = 43%), 67% often chose music to match their mood (seldom = 28%), 61% often vented their emotions through listening to music (seldom = 33%) and 59% of the participants often had music evoke strong, emotional memories (seldom = 37%). These results confirm that music listening does indeed play an active part in affect regulation. The connection between emotions and music has come into the limelight of music research in the last decade (DeNora, 2006; Gabrielsson, 2001; Juslin, 2009; Juslin & Sloboda, 2001a, 2010b; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Sloboda, 2005b; Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001; van Goethem & Sloboda, 2008; Vist, 2009). Nonetheless, the focus on musical emotions is relatively new, and Juslin and Laukka raise an important question: "[...] can we afford to ignore the possible health benefits that a better understanding of musical emotions may offer?" (2004, p. 217).

### 6.1.2 Music and self-regulation

When Ruud (2008) talk about musical self-care, he relates this to how people use music in their everyday lives, and explains that people can use new technologies such as MP3 players to take care of bodily conditions and energies, emotions, cognitive orientations, memories, moods, physical and psychological well-being (Ruud, 2008, p. 83). It is natural to assume that to take care of these aspects include self-regulation. More explicitly, Ruud says: "This musical self-care is about directing the music towards both psychological, bodily and social states that we wish to regulate" (Ruud, 2008, p. 83, my translation). DeNora (2000, 2003) also makes a pronounced connection between self-regulation and self-care. She writes: "One of the first things music does is to help actors to shift mood or energy level, as perceived situations dictate, or as part of the 'care of self'" (2000, p. 53). She goes on to explain that her informants use music for different kinds of self-regulation, such as achieving, sustaining or increasing certain emotions or levels of bodily energy, as well as "moving out of dispreferred states", such as stress or fatigue. Thus, self-regulation must be said to be an important aspect of the care of self.

It is not only the subjects in the present study who use music as a technology of self-regulation. DeNora (2000, p. 49) point out that in her research, "[t]he use of music in private life and the study of this use turned out to be one of the most important features of the constitution and regulation of self". As I will look into below, music has proved to be a successful strategy for affect regulation, both in studies that focused on mood-regulation in general and in studies focusing on affect regulation with music (Thayer, et al., 1994; van Goethem & Sloboda, 2008). The function of music as a technology of self-regulation is thus not restricted to the use of MP3 players. Much of the results presented in this chapter are most likely similar to the way people use music also in other contexts. This shows that the MP3 player is perhaps not characteristic in the way people appropriate music as self-regulation (e.g. DeNora, 1999, 2000; van Goethem, 2010). It is nonetheless interesting that the MP3 player can *also* be used as a medium for cognitive, affective and bodily regulation, and that people can attend to themselves in this way also with the help of mobile, private music. Moreover, the MP3 player allows the user to bring her personal music with

her in all contexts. It became clear during the interviews that the MP3 player takes on a specific function in creating private space for the listeners, thus enabling them to focus on their own cognitive, emotional or bodily states. This is indeed an important characteristic of the MP3 player, which allows the listeners to attend to, manage and regulate themselves by the help of music also outside of home.

In the following, I will present data that illuminates how the MP3 player can function as a technology of self-regulation. First, I look into the role of mobile music in cognitive regulation. The second part interrogates the function of music in affect regulation. Finally, the third part sheds light on the relationship between music and bodily regulation. As I will argue, all these aspects are linked together.

## 6.2 COGNITIVE REGULATION

Listening to private, personal music on MP3 players can function as a strategy for introspection; the informants explain that they can shut off the world and turn their attention to themselves. Bull (2000) also notes that by drowning out the sounds from the surroundings, mental space can be created for the listener where her thoughts can take a more conscious role (Bull, 2000). Further, music can be used to take control over one's thoughts. My informants sometimes use their personal music to guide their thoughts in a specific direction, onto a particular track, or to focus on certain topics. One of the informants explains how she can use music to get her thoughts onto a topic she feels she should think about:

Typically, if you think about something good, but sad, that's maybe when you think mostly about the music. Then if you want to think about something else perhaps a little sad, but at the same time pleasant, but aren't in the mood to think about it, you know that certain parts of the music will bring you straight where you should be in order to think those thoughts (5: Female, 27 years).

Here, music is used as a help to get onto the right 'track' in order to think about a specific topic. The music helps the subject to focus and to stay focused. She knows which music she needs to listen to as to get onto this

specific train of thought. Hence, her knowledge of how her music works for her enables her to take control over her thoughts. In this sense, music can help the subject work through different matters. The fact that this subject has a personal history with the music makes it possible for her to use it in this way. Thus, certain associations and memories that are brought forth by the music allow the subject to steer her thoughts in a specific direction.

In other situations, the informants say that they can use the music on their MP3 players as a diversion from thoughts. The music can take focus off certain disturbing or tiring thoughts, and can therefore function as a desired distraction. As a controlled diversion, one of my informants explains how she can use music to guide her thoughts away from stressful matters:

[...] If I feel muddled in the head, If I've got a lot to think about or some dilemma that keeps on returning, which I don't seem able to get rid of, then I use music in order to [...] try and manage things a bit. Try to focus a little on something else, and concentrate on other things (1: Female, 26 years).

In this situation, the music is used to guide thoughts away from certain issues. In other situations, the music can more directly block thoughts. As one subject puts it: "If something has happened that you don't want to think about, then you put on some music" (female, 18 years). Another informant explains the important role of his MP3 player in interrupting negative trains of thoughts, diverting him from destructive rumination:

Other times [music] can be a distraction, when you deliberately put on something or other because you are in a negative spiral. Think negative thoughts, feel that things are going badly, and think about all the things you have to do, should have done, pressed for time. Then it's good to be able to tune into something that takes over, guides the thoughts, so to say. So that you come out at the other end thinking that everything will probably sort itself out (6: Male, 24 years).

In this example, the music takes on a convincing function as a resource in cognitive regulation. When rumination becomes dysfunctional, as described by this subject, distraction might be the best option for a positive turnaround. Larsen and Prizmic point out that distraction can work as a strategy for affect regulation precisely by interrupting rumination:

To the extent that distraction is effective for affect regulation, it mostly likely [sic.] works by interrupting or preventing rumination. [...] Being able to control one's own thoughts through volitional effort to avoid thinking about some unpleasant event is the way to avoid rumination. Whereas this is often easier said than done, perhaps one approach to short-circuiting rumination is to engage, at least temporarily, in distraction (Larsen & Prizmic, 2004, p. 44).

When it comes to using music for regulation of psychological states of being, Ruud says that among other things, “[i]t can be to divert from painful thoughts, ease anxiety by cognitively direct thoughts towards something else” (Ruud, 2008, p. 84, my translation). This can lead to bodily relaxation, he says, which can promote an experience of peace and harmony. Being able to disrupt destructive chains of thoughts might therefore be essential for daily functioning and well-being. Listening to music may be a valuable distraction in such situations, as shown by my informants. Interestingly, distraction also appeared as an important strategy for affect regulation in van Goethem's (2010) study.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, it seems that distraction is an important strategy in such regulation for many individuals, and that music – in this case mobile music – may be an important tactic for this purpose.

It should be noted that it is not always *music* that takes focus off disturbing thoughts. One of my informants mentions that he might as well listen to the radio when he wants a diversion from his thoughts:

But then you might just as well have something like radio chat shows, some music, just to have something to listen to, so as to prevent your thoughts from spinning around, if you've gotten hung up in some problem that keeps whirring around in your head or which you can't avoid (3: Male, 44 years).

In other words, it may not be the music *itself* that functions as distraction. It may simply work because it is something on which the subject can focus her attention. It is possible that watching television or talking to a friend is just as effective as music. However, as found by van Goethem (2010), compared to other tactics, music listening was the only tactic used regularly. Tactics such as taking a bath, reading or watching television were only used rarely

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<sup>43</sup> See section 2.3.2 (music and affect regulation).

or sometimes. Thus, music listening appears to be a highly available and commonly used tactic for strategies such as distraction.

### 6.2.1 Music to unwind

Several of the informants describe music as an efficient tool to unwind, especially from work. One of the subjects explains:

*But since we are now on the subject of thoughts, you mentioned that you distract yourself from your thoughts; do you use music in this way?*  
Yes, I use it to get my thoughts away from work, unwind, because I use a long time to manage to wind down. [Laughter.] Especially when I come home and I haven't let everything go, I have to find an excuse to be alone a little. I go to the loo or the bathroom or just take a shower just to be alone for a while, to relax. And in fact that's what music does, that's where music is incredibly effective. I don't want to play music once I'm at home, as I enter, because there's so much noise in the house, kids and dog and husband. I will never put it on, because I have to have calm to listen to music. But that's why it's so genial when I bicycle home, or walk home in the winter, to put it on, because in a way it clears things up a little (12: Female, 43 years).

It comes to light in this quote that also other tactics can be used in order to unwind, for example taking a shower. But, it is said music is "*incredibly effective*". Additionally, the MP3 player plays a particular part for this woman, because it helps her to disconnect from work *before* she enters home. She would not use music at home, she says, because there are so many other things going on – and she needs to be alone to be able to regulate her thoughts. The MP3 player has therefore offered her a quick and efficient tactic for the purpose of unwinding, which she perceives as a positive remedy:

In a way, you become happy then.  
*So things seem more positive?*

Yes, you forget in a way, when you listen, when you have good music in your ears you manage in a way not to think about that meeting at work that went really badly, or the things you didn't manage to do. Because it's often these kinds of things I ponder on as I bicycle home,

and in a way, music somewhat dulls these thoughts and maybe make me unwind and look around me (12: Female, 43 years).

This woman points out that she is not in the mood to listen to the radio when she leaves work. She says that she likes to listen to the news when she gets home, “but not as soon as I leave work. Then I only want something pleasant that takes me away from there, so that I can unwind”. The music seems to offer something pleasurable that does not demand anything of the listener in terms of specific attention, whereas talk on the radio or the news would require attention, and perhaps also an opinion or attitude towards what is being said. Another subject also says that she needs a diversion from work when she leaves the office, and that she uses music consciously for this purpose:

*Speaking of thoughts, do you use music in that context, to manage them in a way, to block off or to..?*

Yes, I use it for blocking off, as I said, particularly after work I need to let off steam, and I use music to steer my thoughts to get into another mood and think about something else.

*Is it because music simply works as a distraction for your thoughts, or does the music remind you of something else, if you understand the difference?*

(Pause.) It can be both, I think. It can be both distracting, that I simply become engrossed in something else. And it can cause an association with other things. More like thinking about completely other things. But mostly I think it's a kind of relaxation in a way, it's like you pull out the plug from your thoughts and let other things take over (9: Female, 37 years).

Listening to mobile music seems to be an efficient strategy for “pulling the plug” on ruminating thoughts concerning work. The music puts the listener in a more pleasant state and offers recreation once she leaves the office, before she enters home. This use of music has also been compared to meditative strategies, as we shall see in the coming section.

## 6.2.2 Music as meditation

Interestingly, several of the informants talk about music listening as a form of meditation. For example, this woman relates the way she uses music as a distraction from work to meditation:

I have a particular need to unwind after work. And that's when it's great to just plug in some music on the way home, that makes me completely relax and takes me away from thoughts about work, over to something else. So it becomes a meditative way to..., yes (9: Female, 37 years).

She goes on to say that she has sometimes used music *as* meditation, as a way of relaxing. Another informant also claims that he can use some types of music as meditation, and explains how this works:

It has perhaps a kind of meditative form – music – at least certain types of music can be used as a kind of meditation.

*Yes? How does that work?*

Well, it... (pause). One of the techniques of meditation is that you want to – when the thoughts come you have to feel the thought, look at it, and then let it go. And because thoughts bubble up in our heads all the time, they gradually stop coming because you have trained yourself enough through the meditation process to be only in the present all the time. With music, instead of you having to create the internal dialogue, you can let it create the internal dialogue, but it becomes external instead, and in a way you can allow the music to take over and well, look at the world in another way, when you listen to music (8: Male, 27 years).

It is important to note that the way these subjects use music may not be meditation as others define it. Nonetheless, they remark on a resemblance between certain situations of music listening and forms of meditation. In their article on meditation and positive psychology, Shapiro, Schwartz and Santerre (2005) refer to a definition of meditation by Shapiro: “Meditation refers to a family of techniques which have in common a conscious attempt to focus attention in a non-analytical way and an attempt not to dwell on discursive, ruminating thought” (Shapiro 1980:14, in Shapiro, et al., 2005, p. 632). We see some similarities between this definition of meditation and the way my informants use music. As I have shown above, the subjects can



use music to focus their attention, as well as a distraction from rumination. This is echoed in Shapiro's definition of meditation, as he states that it is "a conscious attempt to focus attention" and "an attempt not to dwell on discursive, ruminating thought". It therefore makes sense when several of my informants make a connection between music listening and meditation. Shapiro et al (2005) focus on the positive aspects of meditation, and conclude that "[m]editation appears to enhance physiological, psychological, and transpersonal well-being" (2005, p. 638). More precisely, they claim the following effects:

Specific enhancements observed include physiological rest and increased happiness, acceptance, sense of coherence, stress hardiness, empathy, and self-actualization (Shapiro, et al., 2005, p. 638).

These results come from studies concerned with meditation done over a period of time. Listening to music, as described by my informants, is usually not put into a system over time in the same way. Nonetheless, if music listening can assist to focus attention or help not to dwell on ruminating thought, it might perhaps have some of the same positive outcomes as meditation.

### **6.2.3 Music for concentration**

Although several of the informants say that music would be a distraction or disturbance when they work or read, some of them claim that listening to music helps them concentrate. Music assists these subjects to focus mainly because it blocks out other sounds. Even if they are in a quiet environment, small sounds from the surroundings distract them from their work:

I think [music] helps me concentrate. It can be hard for me to concentrate if it's completely silent. If I have to sit and read something I hear every little sound. Therefore, I always put on music when I read (3: Male, 44 years).

One of the other subjects explains that it is better to listen to on-going music than to be disturbed by irregular sounds from the surroundings:

If I have to sit in a reading room I have to put on some music. [...] It's rather strange. It's a quiet place, but you hear 'cough, cough', 'swish' [pages turning, keyboards clicking]. In other words, you become distracted. But if you have music on constantly, music becomes the background. There is a balance instead of some strange sounds on and off. In addition, I feel I can concentrate better when I listen to it (7: Female, 24 years).

My youngest informant (female, 18 years) says that she always listens to music when she is doing schoolwork, unless she needs to pay attention to the teacher. If she does not listen to music, she becomes less focused, and drifts off to surf the Internet and such things, she says. She finds it easier to concentrate with her iPod on, both because her peers chatting easily distract her, and because it helps her to get into a 'working-mode':

It's a little like sitting at school for example and knowing that I feel like working with a special thing. Then I can put on a special type of music with which I know I work well, which is perhaps not so loud and not too melancholic to provoke feelings, only something neutral, good music. So that I get into it a bit [...]

*You feel music can help you concentrate?*

Uhum.

*Is it because you then block out all other sounds out there, or is it, do you know what it is that makes it that way?*

It's definitely because I block out the other sounds, but also because I think, you get, at least if you have the right kind of music, you get into that mood that, it's a little like working out to music I guess, in a way, you get into the rhythm.

*You get into a working state?*

Yes (10: Female, 18 years).

While these informants find music as a help to concentrate, others say that they never listen to music when they read or when they need to focus on work: "No, I simply become absorbed in the music. [...] I can't manage to have my iPod on and read", says one man (43 years). He is in unison with a younger woman, who says that she becomes too preoccupied with the music, and begins to interpret and analyse it. "Like a lot of people say that they can sit at home and do their lessons or stuff with music on. I never could've done that", she says (female, 27 years). It is obvious that people

use music for work in very individual ways. This was also apparent in DeNora's (2000) research. She explains that music helped some of the respondents in her study to focus and concentrate:

In short, music was used here to reproduce an aesthetic environment of 'working' and to circumscribe within that environment 'where the mind can go'. One literally stays tuned, through such practices, to a mode of concentrated focus, to the mental task at hand (DeNora, 2000, p. 60).

But, not all of DeNora's respondents would use music as an aid to focus. Especially the respondents who were elderly or professional musicians would never use music as background to anything. This picture is a bit more blurred in the present study. It is true that the informants who have studied or worked with music in some way say that they would be distracted by the music. But there is also one subject who used to be an active piano player, who now can use music to stay focused in some environments, but not others. And other subjects, who have never studied or worked with music, say they would never listen to music when they need to concentrate. Simply put, it seems that different people orient to music in different ways, and therefore use it differently when it comes to work and focus.

Lesiuk (2005) has shown that participants from computer companies performed better on tasks when they were listening to music than when they were not. She explains the increase in work performance by an increase in pleasant mood induced by the music: "When music evokes a pleasant mood and an increased arousal state, participants perform better at non-musical tasks" (Lesiuk, 2005, p. 173). It seems, in other words, that music listening might improve work performance, at least when the employees choose music themselves, as they did in Lesiuk's study. This study was conducted in one type of work environment, where tasks required creative output, and Lesiuk believes that the positive affect evoked by music listening increased performance on this kind of tasks (Lesiuk, 2005, p. 185). In addition to individual differences, the type of attention needed for the task is most probably decisive for whether music improves or hinders work performance. For example, some of my informants choose

to use music when they do routine work, but not when they need to concentrate, as explained by this informant:

*But is it because music helps you concentrate, that you think it helps in a way?*

Yes, sometimes. I don't use music every day, but it's a bit like that, it helps me more maybe when the tasks are a bit boring. In fact that's when I put on some music. When I'm really concentrating on a difficult task, I need to have almost complete silence. But when I know what to do, I just have to sit down and write, then I put on music (8: Male, 27 years).

Music seems to accompany a number of people to work, either to routine work which would otherwise be perceived as 'boring', or to more mentally challenging work as to enhance concentration. In accordance with Lesiuk's (2005) findings, North and Hargreaves (2008) also point to research results that indicate that listening to music one likes in the workplace improves one's mood and job satisfaction as well as performance on repetitive tasks.

In sum, it seems that mobile, private music can function as a tactic for different kinds of cognitive regulation. The fact that the music is private is probably an asset because it becomes an aid in creating a private space for the listener where she is more able to focus. The ability to carry the mobile music along in different circumstances is also beneficial as the listener can bring the music to school or work, as well as other situations where she feels the need to focus, divert from thoughts, or relax. For the subjects in the present study, it seems that the MP3 player can take on an active role in the subjects' cognitive regulation, and also enhance their sense of cognitive control. This control is important because it helps the subjects divert from rumination and destructive chains of thought.

## 6.3 AFFECT REGULATION

### 6.3.1 Mood regulation

The informants in the present study describe music and the MP3 player as efficient tools in regulating moods. One of the subjects says that she “uses [music] as a tool to get into the mood I want to be in” (female, 27 years). Another informant tries to envision her every day without her MP3 player:

It would have been...if I didn't have the MP3 player, I could of course have music at home or somewhere, but the choice to listen to the music *I* like wouldn't be there. And then I'd have to find other methods of getting into different moods, which isn't easy. It's *very* effective with music, so there's a great difference between using music to get into a mood and using other means (9: Female, 37 years).

This woman states that music is more effective than other affect regulation tactics, and that there is a “great difference” between music and other regulation tactics. This agrees with van Goethem's (2010) findings, which showed that music was used more often than any other regulation tactic. She explains the frequent use of music listening for affect regulation in the high accessibility of music and the consistent successful outcomes.

One of my informants explains that she can use the music on her MP3 player to create a ‘private room’, where she can control her mood without being influenced by the mood of the environment she is in:

Often, you can be somewhere where people have a – or there is a kind of atmosphere in the room, either because there are people there or there's something with the place. Then you can use music like that, to take control, create your own little private room.

*Do you find that you can pull back from your surroundings with music, or how is it?*

Yes, I think so. Absolutely. Yes, it's a bit like that. You simply separate yourself from your surroundings. Both, when it comes to thoughts and moods and feelings – a way to isolate yourself (1: Female, 26 years).

This subject uses music to control her own state of being precisely by isolating herself from her surroundings. She says: “at least I feel that I can control more the impressions and things I get from my surroundings by having an MP3 player, because then I can decide a bit the mood with which I want to meet the world.” She describes the music as an ‘armour’ against impressions, but explains that it is vital to fill this ‘private room’ with a specific something:

*Is it because it [music] helps you focus, or how should I say, blocking off your surroundings? Is it therefore?*

I think it’s more like it becomes kind of internal, it becomes more like, a bit in order to block off things that are happening around me out there, but it’s not really that important. But then I have to fill it up with something when I’ve blocked people out. And then in a way that’s what becomes important, that I’m filled with feelings I want to have, instead of being filled with other things. It’s not that I want something else to focus on necessarily, but that I want to hold consciously on to a feeling for example, or to be drawn into a mood. (1: Female, 26 years).

This woman describes how she uses her MP3 player to block out other people and things that are happening around her. In this sense, she creates her own, private bubble with the music. However, she says that more important than blocking out her surroundings is the role of music in creating feelings in her. The fact that her surroundings are blocked off when she listens to her MP3 player is indeed an important factor in her mood regulation, because she avoids “being filled with other things”. Thus, instead of being affected by her environment, music enables this woman to “hold on to a feeling” or be “drawn into a mood”. In this way, the MP3 player and mobile music heightens her levels of control and enables her to regulate her mood according to her own wishes and needs.

People make use of several different tactics and strategies for mood regulation. Some examples are to work out, eat, call a friend, take a shower, watch TV or go shopping (Thayer, et al., 1994).<sup>44</sup> In the study of mood

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<sup>44</sup> These actions are termed *tactics* by van Goethem (2010), but Thayer et al (1994) refer to them as *strategies*. In general, I have chosen to use van Goethem’s GSTM framework (goal, strategy, tactic, mechanism) for affect regulation (see section 2.3.2), but when I refer to Thayer et al, I use their vocabulary, and therefore refer to music listening as an affect regulation strategy.

regulation carried out by Thayer et al., music appeared as an unexpected successful strategy. The participants in the study often used music as a method for mood regulation, and it was indicated to be among the most successful strategies in changing a bad mood, increasing energy levels and in reducing tensions (Thayer, et al., 1994). In her study on mood regulation and music, van Goethem (2010; 2008) has shown that most of the participants used music often or very often consciously to regulate mood. Most of the participants consciously regulated their mood on a daily or weekly basis, and most of them used music equally often or more often than other regulation tactics (van Goethem & Sloboda, 2008). It seems, therefore, that music can function as an effective and successful tactic for mood regulation. The respondents in DeNora's research also used music consciously as an approach to regulate mood and emotions. Almost all of her respondents used music to "get in the mood" (DeNora, 2000, p. 55). Mood was also a recurrent theme in all of the interviews I conducted. Evidently, music and mood are closely connected, and mood was always a factor when my informants listened to their MP3 player. Indeed, when categorizing the interview-material, 'mood' was by far the largest category. In the following, I will look into how music can function in different forms of mood-regulation; that is, music's role in sustaining, enhancing, changing, and clarifying mood.

### **6.3.1.1 Sustaining or enhancing mood**

Most of the informants say that they listen to music that matches the mood they are in. The music helps them to sustain their mood or to enhance it:

In many ways [music] somewhat confirms the mood I'm in then and there. If I've had a good day or something, I feel great, then I can listen to music and feel myself become happier on my way home, and then I'm very much like... listen to something upbeat. I often feel that it enhances [the mood] (6: Male, 24 years).

When the subjects choose music, it is usually according to their mood. They often search through the music library on their MP3 player to find music that agrees with their current mood. Even if they can also use music to change their mood, several of the informants explain that they prefer to

stay in their current state. As one informant puts it, he believes his mood has something to offer him, and therefore chooses to maintain it:

I like to be in that mood that I'm already in and use it to prepare the things that... I think my mood has something to give me, so I just try and use it for what it's worth (8: Male, 27 years).

One of the other men also states that he seldom uses music to alter his mood, but prefers instead to listen to music that either sustains or heightens the mood he is already in:

I would say that I use music to heighten it. Definitely. I can't think of any situations in which I have been in a mood, and thought "no, now I'll change it", and then put on opposite kind of music. I think about the type of music I'm in there and then; If not to heighten, at least to remain in that phase, or in that mood (11: Male, 37 years).

As mentioned, affects offer important information and feedback to the person experiencing them (Grewal & Salovey, 2006; Larsen, 2000; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004). As Larsen and Prizmic point out, the goal of affect regulation is not to short-circuit *all* affect, but rather to abbreviate the current affect after "receiving the message". The authors give an example:

For example, if a woman is angry at her spouse because he did not listen to her side in an argument, then that experience of anger should tell her that this issue is important to her. Effective anger regulation would allow her to have the information that her angry feelings convey, yet also use these feelings to energize an effective response, thereby limiting the residual maladaptive interpersonal effects that often follow in the wake of anger (Larsen & Prizmic, 2004, p. 41).

This is something the subjects in the present study obviously have understood. By listening to music that sustains their current mood, the subjects create the opportunity of coming to terms with their mood and accepting the feedback that lies in this mood. While public environments and urban surroundings can be disturbing and take focus off their internal states, blocking out these environments with the MP3 player and listening to music that matches their current mood might help them to successfully sustain a mood and perceive the information that exists in this mood.



### 6.3.1.2 Changing mood

In certain situations, some of the subjects prefer to change their mood. Usually, the situation they are in requires a different mood than that which they are in, and they can use music to attain a more suitable mood. This is in accordance with DeNora's (2000) study, which showed that the participants listened to music as a way of preparing for and 'getting in the mood' for social gatherings. One of my informants also says that she can deliberately use music to change her mood prior to different forms of social gatherings:

If I'm going to a party or something, or if something lousy has happened and I've to go to school for example, or a social gathering, or just to a friend or something, I put on some pleasant music to get in a better mood (10: Female, 18 years).

Another informant also says that she uses music to change her mood according to social gatherings, and mentions an example of getting in the right mood for 'the party you do not want to go to':

A typical example is the party that you don't really want to go to, but feel you should, and you want to get into a party mood, then I always put on music that I think will get me in that mood (5: Female, 27 years).

These examples are about changing one's mood according to what the situation demands, or what one feels is expected. But the subjects can also choose to change their mood according to personal needs or preferences. One of my informants says that she uses music to change her mood when she feels that she is using unnecessary energy on being annoyed, for example:

I can also use it consciously. For example if I'm annoyed or upset about something, then I use music actively to gain my balance, so that I don't use so much energy and effort on things that don't work. I can just put on the iPod and then I manage to relate to people in a different way (9: Female, 37 years).

This is a good example of how music can be used to 'gain balance' and to rid oneself of negative and destructive moods such as annoyance. This woman says that she listens to music that makes her feel more balanced and more

in harmony. This music “strengthen her internal state of calmness”, she says, and makes her more tolerant towards her surroundings and work-environment. She says that after she realized that she could use her private music as a tool for regulating her moods, she feels that she can take charge over different situations. I asked her to elaborate on how this worked, and she explained:

You can be in a situation in which you feel uncomfortable or irritated. It may be irritation that you actually don't want to feel, for example on a trip to the cottage or something like that. And then something happens that puts you in a bad situation, or that you are simply in a bad place that day and don't want to take it out on other people, then you can put on some music for a while just to calm down and find your balance, so that you don't create a negative atmosphere for others. In fact I'm quite conscious about that. I find it unpleasant, and think it's completely unnecessary. So when I discovered it I thought it would be very interesting and fun to do some – was about to say – research on it.

*Because it's something you've found out that works?*

Uhum. It definitely works (9: Female, 37 years).

This woman consciously and purposefully uses her private music to change her mood, which she experiences as destructive. Having her music available and knowing how to use it seems to heighten her levels of control. Having learned how to use music according to her needs probably also increases her levels of empowerment. As mentioned above, the informants normally choose to sustain their existing moods. However, when a mood is experienced as dysfunctional, music appears to be an efficient tactic in regulating the mood towards a more appropriate one. Also in van Goethem's (2010) study, the affect which the participants most commonly wanted to change was angry/ frustrated. However, not all negative moods are preferred changed by the informants, as we will see below.

### **6.3.1.3 Sustaining negative mood**

It appears in the present study that some of the subjects choose to sustain a bad mood as a way of processing their affects:

*Let's say you're in bad mood or sad, would you listen to music that sustains your bad mood, or will you try to change your mood?*

It depends on what the purpose is, because sometimes it's good to think through things thoroughly, so that in a way you get over the feelings. [...]

*But how would you say music helps you remain in the sad mood or change it? When you talk about processing, how does it work?*

Processing to me is first to feel things through. To go through things and say that now I've been through everything, now I've put things behind me. So I first listen to, how shall I say, prolongation music, trying to hang on to the sadness, and then try some processing music to acquire closure (2: Male, 26 years).

It is interesting that this subject speaks of *prolongation* music and *processing* music. These are his own words, but seem to capture how music can work in the process of dealing with negative moods. In order to grasp his mood, to understand it and reflect on it, this man chooses to listen to music that *prolongs* his mood. In order to "get over the feelings", it is necessary to first "think through things thoroughly", according to this informant. Thus, listening to the correct music allows him to prolong his mood, to "hang on to the sadness", to the extent that he can "go through everything". When he experiences that he has felt and thought things through carefully, it is time to move on. At that point, he chooses *processing* music which allows him to "acquire closure", that is, finish with the sadness. Several of the informants speak about sustaining negative moods with music. However, the point is not to prolong the mood simply to draw it out. There is a specific purpose in sustaining a negative mood, namely, in the words of the informant above, "to go through things and say that now I've been through everything, now I've put things behind me". Only then can the subjects successfully begin to change their moods into a more positive one. It appeared also in van Goethem's (2010) study that the participants who experienced most successful affect regulation were those who regulated strong affects by using a stepwise approach. Attempts at regulating affects all at once were often unsuccessful.

Many say that music makes them happy, and that listening to music is a pleasant experience. This is also the case in the present study. In a study of music in everyday life, Sloboda and O'Neill (2001) concluded that music

generally made the participants 'feel better'. When the respondents listened to music, they became more focused and more positive. Juslin and Laukka's (2004) study confirms that positive emotions dominate among music-related emotions. This is expected, they claim, because individuals normally can choose what music to listen to. Hence, they presume that listeners will choose music they like and which will make them 'feel good' (see also Gabrielsson, 2001). Larsen (2000, p. 131) also assumes that people "do things for the sake of feeling good". He writes:

In ongoing daily life, much of what we do is geared toward avoiding those things that make us feel bad and approaching those things which make us feel good. If we think of the activities of daily life, much of what we do can be thought of in terms of the subjective hedonic or energetic consequences we are trying to achieve. We may have a coffee, take a brisk walk, or chat with some friends in an effort to boost energy. Or we may try to distract ourselves, relax, or even help someone less fortunate in an effort to get over some bad feeling (Larsen, 2000, p. 131).

According to Erber and Erber (2000), this is at best an oversimplification. They challenge the "widely accepted" hedonistic idea that "humans, by and large, seek pleasure and avoid pain" (Erber & Erber, 2000, p. 142). Rather, they believe the context is decisive of whether one chooses to maintain or get rid of good or bad moods. They explain that we can choose to indulge in a negative mood when we are alone, whereas we are otherwise forced to regulate our moods according to the demands of the situation. "Just as singing show tunes off key is perfectly alright in one's shower but not in a crowded subway car, the experience and display of moods may be similarly inappropriate in a public context", they say (Erber & Erber, 2000, p. 145).

If the situation does not demand otherwise, my informants seldom try to change their negative mood. Rather, they listen to music to maintain the mood and indulge in their emotions. By sustaining the negative mood, the subjects can gain a better understanding of the situation and the feelings they are experiencing, as shown above. In the case of my informants, to sustain and perhaps enhance a negative mood does not have any noticeable harmful effects. They manage to work through the mood and perhaps even feel better afterwards. The same was the case with the participants in

Saarikallio and Erkkilä's (2007) study. When their respondents used music to reflect on or vent negative affects, these affects were temporarily intensified by the music, which sometimes resulted in the respondents feeling worse. However, in the long term these processes helped the respondents to get rid of the negative mood so that they ended up feeling better.

It is probably not advisable for individuals to stay in a negative mood over long periods of time, though. Oishi and Koo (2008) ask two questions about happiness: "is happiness good?" and "is happier better?" Their analyses give rise to two conclusions:

(1) happiness has positive benefits in diverse areas, ranging from health and longevity to job performance, income, and close relationships; and (2) the optimal levels of happiness vary across domains: the highest possible level of happiness was associated with later relationship success, whereas the second- or third-highest levels of happiness were associated with higher income, education, and civic engagement (Oishi & Koo, 2008, p. 300).

The answer to their questions can therefore be concluded with a "yes". Happiness, in the long term, seems to be better for individuals than does unhappiness. However, for people who are apparently healthy and who manage to regulate their moods, sustaining or enhancing negative moods does not seem to lead to unhappiness. On the contrary, upholding a bad mood can help the subjects gain insight into their internal states and affects, which can perhaps increase their ability to regulate affects at a later stage and in other situations.

One informant explains that she uses music to *get into* a mood and work through it:

*How is it, if you feel sad or upset?*

Then I often listen to a specific artist that I associate with very strong feelings. I listen a lot to it, and get thoroughly into a mood. Once you get into that mood, then you can get hold of the difficult stuff there and then, instead of just pushing it away with something else. [...] So then you can intensify the feelings and in a way be finished with them properly. And you can think and be in your own world. Then you can go and do something else later, instead of it being the other way

round that you try to push it away. In any case you have to go back and process it later (10: Female, 18 years).

By getting *thoroughly* into the mood, this subject experiences that she can get hold of “the difficult stuff”. In this way, she can work through it *there and then*. For this purpose, the MP3 player becomes particularly valuable, since it enables the subjects to use music as a tactic to deal with their affects in the moment they experience them. This allows the subjects to finish with their difficult affects, instead of going back “and process it later”, in the words of the informant above.

An additional aspect of sustaining a negative mood with music is that the subjects can experience comfort in the music. Music can confirm their emotions and allow them to feel the way they do:

When I put on [music], it's not a goal in itself to become sadder, but to be *allowed* to be sad, to acknowledge the feeling. [...] But then again, maybe I'm often sad because I'm lonely, [but] then perhaps it's not that lonely after all. [...] Rather than aiming at becoming sad, maybe the goal is to find a kind of consolation in the music. Sometimes you just need to hear that it's ok to feel like that. And that's what music does (1: Female, 26 years).

One of the young women describes music almost as a ‘friend’ you can lean on: “If something has happened, for example, if you experience something, then I feel in a way that I have to go there [to the music]. You feel that someone else understands you, that's one thing, through the music” (female, 18 years). To find *acceptance* for one's negative or difficult affects can be an important asset in dealing with them. By finding recognition for their affects in the music, the music offers acceptance and consolation to the subjects. Also in Sloboda's (2005b) study on emotional responses to music, music was described as a *change agent*. Sloboda argues that comments such as ‘one feels understood and comforted in pain, sorrow, and bewilderment’ and ‘through hearing emotions in someone else's music it is possible to feel that emotions are shared and not your burden alone’ are examples of music “offering an alternative perspective on a person's situation, allowing him or her to construe things differently” (Sloboda, 2005b, p. 204). Laiho (2004) points out that music can be a substitute for relationships: “It is often felt to be an understanding and valued friend rather than a sounding object”, she

writes (2004, p. 52). In sum, music can be experienced as a 'support' for emotions, which comforts and allows the subjects to feel the way they do, which further helps to process and work through the mood.

#### 6.3.1.4 Clarifying and understanding mood

The music is not only used to express, enhance or change mood. It can also be used to gain a better understanding of what it is one actually feels, and can be used as a method for reflecting on one's mood and emotions. By looking through the music library on the MP3 player, the subjects can find the music that 'feels right' at that moment in time, and thereby understand which mood they are in, as in this example:

Sometimes I can use [music] to investigate [my mood] a little. [It's] good to go around and just listen to music, listen to something that perhaps allows reflection.

*How does it work, then? Or what is it with the music that...?*

Well, if I'm sad or wonder what kind of – if I feel a bit strange, I can listen to some poignant music, so that I can examine the feeling a little. [...] For my part, I'm in a period in which I have lots on my mind all the time [...], so that in a way it can help me find out what mood I'm actually in, and examine it. Because it's very – I feel in a way that I can choose, that now it's exactly right to listen to precisely this, and that's not right now, and then I listen to it, no not that, that's the one I wanted to listen to now. In a way, I search through to find out the mood I'm in, and feel it. [...] and then maybe also to try to understand why, and do something about it (6: Male, 24 years).

This subject searches through his music as to be able to find out what exactly the mood he is in. Once he has figured out that, he is more able to deal with it. Another subject explains that his mood becomes more clarified when he listens to music. The music can help to enhance his mood, but also let him 'reflect' on and study his emotions:

I actually use music to amplify the mood I'm in already. [...] [The mood] becomes clearer. If I'm a bit angry, I put on some angry music and just feel the anger and let it flow, simmer. And then I can sit there and head bang a bit to the music [...] [The music] helps me maybe get out of the pit. [...] I'm not usually very angry [laughs], but it allows me

to feel the state of anger. Instead of just being angry I'm able to distance myself from the feeling and monitor the feeling, in a way. So that you can examine the feeling, grasp it and study it a bit (8: Male, 27 years).

To reflect on one's mood and emotions might perhaps lead to better insight in one's affective life. Perhaps this can lead to improved emotional intelligence? Grewal and Salovey (2006) claim that emotional intelligence may play a vital role in physical and mental health, and that "managing emotions might also be extremely important in maintaining good health" (2006, p. 114). When defining emotional intelligence, the authors choose to conceptualize the term in four branches, namely "(a) perceiving emotions, (b) using emotions to facilitate thought, (c) understanding emotions, and (d) managing emotions in the self and others" (2006, p. 106). Particularly (a), (c), and (d) becomes visible in the way these informants use music to (a) detect what they feel, (c) understand their emotions, and (d) manage their emotions.

Emotional intelligence begins with "the awareness of emotions in both self and others" (Grewal & Salovey, 2006, p. 106). Grewal and Salovey point out that without the ability to identify what one feels correctly, it is extremely difficult to express those feelings. I want to add that, additionally, it must be nearly impossible to understand and manage one's emotions unless one is able to identify those affects. To understand one's emotions involves "the ability to label emotions linguistically and to recognize the often subtle and complex relationships between different emotions" (Grewal & Salovey, 2006, p. 107). The way I understand the capability to manage emotions, it includes the ability to control and regulate affects. As Grewal and Salovey indicate, this ability may have implications for why some people are better at avoiding depression, but it also includes willingly inducing both positive and negative emotions. In specific situations, certain emotions are more appropriate than others. At a funeral, for example, it may be appropriate to express profound grief, and an individual might wish to increase the powerful emotions she is experiencing. As I have already shown, the subjects in the present study obviously choose to sustain and enhance negative affects, not only positive moods and emotions.



Emotional intelligence is important because it “is related to several desirable life outcomes, such as better relationships, success at work, and physical and mental health”, according to Grewal and Salovey (2006, p. 106). Moreover, they demonstrate that there is a relationship between low emotional intelligence and some forms of mental illnesses, such as depression, alexithymia and borderline personality disorder. Emotional intelligence may also play an essential part in physical health. Grewal and Salovey refer to Pennebaker, who have demonstrated that unveiling strong emotional experiences may improve immune system activity, resulting in a decrease in self-reported physical symptoms, subjective distress and depression (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988, in Grewal & Salovey, 2006). In sum, Grewal and Salovey conclude that “[o]ur emotions – and more specifically the skills related to emotional intelligence – may have important implications for keeping our bodies and minds healthy” (2006, p. 114).

The subjects in the present study are presumably healthy, and most of them, some more than others, have the ability to reflect on and manage their affects. They are therefore most likely not in the danger zone of developing mental or physical illnesses related to poor emotional intelligence. Nevertheless, if music listening can improve their ability to understand and manage their affects, I conceive this as a possible way of improving their emotional intelligence further. In this sense, music listening might function as a way of staying healthy, or even promoting health. As we have already looked into emotional intelligence, I will continue with some aspects regarding emotion regulation.

### **6.3.2 Emotion regulation**

Several of the writings on musical emotions focus on why and how music induces emotions in the listener, thus focusing on the musical object (e.g., Clarke, et al., 2010; Juslin, 2009; Juslin, et al., 2010). Here, I will rather focus on the subjects’ use of music, particularly how they can use music as an access to emotions, and in positive and negative emotion work. Hence, the focus is on the subject more than the music itself, that is, a focus on the *appropriation* of music rather than music’s *affordances*.

### 6.3.2.1 Accessibility of emotions

A woman says that “in any case, I think music always brings out one or another type of emotion in me” (female, 24 years). She says that her emotions always play a part in her choice of music. This confirms previous research that claim a fundamental relationship between music and emotions (Juslin & Laukka, 2004; Juslin & Sloboda, 2001a). Juslin and Sloboda write that “Some sort of emotional experience is probably the main reason behind most people’s engagement with music” (2001a, p. 3). This is supported by a survey of 141 music listeners, which confirmed that emotions are strongly connected to individuals main motive for listening to music (Juslin & Laukka, 2004). One of the subjects in the present study (male, 26 years) says that he can control, intensify or influence almost any emotion with music. This is true also for the other informants. They use music to sustain or enhance their emotions, and thus take control over their emotions with music.

In her PhD thesis on music experience as possibilities for emotion knowledge, Vist (2009) presents one of the main categories from her empirical data as accessibility of emotions, or *emotional accessibility*. Although our starting points differ, it also appears in my study that music listening offers access to emotions. When I ask one of the informants (female, 26 years) about the criteria for the music she chooses to listen to – why she chooses that particular music – she answers that she can use music to search for an emotion. She uses the music first to figure out which emotion she wants, and then to induce this emotion in her. Another informant says the same thing; he uses music both to locate an emotion and to enhance this emotion:

I think I can seek out the way I’m feeling, and then immerse into it a bit, if the music confirms the feelings I have, then in a way I can intensify them to a certain extent, in order to feel I’m relaxing more, because I can let the music affect me in this manner, and then work with it a little (6: Male, 24 years).

DeNora (2000) also states that music is not only used to express internal states, but that it is also a resource in the identification of knowing how one feels: “One may say to one’s self, ‘this music is how I feel’ and one may grow

tense and relax as the music does, when the music does” (2000, p. 57). Music probably creates an opportunity to tend to one’s emotions, and also makes it easier to actually feel what one is feeling. As one subject puts it: “I probably draw much better and more honestly when I listen to music than when I don’t. Because then I dare to examine my feelings, I guess. Absolutely” (female, 18 years). When I ask her how it would be if she did not have the music, she answers that she most likely would not draw without it. She needs the music to go into her emotions and to express them through her drawing. Thus, music offers accessibility of emotions as well as the *courage* to both examine and express them.

### **6.3.2.2 Positive emotions**

Vist (2009) points out that it might be problematic to divide emotions into the categories ‘positive emotions’ and ‘negative emotions’, as I have chosen to do here. She points to the fact that music can “beautify the sorrow” (2009, p. 302) and that negative emotions such as sorrow can have aspects of positive emotions when they are experienced in relation to music. One of my female informants also expresses that “things are often beautiful when they are sad, a bit melancholic” (female, 26 years). Feelings of sorrow in the context of music experiences can have value and meaning for the individual; it can perhaps evoke a form for satisfaction and even joy, according to Vist. I agree that our emotions are almost certainly not so simple that they can be strictly divided into positive or negative categories. There is more likely a continuum of emotions, and a spectrum of emotions of different valence. I have nonetheless chosen to categorize the emotion work of my informants under the headings ‘positive’ and ‘negative’. This is not to simplify their emotions, but rather for the purpose of clarification, for the sake of the reader.

When I ask the subjects how they use music on a ‘good day’, they usually answer that they listen to music to sustain or enhance their positive emotions. One of the informants continues to say that after a while, he can “shut out painful feelings by the fact that it becomes more difficult for them to get hold of you, just as it’s harder for difficult thoughts to linger while I listen to music that makes me happy” (Male, 26 years). Hence, it seems that music does not only enhance positive emotions, but also functions to shut

out negative emotions and thoughts, consequently functioning at several levels at once to increase positive affects.

The subjects often describe music listening as pleasurable, and one of the informants says that music can “cheer you up” (male, 43 years). As mentioned, it also appears in studies by Sloboda and O’Neill (2001), Juslin and Laukka (2004) and Gabrielsson (2001) that positive emotions dominate among emotions experienced in relation to music. The subjects in this study often listen to music that sustain or enhance happy feelings, rather than to create happy feelings when they are feeling low. One of the men describes how he listens to music when he is happy:

Then it should be very upbeat and happy music, so that you don’t really notice everything. Yeah, you become a little ecstatic, and zoom through town on a bike, neither looking right nor left, just in your own bubble maybe, but in a positive way (11: Male, 37 years).

Interestingly, several of the subjects say that they become more positively attuned towards their environment when they listen to their MP3 players. One of the subjects says that he sometimes would like to share his music with people around him, and he believes he appears more positive when he listens to his music:

It happens that I want so badly to have a stereo with huge loudspeakers and plug it in when I’m on the train and I’m listening to something extremely cool and want to share it with everyone else. Because sometimes it’s just like [chuckles] “Oh, they all should have listened to this one”. But then I only smile a bit more, and tap my foot. Yeah, I don’t particularly make an effort to come into contact with anyone, maybe I seem more outgoing when I listen to music, because I smile more and perhaps become more open by it (8: Male, 27 years).

Another subject explains that the music she listens to defines how she perceives and responds to her surroundings. Certain music induces a more positive attitude, while other music can bring out a negative attitude towards her environment:

It’s like when you are out walking in a crowd, then you just put on some happy music, then everything becomes much more pleasant in a way. You become a little like “yeah, yeah, sure”, “after you” and a bit

like that. But if you listen to loud, angry music then it becomes more like “Oh, get out of my way” and a little like that. [...]

*Yes. Do you see people in a different way?*

Yes, I think so. And if you listen to happy music, then it doesn't matter so much if someone bumps into you. But if you are in another mood and listen to another kind of music, then maybe you become more like “Oh!” [annoyed exclamation] (10: Female, 18 years).

The music this subject listens to influences both how she perceives her surroundings and how she meets her environment. She says: “If I'm listening to music, then a lot of chaos in town can be just fantastic, and there are only masses of fine people when you are listening to happy music.” When she listens to music she enjoys, she seems to cope better with what could otherwise be perceived as stressful surroundings.<sup>45</sup> She even interprets the chaotic environment as ‘fantastic’. This music also enables her to meet others in a more positive manner: “If I'm listening to good music, I go around smiling a little to everyone, and almost go and dance a little for myself. I think it's really fun”. Listening to music when in a happy mood thus seems to induce an upward spiral of positive emotions. A number of the other subjects also mention that their attitude towards their surroundings, or how they perceive other people, becomes more positive when they listen to music. One of the women describes how the music can enhance her experience of her environment:

You get a great feeling when you listen to music. Everything becomes ok. It's good to go out, “it's so beautiful”, and then you listen to music and there are lots of sensory impressions at the same time, and on top of that you have the sensation from the music. Then it can be extremely good (12: Female, 43 years).

Although I appreciate functions of different emotions, and believe that emotions experienced at specific times offers something to the individual, it seems that positive emotions may have specifically positive outcomes for the individual. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions draws on this notion (Fredrickson, 2005b; 2006, see also chapter 3, theoretical framework):

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<sup>45</sup> More on this in chapter 7.

Whereas traditional perspectives have suggested that positive emotions mark or signal health and well-being (Diener, 2000; Kahneman, 1999), the broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions also produce health and well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). Put differently, to the extent that the broaden-and-build effects of positive emotions accumulate and compound over time, positive emotions carry the capacity to transform individuals for the better, making them healthier and more socially integrated, knowledgeable, effective, and resilient (Fredrickson, 2006, p. 98).

Thus, it seems that positive emotions induced or enhanced by music may indeed have positive consequences for the subjects, both in the short term and the long run.

Juslin and Laukka (2004) believe that because people usually can choose what music to listen to, they will tend to listen to music that makes them 'feel good'. However, for natural reasons positive emotions are not always desirable:

Although we naturally seem to prefer good moods over bad ones, positive affect may not always be desirable. For example, when trying to work on a task that requires intense concentration and deductive reasoning, a slightly depressed mood can be helpful (Schwarz, 1990) (Grewal & Salovey, 2006, p. 107).

Hence, individuals do not always choose music that increases their positive emotions. This disconfirms Juslin and Laukka's (2004) assumption that individuals generally choose music that makes them 'feel good' or 'feel better'.<sup>46</sup> Positive emotions *do* dominate among the most commonly felt emotions in relation to music in both Juslin and Laukka (2004) and Sloboda and O'Neill's (2001) studies, and I do not doubt these results. However, the listening-context most likely determines which emotions the listener seeks, and whether or not she tries to change her emotions or enhance them with the help of music. As Erber and Erber (2000) pointed out, people normally regulate their moods according to what the situation allows. As was the

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<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that Juslin and Laukka define positive emotions as e.g. 'happy', 'relaxed', 'moved' (2004:231). Positive emotions are therefore not the equivalent of 'happy' alone. As I have discussed, subjects can also perceive positive experiences in negative emotions. Hence, the bounds of different emotions are unclear, and one should be careful about defining 'positive emotions' too narrow.

case with moods, rather than trying to change their emotions, the subjects usually listen to music to sustain or enhance their emotions, even if they are negative.

### 6.3.2.3 Negative emotions

Above, I looked into the function of music listening in sustaining negative moods. It appears that music can have the same functions when it comes to emotions.<sup>47</sup> As mentioned, Vist (2009) points out that there can be positive aspects in negative emotions. I referred to one of the subjects who states that “things are often beautiful when they are sad”. When I ask how she feels after listening to sad music, she says:

I don't quite know if I'm able to tell whether I become sadder or happier. But it may be that, perhaps one connects the sadness, which is a lousy feeling in itself, to something bigger. For things are often beautiful when they are sad, kind of melancholic, that one in fact links the sadness to something positive. As such I think I can experience, that by listening to sad music when I'm sad, I don't necessarily become sadder, but just link the sadness to something else (1: Female, 26 years).

It is interesting that this woman uses music to connect the sadness to something outside of herself, which makes the emotion easier to bear. By connecting the sadness, which is a “lousy feeling”, to an external object – that is, the music – the sadness obtain an aspect of something positive (c.f. Vist, 2009). I further asked her whether she could use music to become sadder, and whether she could control it:

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<sup>47</sup> It is not always clear whether the subjects actually speak about mood or emotions. For example, I found it hard to interpret ‘sad’ as either a mood or an emotion. The subjects speak about ‘feeling sad’, but it is not always related to an external object, which is the foundation of emotions (Gross, 1998; Larsen, 2000). ‘Feeling sad’ can therefore rather be interpreted as a mood, because of the duration in time, and the relation to internal states rather than external objects. Juslin and Sloboda (2010a, p. 10) categorize sadness as an emotion in their overview of definitions used in the Handbook of Music and Emotions. However, I do not find such affects to be easily categorized. Because the subjects speak about mood, emotions and feelings in the same context, I have therefore chosen to be true to their experiences and interpret e.g. ‘sad’ as possibly holding qualities of both mood and emotion.

*But for instance how do you use music to become sadder, or is it something that happens that you can't control?*

There's a kind of symbiosis [laughter] of the fact that I think at least I can control it, and the knowledge that there are certain songs or certain artists that make me sad, because I've had some sad experiences while I heard that music, or only because it's the music that has in a way a sadness in it [...] And then I feel that I can manage it by putting on [the music] (1: Female, 26 years).

This woman experiences that she can control her emotions by listening to music that she knows have certain effects on her. This relates to DeNora's (2000) research, where the participants also knew what they needed to hear at specific times, and thereby worked as 'disc jockeys' on themselves. This subject says that by listening to music that makes her sad, she can find affirmation in the music and relate the sadness to something outside of herself. The music 'comforts' her, as shown previously (6.3.1.3).

Other subjects tell me that they have listened to more music in periods of their lives when they were feeling down. Two of the subjects (male, 44 years; female, 43 years) talked about their music listening when they went through divorce. Although this is not directly related to MP3 use, it is still interesting that they both say that they listened a lot more during this period in their lives. "I probably found a lot of consolation in music", one of them says (male, 44 years). He also says that 'music is therapy': "If you have problems, and are struggling with things once in a while, then music can undoubtedly be used as therapy". When I ask him how music functions as therapy, he has trouble explaining, but he believes it has to do with being cheered up and increasing energy levels. Later, he repeats that music listening is "always therapy", and says that it has to do with relaxing and being absorbed in the music: "It almost becomes a kind of escape from reality". These utterances can be related to van Goethem's (2010) framework for affect regulation. Being 'cheered up' relates to the mechanism of creating a happy mood; 'relaxing' mirrors the affect regulation strategy of relaxing; and 'escape' relates to the strategy of distraction. Thus, it seems that this man links affect regulation to a form of self-therapy. Perhaps the fact that music helps this individual control and regulate his affects contributes to his experience of music as therapy. Knowing that both Ruud (2008) and DeNora (2000, 2003) link the use of



music in self-regulation to self-care, it makes sense that this man does the same, although he does not seem to be so conscious about how the music actually works.

The female informant explains that she can use music to work through her emotions, and mentions that she listened more to music during her divorce:

If I'm alone, and there are some stuff that I need to figure out, if I'm going around thinking about some very emotional stuff, then I think it's wonderful to have music, I probably use it as a kind of therapy. But then it's great, and I love good music and then I can listen to Jan Eggum<sup>48</sup> [laughter] and things like that. That was before I got my iPod, but I got divorced once, and during that period I bought an incredible amount of music. And I didn't think that it was anything like that, I was alone then, but I had to work my way through it. And then I listened to a lot of music. And much of that music is not on my playlist now, but when I hear it, it reminds me very much of that time, and I know that at the time I thought it was wonderful to listen to that music. And in fact that's a bit like how I use my iPod now as well. Because I like to listen when I'm alone, if I'm walking the dog for example, then I find it wonderful to listen to music. It's as if it's the music and me. Then in a way I don't know what it does, takes the thoughts away maybe (12: Female, 43 years).

Listening to music seems to have a comforting function in difficult life circumstances. This woman explains that the way she listened to music during her divorce is similar to the way she uses her iPod now, and she also relates it to a "kind of therapy". It allows her to be alone with the music, which she perceives as pleasurable. She says that perhaps the music helps her to work through her emotions, because it distracts her from her thoughts. It becomes apparent that emotions and thoughts are connected, and that to separate the two only makes sense at a theoretical level. Here, it is also interesting to note that three out of the six affect regulation strategies van Goethem (2010) operates with are related to cognitive activity: distraction, introspection, and rational thinking (the other three being relaxation, active coping, and venting). Thus, affect regulation has

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<sup>48</sup> Jan Eggum is a Norwegian singer-songwriter.

indeed a cognitive element, and also an element of bodily energy, which we shall see below (section 6.4).

Yet another informant says that music can be “brief therapy”. He relates it to being in his own universe for a short period by shutting out the rest of the world, and that it has to do with achieving specific emotions and identifying with the music and the musicians. Again, we see that music ‘as therapy’ is related to affect regulation, in this case particularly distraction and accessibility of emotions. Finding confirmation and acceptance in the music also appears to be crucial. When I ask him, he confirms that music listening is a way of processing negative emotions:

If you are broken-hearted for example, then you put on blue moody tunes and ballads and sad songs that people have sung before. You fix up the one and the other of this style, precisely in order to follow that line of thought further. So you specifically seek it out.

*Do you think it can be a kind of process to work things out, or?*

Yes, I’m quite certain about that. It’s a kind of therapy, some sort of processing. You try to relate what the song says to your own situation and think through it. For instance, if it’s about your own experience and perhaps others have been through the same situation as you. I would certainly call it a process of working things out. I don’t know if you feel better after having listened to the music, but at least it feels right, I wouldn’t exactly say it feels good [laughter], but it feels right in these situations, it does (11: Male, 37 years).

Here it is explained that listening to moody music does not feel *good*, but that it is possible to find comfort in the fact that one can recognize one’s own experiences in the music. Knowing that others have experienced the same things you are going through, and being able to relate to the music, becomes a way of processing your emotions.

One of the subjects who says that she usually listens to music that matches or increases her emotions, mentions that she perhaps used music more according to her emotions a few years ago, when she was feeling more down:

I used to do it quite often earlier when I was going through sad periods, when I was a bit down. Then I often listened to sad music. But not so much now, because I haven’t been depressed these last

four years, so I have seldom listened to music consciously to cultivate feelings (7: Female, 24 years).

She says that she used music more as a way of cultivating her emotions when she was feeling down, but then realizes that she now perhaps uses music to tend to other emotions: "But I've actually done that, I mean if I'm happy I often put on some up-beat music, or if I miss something I put on some nostalgic stuff". It seems, in other words, that she uses music to either sustain or enhance different emotions. However, she says that she used to know exactly what to listen to when she felt more emotional, whereas it is less clear now that she feels more balanced:

It's a bit more complicated to know which mood you're in when you are as balanced as I am nowadays. It was much easier before, when I was a bit unbalanced, when I was very emotional, when I was very up and down, then it was easier to know that exactly at that moment I *have to* listen to this one in particular. Now I don't know it so often, any more.

*But how did you choose music then, if you felt a bit as you say imbalanced emotionally?*

At that time I didn't choose the music. It wasn't a question of choice back then. It was simply *that one* I had to listen to. It wasn't as if I sat down and thought "what shall I listen to now, what is it going to be?" No, it wasn't like that. It had to be just *that one*. I already had it in the back of my mind, and I put on exactly that one (7: Female, 24 years).

It seems that what one 'needs' to hear becomes more obvious when one is more emotional. This woman, like several others, explains that when they are in a good mood or feeling happy, they can choose to listen to music that demands more of them cognitively. When they are in a positive mood, they seem to have the energy to explore new music or listen more analytically to the music. When they are in a negative mood, it appears that their emotions guide their musical choices more, and that they 'need' to listen to music that allows them to tend to and process their emotions.

It should be noted that not all of the subjects use music when they are feeling down. One of the subjects (male, 43 years) explains that he seldom uses music if he is sad. He says that music does not make him sentimental, and that he does not seek music if he is feeling sad, although he admits that

he rarely feels gloomy. This example makes it important to remember that people use music differently and for different purposes, and even if we can see some general tendencies in how people appropriate music, we must be careful in developing general laws.

#### 6.3.2.4 Venting

Venting is one of the affect regulation strategies mentioned by van Goethem (2010), which is also described by the subjects in the present study. As this subject puts it, using music to vent her emotions enables her to finish with her negative affects:

*How is it if say for example you have a bad day or are in a bad mood, what kind of music do you put on then?*

[...] It can be a bit like, it can be a bit aggressive almost, a bit like "Oh!" [chuckles], almost some angry music, but at the same time very happy one with good beats and yes, very much like, to get it all out. I notice that sometimes.

*Yes, but how does it work? Does it amplify your mood, or does it change it?*

No, it amplifies, or rather to say I don't become angrier, but get it out of my system in a way, so that somehow I can become more like "aargh!" angry, and then I become a bit happy because of the music nevertheless.

*You get over it in a way? Or you get it..*

Uhum. Get it out a bit (10: Female, 18 years).

Tice and Bratslavsky (2000) argue that venting is a form for misregulation of emotional control, and claim that venting can prolong the negative affect, mood, or emotion rather than reduce it. They claim that the focus on one's negative emotions involved in venting is an ineffective strategy for emotion regulation, and that the attention to the negative emotion prolongs or increases the emotion. "Venting directs attention to precisely the wrong place, namely to one's distress and to what is causing it", they say (2000, p. 155). Larsen and Prizmic (2004, 2008) also point out that venting is an ineffective strategy for reducing emotions. On the contrary, venting or expressing anger seems to make people angrier and more aggressive. Similarly, venting or expressing sadness seems to elevate the sadness. It

seems therefore that “venting, at least in the short term, would work to amplify subjective feelings” (Larsen & Prizmic, 2008, p. 276).

Vist (2009) claims that the idea that distraction from emotions is a better strategy than venting or rumination is an unreasonable assertion. Her data shows that painful or negative emotions such as sorrow or grief often were sought through music, and that it was not experienced as negative that the music intensified these emotions. Other music researchers (e.g. Lilliestam, 2009; Ruud, 1997b, 2005), claim that music can function as a ‘catharsis’. Although he points out that there are some objections to music as a way of venting emotions (e.g. Howlin’ Wolf: “Singing doesn’t help you. The problem is still there”(Lilliestam, 2009, p. 144, my translation)), Lilliestam (2009) asserts that people can work through loss, heartbreak, depression and melancholy by the help of music. “Music functions as both comfort and as a confirmation that one is not alone with one’s difficult emotions”, he writes (2009, p. 143, my translation).

In the case of my informants, music seems to function as a successful strategy for venting. By listening to music with a heavy beat, angry lyrics or the like, the informants can intensify their negative emotions and experience a form for catharsis. This is also the case in studies by DeNora (2000), Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2007) and Greasley (2008). Maybe music is effective in venting because it offers a symbolic reality to the listener? The individual does not vent her emotions by violent or uninhibited behaviour, but can imagine this kind of behaviour through the music, as explained by DeNora. Laiho (2004) also points out that music offers an accepted expression for otherwise difficult, violent or unaccepted thoughts and emotions, and Sloboda and Juslin (2001a) suggest that involvement in music and arts can function as a safe way of ‘testing’ different emotions and responses:

By exploring the interactions between situations, emotions, and actions in a simulated environment, we can develop and test different strategies that might be deployed in real situations, but without the potentially harmful consequences of ‘getting it wrong’ (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001a, p. 88).

In the case of sadness, I have shown that my informants often choose to sustain a sad mood, or sad emotions. This is in agreement with Larsen and Prizmic (2004, 2008), who claim that venting works to amplify subjective feelings, at least in the short term. However, as I have discussed, sustaining and enhancing negative emotions may in the long term lead to the subjects feeling better, which was also the case in Saarikallio and Erkkilä's (2007) study. They write that music was an effective tool in releasing negative emotions. However, they also refer to research that conclude that venting has negative outcomes, and ask the question: "Therefore, is ventilation of feelings through music harmful or salutary?" (2007, p. 103). With music, the individual directs one's anger into harmless activity instead of engaging in behaviours such as verbal or physical aggression, yelling, blaming and so on. As a symbolic object, music offers "acceptable and non-destructive expression of violent thoughts and feelings", they say (2007, p. 103). "Thus, music may help to let anger out and calm emotions down before any engagement in verbal confrontation", Saarikallio and Erkkilä conclude (2007, p. 103).

To utilize music for venting seems to be a successful strategy, rather than dysfunctional, as proposed by Tice and Bratslavsky (2000) and Larsen and Prizmic (2008). This might be because the music offers a symbolic reality rather than actual uninhibited behaviour. It may also be that people need to deal with their emotions rather than putting them aside. As one of the informants expressed (section 6.3.1.3, sustaining negative mood):

Then you can intensify the feelings in a way and be finished with them properly. [...] Then you can go and do something else later, instead of it being the other way round that you try to push it away. In any case you have to go back and process it later (female, 18 years).

## 6.4 BODILY REGULATION

### 6.4.1 Increasing bodily energy

#### 6.4.1.1 'Get going'

At the beginning of a new day, music can work as an aid in waking up and 'get going'. One of the subjects wakes up each day by music on her iPod. By pre-setting the music, she chooses to wake up by music she knows will give her energy and help her get out of bed:

I have loudspeakers that you can plug the iPod on, like an alarm clock. And then when I wake up in the morning, I'm tired and don't really want to get up. It's quite [laughter] universal I think, but when I wake up and hear the base in *Beautiful Day*, it's the first thing that I hear, then it's conscious, then in a way I want to get into a groovy mood and acquire energy and wake up, and that is absolutely a conscious thing (5: Female, 27 years).

In her written report, this subject elaborates on this, and writes that the music helps her to get up and get to the gym:

I always put my iPod on the alarm clock so that I can choose which song I want to wake up to. Every Monday morning I get up at six to go training and I'm always, without exception, on the verge of dropping the training because I'm always so tired. Therefore, every Sunday evening I put my iPod on *Beautiful Day* with U2, and that song always gives me maximum energy (wonderful base line and fantastic drive). From being tired, and unmotivated for training, and in general not so keen about Mondays, I become full of energy and get up with a much more optimistic outlook on both Mondays and morning workout (5: Female, 27 years).

In this example, the music not only wakes her up, but increases her motivation and energy, and gives her a positive attitude towards 'Mondays and morning workout', which she would otherwise rather skip. This subject also listens to music on her way to work, which helps her to 'get ready' for work, and increases her energy:

Things like Dave Matthews with *Rhyme and Reason*, that has like a lot of drive and is very rhythmic. It makes me very energetic and ready to go to work, and makes you walk faster, so that helps – a lot (5: Female, 27 years).

It also appeared in Greasley's (2008) study that many participants, both those defined as engaged music listeners and those defined as less engaged, used music to motivate them in the morning. It seems that motivation and energy are related, and that music can increase both bodily energy and motivation at the beginning of a new day. Another informant explains that he finds it pleasant to listen to music on his way to school, as a way of getting started with the day:

I use it a lot in the morning, on my way to school. It's wonderful to listen to music as a start for the day and in a way get the day going. It's like, new day, and it's great to just listen to music and get going (6: Male, 24 years).

Most of the subjects say that they listen to music both to and from work. While they usually listen to music that helps them unwind after a work day, they listen to music that typically puts them in a positive attitude and increases their energy levels on their way to work or school. The music helps to get them going, but can also protect the subjects from what is perceived as stressful surroundings, such as packed buses or trains. This helps the subjects to gain control over which impulses to be influenced by.<sup>49</sup> The informant from above explains that this enhances her levels of energy:

I've had a thing with *Viva la Vida* [Coldplay]. I have it on while I walk from the train to work, which takes exactly as long as *Viva la Vida* [laughter] lasts. I have that on mostly every morning, and it gives me *masses* of energy. It's a bit of a feel-good thing to have that type of vibes instead of all the hassle around you on the way. To choose the impulses you want to have. It definitely gives you energy (5: Female, 27 years).

Music can be used to 'control' energy-levels, both by increasing or decreasing bodily energy. Some of the subjects say that they listen to different music during the day, dependent on time of the day and

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<sup>49</sup> More on this in chapter 7.



appropriate energy-level. This man explains that he chooses music according to his activities, to achieve a suitable level of energy:

If I'm going out, I like to put on something like Queens of the Stoneage type music. That or some hip hop, that's like catchy and has a good rhythm and makes me walk easily. But for instance if I'm at home and am not going to go out, then I like something much calmer that actually makes me relax a little and doesn't stress me up to go and do things (8: Male, 27 years).

Again, we see that choice of music often is based on activities (c.f., DeNora, 2000), goals or needs (c.f., Sloboda, 2005c). As we saw earlier, music is sometimes chosen to regulate mood according to activities such as social gatherings. There seems to be certain moods that are more appropriate at specific times, and music can help the listener achieve this mood. The same seems to be the case for energy-levels. Specific levels of energy seem to be appropriate according to activities and time of the day, and music can help the listener regulate and control bodily energy, so as to reach the suitable level.

Many of the subjects speak of 'up-beat' music or music with distinct rhythms, 'groovy' bass, or 'punch' that increases energy. In daily life, it is not necessarily always musical elements that produce energy, however. The subjects can also gain energy by listening to music they enjoy:

But it's not just that the music necessarily has to be fast or that a lot has to be going on, with a lot of groovy bass and stuff, but I think I get energy by listening to things I like. And so I've used music consciously to increase my energy level (1: Female, 26 years).

By listening to music one enjoys, motivation, energy, and positive mood seem to be heightened simultaneously. It therefore seems that increasing energy and heightening a positive mood function as one single regulatory act. Thayer et al (1994) presume that moods are closely related to bodily energy and tension. They write that "[...] many systems of the body (e.g., cardiovascular, skeletal-muscular, and cognitive) interact in a somewhat general or holistic manner together with positive and negative moods" (1994, p. 911). They point out that mood "is not purely a mental phenomenon, as it is often treated" (1994, p. 924). On the contrary, their

research shows that the respondents utilized the same strategies for regulating energies and tension as they did for changing negative moods:

[...] it is apparent that cardiovascular, respiratory, skeletal-muscular, and cognitive systems, among others, all interact. Thus, the best strategy for changing a bad mood [...] involves such behaviours as exercise, and relaxation techniques, together with, put feelings in perspective, and control thoughts (Thayer, et al., 1994, p. 923).

Also in Saarikallio and Erkkilä's study, it appeared that the physiological elements of musical experiences were closely related to mood regulation: "For example, lifting spirits and getting energy from music were typically blended as a single regulatory act" (2007, p. 94). As seen above (section 6.3.2.3), the informant who stated that "music is therapy" related the therapeutic effects of music to its ability to cheer you up and enhance energy levels. There are several examples in the data where the subjects speak of listening situations that includes both increased energy and positive affects. This confirms Saarikallio and Erkkilä's findings, and relates to the assertions that thoughts, affects and bodily reactions are interconnected. Simply put, feeling good seems to increase bodily energy.

Different music is used for the purpose of increasing energy in different situations. It seems that the subjects listen more attentively to the music for example on the way to work, and it therefore becomes important to listen to music that they appreciate 'cognitively'. In other situations, music can be used simply for the purpose of increasing energy, and the way it affects the body becomes more important than whether they appreciate it at more analytical levels. It does not necessarily have to be an incompatibility between the two, although there sometimes is. This becomes particularly clear when it comes to music used during workout. However, there are also other situations where the subjects seek motivation and energy, such as when they work in the garden or do housework. The woman from the quote above says that she gains energy from the fact that she likes the music, but at other occasions, she uses music for the reason of its musical elements:

For example when I'm washing, [...] then I often like to have music in my ears that winds me up, because you need a bit of extra energy in order to get through the washing. Then I often listen to soul music for instance, which I find is – it swings somehow. Then it's more

consciously musical, because there is something in the music that I find energizing, more than just feeling, that I mentioned earlier (1: Female, 26 years).

The use of music based on its musical elements becomes more apparent when it comes to the music used during workout, which is usually a more intense energy-outlet than other daily activities. I will therefore focus on the use of MP3 players during workout in the coming section.

#### **6.4.1.2 Working out**

Most of the subjects who work out claim that they would never do it without music. Individual training such as jogging, skiing or working out in a fitness studio is often accompanied by music on the MP3 player. The music helps the subjects keep going, and makes the workout less boring, they say:

I've just started experimenting with this cross-country skiing thing. I've never been very keen on cross-country skiing. I've only done it because it has been a lovely day, a pleasant outing, but then it has been very boring actually. I get very easily bored with that sound the skis make; it becomes almost trance like, a bit apathetic. I never seem to get going properly. So now I've begun listening to music and I go much faster, and uphill is no problem, so there is a *huge* difference in that (9: Female, 37 years).

Hodges (2009) differentiate between *physiological responses* and *physical responses* to music. Physiological responses are internal bodily processes, such as heart rate, respiration and blood pressure, while physical responses are external movements such as head nodding and foot tapping. Most of the subjects speak of physical responses when they listen to music – they become more energized, and find it easier to e.g. ski faster and ski uphill, as in the example above. One of the informants also experiences physiological responses when he listens to certain kind of music. He believes his heart beats faster, particularly when working out:

If you want to get energy, or if you want to become boosted and on the go, then you put on something that gets you there. For instance Ramstein or something like that, then you draw on it a bit, and sure enough, you become simply a little upbeat. I bet your heart beats a bit

quicker and that you get more adrenalin in your body and you simply become more driven. Undoubtedly, and especially when working out, when training, that's when I think it applies (11: Male, 37 years).

The music is described as a 'pacer'; "something that drives you" (male, 27 years). Music that is used during workout is usually described as music with specific qualities. The subjects need a particular type of music to keep them going:

I feel that it's a very good - like a cheerleader. But then it depends a bit on the type of music. It has to be some kind of happy music. Or not happy music, [...] but I've tried some soft music, and I don't think it works so well. I've got to have more rhythm and something that gives more energy through the music. That I get more energy, I run more in rhythm. It's more fun to jog with that [laughter]. But of course, it gives me more energy, because then I feel it's *only* me when I jog. Without that it becomes a bit more boring. I feel that my ass becomes a bit heavier. I feel like stopping more often. When I have music it's like suddenly I've run far. It's easier (12: Female, 43 years).

For this woman, the correct music can function as an important motivator during training. Music with proper rhythm seems to make the entire workout easier to get through, almost to the extent that she forgets what she is doing; "suddenly I've ran far". Without music, or with the wrong type of music, her body seems to feel heavier, and the training is described as boring and more difficult to get through. Again, we see that the correct music lifts spirit, boosts energy, and increases motivation, in one single act.

Another woman is nearly embarrassed by the music she listens to when she works out. She explains that it is music she would never listen to at home, for example. She describes the music as 'superficial', which does not demand any mental activity. It is important with tempo and correct pulse in the music:

*I think that there is a bit of difference between going out to run or work out and going to work. Do you listen to another type of music then?*

Yes. I have to admit that I use a very different type of music and then we're talking about things that I don't normally disclose that I listen

to. We're actually in the VG-list<sup>50</sup> [laughter] on a couple of things. But in my defence, it's like these boxes with music for workout and then music becomes a kind of a tool. And it has to be the right music, music that is in a right tempo, right beat. Like if I'd to run to a 7/8, I'd fall off course (5: Female, 27 years).

The subjects have a clear understanding of the kind of music that is suitable and effective for workout. As described, they usually choose to listen to up-beat music with a distinct rhythm and clear pulse. The informant from the quote above also maintains that the music is a 'tool'. Its purpose is to keep her going during the workout. However, as DeNora (2000) stresses, the music alone does not cause anything to happen:

[...] to say that music will 'cause' things to happen, that it makes the body do things or that its objective properties will automatically entrain the body in particular ways, is to miss the collaborative dimension of how music's effectiveness is achieved, for it is always in and through the ways that it is appropriated that music provides structuring resources – devices that enable and constrain the body. Music provides environmental materials that may be *used* in ways that 'afford' different bodily capacities (DeNora, 2000, p. 96).

One should not overlook the fact that certain musical qualities seem to get the subjects going more efficiently during workout than others. It does not seem to be unimportant what kind of music the subjects listen to. But, as DeNora expresses, it is the way individuals orient to and appropriate the music that makes it an efficient aid during workout. The subjects are not passive recipients who are 'acted upon by music'. Rather, they try to make sense of the music and work with it (DeNora, 2000). Again, their knowledge of music becomes vital for their ability to appropriate it during workout. For example, as the subject above states, "it has to be the right music, music that is in a right tempo, right beat. Like if I'd to run to a 7/8, I'd fall of course" (female, 27 years). She expresses here a knowledge that perhaps many of us take for granted: She knows that she needs music with a certain tempo and beat to keep her going. Moreover, she is aware that the music

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<sup>50</sup> The 'VG-list' is a weekly Top 20 list presented in the Norwegian newspaper VG. The list is based on the previous week's music sale by about 100 music distributors across the country. It is often associated with pop music, and is perceived by some as rather 'simple' music.

should have a specific time and rhythm; otherwise she will fall over or lose what she is doing. This knowledge enables her to utilize music for the specific purpose of motivating her, enhancing her energy levels and keeping her going during workout. Hence, she can act as her own, personal trainer, instead of relying on an instructor to guide her through the workout.

Music is used in several kinds of workout. DeNora (2000) makes an account of how music can be appropriated in aerobic-sessions,

[...] where music is overtly employed as a device of state regularization, a means for structuring and restructuring motivation, movement, energy and the self-perception of fatigue in relation to predetermined aims and over time (DeNora, 2000, p. 88).

The music used in aerobic sessions is placed in the *foreground* to serve as “a motivational device of bodily conduct” (2000, p. 93). When the instructor puts on the ‘wrong’ music, it is obvious that the participants lose what they are doing. When the music is ‘right’, on the other hand, it can guide the participants through the session, from warming up through cooling down, and provide clarity to each exercise. Moreover, the correct music provides motivation and energy, and makes the participants forget about tiring movements and fatigue (DeNora, 2000). When the subjects in the present study use mobile music for their individual training, the music seems to work in the same way. It is placed in the foreground of the subjects’ focus, and serves to provide motivation and bodily energy, and to make the subjects forget about boredom and exhaustion.

## **6.4.2 Decreasing bodily energy**

### **6.4.2.1 Relaxing**

As we saw in section 6.4.1.1, the ability to shut out the surroundings by the use of the MP3 player made the subjects less affected by stressful environments (e.g. packed train), and helped them to gain energy. In the same way, the MP3 player can help to shut out the surroundings, and consequently help the listener relax:

People sit and chat loudly about everything under the sky. It can be difficult, if you begin to listen it can be difficult to block it out, if you want to relax, then music is a good way to do so (3: Male, 44 years).

One of the subjects mentions that her use of the MP3 player “is a good way to save your energy as well. Instead of becoming tired of the unpleasant noise, you can listen to music and relax” (female, 37 years). The mobile music thus seems to have a specific function in that it helps to exclude what is perceived as ‘noise’ or stressful surroundings, and therefore helps the subjects to relax.<sup>51</sup> Further, self-chosen music, normally described as ‘soft music’ can calm down the subjects. One of the informants tells me that he usually listens to Mozart’s piano concerts when he is travelling to other cities. He usually puts them on in the evenings, when he is back in the hotel room:

And lie down in a big, soft bed and put on these things here [headset], and use it to sleep, as simple as that. I think I almost never manage to listen through any of them, but the first few parts at least. I do that almost every time (11: Male, 37 years).

This man explains that he listens to the same music every time he travels. He uses Mozart’s concerts to calm down in the evenings, and explains that he normally falls asleep before the music is finished. He has in other words developed a ritual for relaxation where music plays a vital part. There is of course a difference in being on a train or in the city, and being in a comfortable bed in a hotel room. According to my informants, it seems that music can help them to relax in different situations, however. As this woman says, she listens to music when she is on long journeys to create space for herself where she can rest:

I’ve been on 24-hours bus trips several times, and that meant sitting in one place doing nothing. And it works, but if I have music then I’m *completely* knocked off. It’s a bit like meditation perhaps. Because I’m in a place where I can’t do anything anyway. Then it’s good to be all by myself, and not have any stressful elements coming in from outside, because in such a situation it’s perhaps rather easy to just doze off (7: Female, 24 years).

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<sup>51</sup> More on this in chapter 7.

The MP3 player seems to act as a technology for bodily regulation, and relaxation in particular, because music itself seems to calm down the listener. What is more, the MP3 player can be used specifically for the purpose of excluding the environment, thus providing private space for the listener where she is able to relax. Hence, the MP3 player gains a double function as a technology for relaxation. Further, the use of the player can even help the listener to fall asleep, as we shall see in the coming section.

#### **6.4.2.2            Going to sleep**

In the previous section, one of the subjects mentioned that he could use music to fall asleep. Although a number of the subjects say that they do not utilize music as a sleeping-aid, several have used, or actively use music as a help to calm down and fall asleep. While the music calms the listener down, it also takes focus away from thoughts and worries, and therefore helps the subject to relax:

I've done that quite often, to use it as sleeping aid, that's why I do it all the time [laughter]. And it has something to do with that [...] that it calms me because it is soft music, at the same time as it becomes something I automatically concentrate on, instead of lying there thinking that I have to sleep, or what I should do with this and that, which one often does when one isn't able to sleep. So yes, consciously, I absolutely think it helps (1: Female, 26 years).

When the subjects listen to music at night, they usually listen to loudspeakers, not on headsets. One of the subjects says that the headset can be a bit uncomfortable when she lies in bed. Another says that she tries not to use her headset too much, because she knows it is not good for her hearing. The subject who says that it is uncomfortable with the headset still says that it could be an idea to use it as a way of being closer to the music, and create a 'bubble' where the music is 'wrapped around her'. One of the subjects who goes to sleep with music regularly, says that she pre-sets a playlist with a limitation in duration, so that the music stops shortly after she has fallen asleep:

Normally I sleep to music. I make a playlist that I know doesn't last very long, for I know that it's not very good with background noise. I



find that wonderful, because I don't like it very much when it's completely quiet, at the same time I become calmer. [...]

*When you say that you don't like it when it's quiet in the room, do you know what the reason is?*

No, I don't know, you lie there and listen to things and then it creaks and you start thinking about things. If you listen to music you can get in a mode where you can remove all background noise (10: Female, 18 years).

It seems that one of the most important functions of music at night is to distract the listener from ruminating thoughts. If one starts to worry, it becomes difficult to fall asleep. The music also takes focus off distractions such as sounds from the surroundings. When the subjects can focus their attention towards the music rather than other distractions, they find it easier to relax and calm down. The girl from the quote above explains that it is important with the correct kind of music at night. "With playlists in the evenings, it's important not to put on the kind of music that just makes you feel totally lost", she says. She chooses to listen to more neutral music, which does not bring out any specific emotions in her; "just calm, pleasant music which doesn't really bring out any particular feeling". Moreover, she explains that she never picks out new music when she creates the playlists she uses for falling asleep. If there was music that she never had heard before, she would become focused on the lyrics and the like, and the music would therefore divert her from falling asleep. Therefore, she creates the playlists out of music she already knows well, she explains.

Two of the subjects who have used music as an aid to sleep earlier, have now stopped, both because they do not feel the urgent need, and because they are now married, and choose not to listen to music out of consideration to their partners. One of the subjects tells me that he used to listen to his private music when he was in the military and shared bedroom with several other people. The music helped him to create private boundaries, and a space where he could be by himself:

I used music a lot earlier. I slept with music, but I don't use it anymore. But back then I very often fell asleep to music. And it was wonderful, because it was in a situation at the military, I was in a room with very many people, it was great to be able to shut myself in

a bit and listen to music. Then you're a bit on your own (6: Male, 24 years).

The other informant explains that the music did not help her to sleep, but kept her company when she could not sleep:

I have actually had many sleepless nights, insomnia since my childhood. [Music] never helped me sleep, but I could at least have something to do while I didn't sleep [laughter]. It was a little like that. Now I sleep, so it's a completely different affair. And I'm married, so now there are other people to consider (7: Female, 24 years).

We see that music can function as a sleeping-aid at a number of levels. At one level, it creates a private space for the listener where she is able to calm down. At another level, the sedative music itself calms down the listener, and helps her to relax. On yet another level, the music helps the subject to sleep because it distracts her from disturbing or repetitive thoughts. Additionally, the music drowns out any irregular sounds from the surroundings, which could be disturbing when trying to fall asleep. In some situations, however, the music does not help the subject to sleep, but keeps her company when she cannot sleep.

To summarize, it seems that the subjects can appropriate music for bodily regulation throughout the entire day, from waking up in the morning, to 'getting going' and 'getting ready' for work by increasing both motivation and bodily energy, to calm down and relax after work, or as an aid during workout, and to rest and fall asleep at night. The music itself is important. While 'soft' music usually helps the subjects calm down, 'up-beat' music normally increases their bodily energy. But, the subjects' knowledge of the music and relation to the music plays a vital role. For example, the fact that they enjoy the music can both increase their motivation and energy, and lift their spirits. Also, the MP3 player has a specific role in the way the subjects appropriate music throughout the day. First of all, the music is always available. This makes it possible to listen to music on the way to and from work for example, or during workout. In addition, the fact that the subjects can create a private space where they can avoid being influenced by the surroundings seems to be an important asset and aid in controlling their bodily energy regulation, both when they need to be more energized and when they need to calm down.

## 6.5 SUMMARY

Why are MP3 players as technology of self-regulation interesting? As we have seen, having an available tool for self-regulation is useful in situations when the subject has the need to regulate cognitive, affective or bodily aspects of the self. As mentioned, the MP3 player is always available, and the mobile music seems to be an efficient support in different forms of self-regulation. The MP3 player offers an 'armour' against stimuli from the surroundings, as one of the informants expressed (female, 26 years). By creating a private space, the music helps to focus on one's internal states and one's personal needs or goals, rather than being influenced by the mood of the surroundings. This makes the MP3 player a successful tool for self-management and self-regulation.

There is no longer any doubt that emotions, mood and bodily reactions are intertwined (e.g. Engelsrud, 2006; Grewe, et al., 2007; Larsen, 2000; Thayer, et al., 1994). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) asserts that the body is the basis for all our experiences of the world and of oneself. It is therefore impossible to separate cognitive, emotional and bodily aspects of an experience. This belief is a hallmark of our time, and Engelsrud (2006, p. 30) points out that the body "has feelings, intentions and meaning" (my translation).

As shown above, music listening is related to both moods and emotions. But these experiences are not separated from the body. North and Hargreaves point out that "there is evidence that specific musical events do indeed lead to physiological reactions in listeners" (2008, p. 129), and Hodges (2009, p. 121) states that "[t]he experience of listening to music involves highly complex interactions among cognitive, affective, and bodily processes that take place within a personal-social-cultural context."<sup>52</sup> As seen, music induces affects, and affects have a bodily aspect. Grewe et al have also shown that emotional responses to music and bodily reactions often go hand in hand: "Feelings in response to music are often accompanied by measurable bodily reactions such as goose bumps or shivers down the spine, commonly called "chills"" (Grewe, et al., 2007, p. 297). Hence, regulation of thoughts, moods, emotions, and bodily energy must be understood as more complex, interrelated regulation work.

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<sup>52</sup> See also DeNora (2000) and Lilliestam (2009).

Music listening appears to be (one of) the most common tactics used for affect regulation (van Goethem, 2010). Van Goethem asks *why* music is so commonly used for affect regulation purposes, and finds six explanations:

- Music is viewed as a quick and easy accessible “fix”
- Listening to music does not require any brainpower
- Music listening is easy to combine with other activities (and tactics)
- Music listening allows a temporary break without leaving everything behind
- Music listening is healthier than other tactics such as eating and smoking
- Prior experience leads to knowledge of possible outcomes (van Goethem, 2010, p. 273)

These findings are confirmed by the present study. I have shown that the informants’ knowledge of how music works for them allows them to use it as an efficient regulation tactic. Further, the MP3 player acquires a particular role in the availability of music, allowing the listeners to combine the music listening with other activities when ‘on the go’. Although I want to argue that music can indeed require brainpower, it is also apparent that it can be used for relaxing and unwinding in a different manner than e.g. listening to the news. In sum, listening to music on MP3 players appears to be an easily available and efficient tactic for self-regulation.

## 7. MP3 PLAYERS AS A TECHNOLOGY OF COPING

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As I have touched upon previously, the use of MP3 players enables the subjects to create a private space where they can more easily focus on, manage and regulate themselves. I believe this aspect of the MP3 player is a crucial element in its role in self-regulation and daily coping. The previous chapter mainly focused on the relation between the music and the listener, and how music can be appropriated as a tactic for self-regulation. As mentioned, music may be used in similar ways also in other listening-contexts, and is thus not limited to MP3 use. In this chapter, I will focus on how the informants use their private music to create and maintain boundaries around themselves, and how this strategy enables them to cope in daily life. This is a more specific feature of the MP3 player as a technological device. By bringing their private music into the streets and public places, the subjects can privatise these spaces (see also Bull, 2007). What is more, the music listening becomes a truly private action, in that the listening device is designed for solitary listening. Thus, the subjects create boundaries around a private space when they listen to their MP3 players. Further, the mobile music becomes a technology of control, as it enhances the subjects' sense of control over different aspects of their everyday life. Finally, the private music on the MP3 player might enable the subjects to cope with the stressors of everyday life. These are all aspects I will look into further in the present chapter. As will become evident, the different aspects

are interlinked, and should be viewed as different sides of the same phenomenon.

## 7.1 BOUNDARIES

One of the most prominent traits of the MP3 player (and other personal stereos) is that it creates boundaries between the listener and her environment. First of all, the music marks the listener off from the soundscape of her surroundings, and creates a personal sonic environment where she is the only listener. Second, by wearing a headset or earplugs, the listener sends out a signal to others that she is not available for talk or interaction. My informants explain that they consciously withdraw from their surroundings, and perceive it as pleasurable to do so. It should be noted, however, that while most of the subjects agree on this matter, it is not the case for everyone. One of the informants has no need, and no wish, to withdraw from his environment. He simply uses his MP3 player in order to be able to listen to music outside of home. If it was up to him, the music of his choice could just as well be played on loudspeakers on the metro. Here, I will nonetheless focus on how and why the subjects use their MP3 players to create boundaries around themselves.

One of the subjects explains that she can use her private music to avoid the non-verbal communication and the evaluation she feels happens between her and the people around her:

*How is it in relation to other people? Any thoughts about that?*

[...] Like on the bus and when I'm in a café, you can often think, or rather I may think that others are observing me and I sort of become aware of what I do and things like that. And then I think a lot about that, and begin wondering who they are and what they do and then somehow I get in a situation where I'm communicating with people around me. And sometimes it's nice not to do that, not to have to relate to my surroundings. And that's when I put on my iPod and focus on something else, create my own world, so the other one becomes less important. And in that way I communicate with others by – it's really strange because these are people I don't know and I would never have started talking to them – but it's merely

communication on a low level. By just putting on my headphones I make myself unavailable to them. Just by communicating this action allows me to acquire more space for myself and not be obliged to relate to others. And sometimes it can be stressful in itself, sitting on the bus and having to relate to others, or sitting in a café and [relating to others] (1: Female, 26 years).

This woman explains that it can be stressful to relate to other people in public spaces. She does not know these people, but still feels that they communicate at one level, particularly by evaluating each other. I would think that these experiences are characteristic for urban environments, where one constantly is close to people one does not know, and often stands or walks in crowds. By putting on her headset, this informant makes herself unavailable to other people. This act communicates to others that she is otherwise engaged, and so she feels that she does not need to relate to her environment in the same way. In this way, the MP3 player becomes a form for protection for the user. This informant further describes the private music as an 'armour' against impressions from the surroundings. It becomes obvious that the MP3 player can take the role of a protective device against unwanted stimuli or communication with the environment. Bull (2007, p. 47) also points out that "iPods are non-interactive in the sense that users construct fantasies and maintain feelings of security precisely by not interacting with others or their environment". The fact that the subjects already know the music they are listening to is also an important aspect of their feelings of security. One of my informants says that she 'likes to be distracted from the environment'. I ask her to explain further, and she says:

Well, I simply don't hear people. I can't hear what's happening around me and I like that. I think it's quite pleasant, because I like to think when I sit and stare out of the window or something like that - or by just being completely detached. So it's good to have music on, well, because it's familiar, what I'm hearing.

*You become familiar with what you're listening to?*

No, I'm already familiar, so then it isn't - then I know what it is and I can sort of just relax (7: Female, 24 years).

This subject explains that by listening to music she already knows, she is able to withdraw into herself and relax. The fact that she knows what to

expect enables her to focus on her own state of mind without being distracted by the surroundings. While this informant does not say anything about feeling more secure, it is likely that personal and well-known music enhances the listener's sense of identity and confidence and thus empowers her in unknown environments (Bull, 2000; Skånland, 2007).

Some subjects describe the experience of listening to their MP3 players as "being on the outside, observing". It is clear that the private music can create an experience of being disconnected from the rest of the world. However, a young man (24 years) asserts that he does not feel isolated. He just blocks out 'unnecessary' impressions that 'he does not want', he says. Another subject (male, 43 years) also claims that he is still aware of his surroundings when he listens to his MP3 player, and that he is able to react in situations where it is needed, but that he is still able to block out tiresome stimuli from his environment. By drowning out sounds from the surroundings, blocking out impressions and retracting into themselves, the subjects create a private space for themselves, or a private room, which I will explore in the coming section.

### **7.1.1 A private room**

As mentioned in chapter 5 (use of the MP3 player), the subjects often describe listening to their private music as being in a 'bubble', or being in a private world. "I listen to the iPod mostly when I'm out on my own. It's my private room", says one of the subjects (female, 43 years). Another informant describes the experience of being in a 'bubble' like this:

In a way you get into your own world, and the rest of the world becomes detached. It's like you and your music and you feel at one with it. And the rest of the world is left to fend for itself, I think. Yes, you enter into your own bubble (11: Male, 37 years).

Bull (2007, p. 7) writes that "[t]he iPod appears to privilege private life, enhancing the conception of the consumer as an isolated subject". Later, he describes some of the social uses of the iPod, such as listening to music on loudspeakers via a docking-station in the car or at home. He says, "iPods, unlike the personal stereo, create new forms of social possibilities, primarily with others known to the user, in the home and in the car". Even



so, he points out that “they remain, however, the archetypal privatising technology” (2007, p. 65). This privatising is one of the technological consequences of the MP3 player that most of the subjects enjoy, and even seek. One of the women describes the ‘bubble’ created by the music as a private space where she can be left alone:

It’s like that bubble we talked about, the fact that I shut out the world a bit. It’s only me listening to that music; it’s only me who knows how I feel then and there. When you sit there with those two plugs in your ears, no one asks you unnecessary questions [laughs], you’re more at peace (5: Female, 27 years).

The earplugs send out a signal that she wants to be left alone, and so this woman carves out some personal time by listening to her private music. Further, she says, she is the only one who knows how she feels at that moment. Consequently, the music listening becomes a truly private experience, often despite the fact that the listener is in a public environment. In other words, there is not necessarily need for a physical room to achieve privacy. One can create a private, sonic room by putting on a headset, which can function similarly to closing the door to one’s personal room. For the subjects, this private room becomes a valued space.

Music creates boundaries around a private room and adds contents to it at the same time. In this sense, music gains a double function; it defines what the private room is both by clarifying what is *not* part of it (the environment, other people) and what *is* part of it, which is the music and the listener’s private experiences. As the man expressed in the quote above, a strong bond between him and the music takes shape when he listens to his MP3 player, and he feels ‘as one’ with the music, while the rest of the world is left to its own devices. Hence, the listener-music relationship becomes more prominent because of the private room created with the MP3 player.

One of the other subjects describes how the members of her family use their iPods when they are out sailing. They live on the boat for long periods of time, and naturally there is not much space for each of them. She explains that they use their private music to withdraw from each other, and that this is an advantage when they spend most of the day close together:

*When you put on your iPod, is it like having some time alone, is that how you experience it?*

Yes, I do, and also on the boat in fact. And I actually thought about it, because before, we used to put on music that everyone liked on the boat, while now we all have our own iPods. We're four people [laughter] and we each have our own. So in a way it's a bit asocial, because we all sit around and listen, retreat and listen to our own music files, or the music we like. But it's great, instead of sitting and listening to something that's fairly okay and which everyone likes.

*But what do you think about the social aspect? Do you think there's something negative with the fact that you all withdraw from one another?*

No. No, I've thought a bit about that. No, actually it's an advantage on the boat, because there you're extremely closed in all the time. So the fact that you can put on your iPod and withdraw a little is actually just fine when you're so cooped in. When you have twelve hours sailing to go through, it doesn't matter that half of that time is in your own room. Because you are in your own room, at least I feel that I'm in my own room when I have my iPod on (12: Female, 43 years).

It becomes obvious that the MP3 player can function as an efficient technology for creating private space, or a private room. Especially in situations where one is in close distance to other people, the MP3 player can be an appreciated device for this purpose. In the quote above, a situation where a family is close together over long periods of time is described. In this situation, the need for a private room becomes conspicuous, and so they use their private music to create privacy in a non-private situation.

Normally, the subjects do not use their MP3 players when they are with people they know. It is rather in public contexts, when they are surrounded by strangers, that they crave their private space. This is possibly a need that is more present in cities and urban environments, where one often experiences these situations, than in more rural environments. That being said, some of the subjects report that they have also used their MP3 player to withdraw from social situations. One of the young informants explains that she sometimes puts on her music on the bus home from school, even if she is with friends:

[...] it actually happens because I know the ones I sit with quite well and I can say, “no, today I’m terribly tired, today I just want to listen to my headset”. And then I put it on a few times. I feel a bit wicked afterwards [chuckles]. But it does happen.

*Do you find that when you say you’re tired, that you relax better or?*

Uhum. Or rather – it’s a bit mean to say so – but you don’t have to be social as well, “how’s your day been?” Because in a way you’re always play-acting a bit on these kind of bus trips with people, unless they’re your best friends (10: Female, 18 years).

I interpret this utterance to mean that it can be tiring to be in a social situation and to keep a straight face when one is worn-out. One does not always wish, or have the energy to participate in social interactions. In these situations, this informant chooses to retract and listen to her personal music rather than keeping the façade in front of her peers. Another subject also tells me that she has chosen to withdraw from social contexts when she has become tired of the situation:

I only remember doing that in social contexts on a bus or something where there is a crowd, and I become somewhat tired of keeping it going, so I just withdraw by putting on some music on the bus. But otherwise I find it hard to do so, because I feel very asocial with it. So it’s not that easy in social gatherings to just sit down and plug in the plugs (9: Female, 37 years).

Both of these women describe listening to their MP3 player as being ‘anti-social’. The youngest subject utters that she feels ‘a bit mean’ when she withdraws with her music. The other informant explains that she finds it difficult to put on her MP3 player in social contexts. In all, the subjects mainly choose to remain ‘present’ in the social contexts they are in. Nonetheless, it appears that they might sometimes wish to create a private space where they can choose to relax or focus on themselves. As we have seen, the MP3 player can be an efficient device for this. Creating a private room is further related to carving out private time, which is desirable for many of the subjects. I will therefore look into this below.

### 7.1.2 Private time

Bull (2005, p. 343) argues that “the new technology of MP3 players gives users unprecedented power of control over their experience of time and space”. For my informants, the MP3 player has given them the opportunity to listen to music undisturbed by family members or daily chores. By listening to their personal music while they are commuting to and from work, they carve out some private time where they are allowed to be absorbed in the music and not focus on their surroundings. This time is usually perceived as quality time:

I feel that if I sit on the train, many people think that I have a long commute and waste a lot of time. But if I can sit for an hour and listen to good music, it is in a way quality time, not wasted time. Then it's a thing that gives me something. It's a breathing space in everyday life, in a way. It almost becomes like an experience, a blessing to have the possibility to sit undisturbed for an hour and listen to music. It's not that often people have this possibility in their daily lives. There I can sit on my own and listen to exactly what I want for a whole hour. [...]

*So you may say that music perhaps gives meaning to that time spent?*

Yes, absolutely. So I don't consider this train trip as wasted at all. If I read a good book and listen to good music, there's no better way to spend time [laughter] (3: Male, 44 years).

What others would think of as a waste of time becomes quality time for this subject. He describes his daily commute as a “breathing space”, precisely because he is allowed to listen to his music in privacy. He even asserts that “there is no better way to spend time”. Thus, the time that would normally be conceived as tiring or ‘a waste’, has now taken the form of valued, precious time. Accordingly, the music does not only make commuting tolerable, but makes it in fact desired. One of the other men claims that he hopes his daily journey will not be shortened by express trains or similar advancements because he enjoys the time it takes to get to and from work:

Now I have one hour and a quarter from when I leave home, one hour and twenty minutes actually, until I'm at the office. It's just perfect.

*You wouldn't want it shorter?*

No, I wouldn't. It's just fine. For me it's like quality time, to get to play the music I like and read a bit if I'm in the mood, listen to podcasts or

something I want to listen to. Then you have regained much of what was, for me at least, the thing about music before: a bit like chilling out and listening to something you like and to relax (4: Male, 43 years).

This informant says that with the use of the MP3 player, music has regained most of its original purpose (before he acquired a family), namely to sit back and relax. For these subjects, it becomes clear that their life-situation, with family and obligations, does not allow them much private time. With the MP3 player, they have transformed the time they spend commuting to become their own private quality time. Also for younger listeners, the private time created with the use of their MP3 player is desirable. When they put on their headsets, they send out a signal that they are unavailable, and so they are left alone. By signalling that they are otherwise engaged, they construct some private time:

*Can you say a little about what it means to you [...] to be able to have your music when you are out of the house?*

It means a lot, because there is a lot of company in music, too. People go out with their dogs; I go out with my iPod. That's a bit how I feel. And it is a bit how it is for me. And not least of all that it gives me some time alone. If I go around with the iPod then no one expects me to be [available], so it is my time (5: Female, 27 years).

It seems that the private music helps the subjects to regain control over space and time. Bull (2007) also speaks of MP3 listeners' control over their experience of time, but he is mainly concerned with an "attempt to break away and overcome the structured rhythms of contemporary life" (2007, p. 146). He states that "the iPod potentially liberates users from the linear grind of daily life", meaning that they "reinscribe mundane linear time with their own very personalised meanings" (2007, p. 147). Here, Bull touches upon an important aspect of mobile listening. However, based on my informants' descriptions, their listening is not so much about being 'liberated from the linear grind of daily life' as being able to create a privatised space and time where they are allowed to focus on the music and themselves. Bull does mention that time spent listening to the MP3 player is conceived of as 'free time', "away from others, schedules and obligations" (2007, p. 147). However, what is vital, I believe, is that this 'free time' also

turns commuting into desired time. Reinscribing 'mundane linear time' might be part of it, but the personal music also reinscribes time and space that is otherwise conceived as extremely wearing:

I noticed that very well when I was living [abroad], because then I used [public transport] every morning. It took half an hour each way to go and come back from work. And then to take [public transport] on those days I had forgotten my iPod, was just *horrible*. I thought it was unbelievably rotten. While the times when I had my iPod, then I got to sit half an hour in peace and listen to music (5: Female, 27 years).

This woman describes commuting not only as 'mundane' or 'boring', but as *horrible*. It felt intolerable to travel when she did not listen to her private music. When she did listen to her private music, however, commuting did not only feel tolerable, but she felt she was allowed to spend time to sit in peace and listen to music. The experience of commuting consequently becomes completely transformed with the use of an MP3 player.

We see that by creating boundaries and carving out private space and time, the subjects gain high levels of control over their experiences. At the same time, the subjects create strategies to cope with otherwise tiresome or stressful surroundings. I will look into the experience of control in the coming section. The last section will further illuminate how the MP3 player can function as a technology of coping.

## **7.2 SENSE OF CONTROL**

### **7.2.1 Cognitive, social, and aesthetic control**

In his writings on the use of personal stereos and the iPod, Bull constantly returns to the issue of 'control' (Bull, 2001b, 2005, 2007). He asserts that personal stereo users gain an unprecedented level of control over themselves and their experience of their surroundings. The iPod offers the users cognitive, social and aesthetic control in their everyday lives, according to Bull (2007, p. 3). I will here look into these aspects of control,

based on how I interpret them. Cognitive control is linked to self-regulation and self-control, social control is related to social interaction, and aesthetic control refers to perceived control over one's aesthetic environment. Because I have already looked into what can be described as cognitive control in the previous chapter and aspects of social control in the sections above, I will not use much space here to elaborate on these issues. I will rather go further into the matter of aesthetic control.<sup>53</sup> I choose here to focus on the subjects' sonic environment, although this is not separated from vision and other sensory stimuli. As Chion (1994) points out, we do not see and hear a phenomenon separately, but rather see-hear it. What we see is influenced by what we hear, as what we hear is influenced by what we see. Thus, the relationship between sound and sight brings out what Chion calls *added value*. This phenomenon can perhaps explain why the subjects in both Bull's (2000, 2007) and my studies speak of *filmic experiences* when using their personal stereos. As Bull has made good accounts of these experiences, and I have touched upon the phenomenon elsewhere (Skånland, 2007), I have chosen not to go further into the issue in this context. Rather, I focus on sound, noise, and privatised soundscapes.

### 7.2.1.1 Cognitive control

I will not use this space to write much about cognitive control, since I have already talked about the MP3 player as a technology of self-regulation in the previous chapter. Here, I will only point out that the MP3 player can enhance the listener's experience of cognitive control precisely by being a tool for self-regulation and self-management. Bull (2007, p. 125) claims that cognitive control "comes with technological mediation in iPod culture". He relates this control to self-regulation, and makes an account of the different strategies and activities engaged in by the iPod user linked to cognitive management. Relating to DeNora (2000), Bull writes:

Music is intimately linked to our deepest strivings and most powerful emotions. iPod use appears to offer a glimpse into the internal workings and strategies engaged in by users in their management of

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<sup>53</sup> Another term for 'aesthetic control' could be 'sensorial control', as it is one's sensorial impressions which are controlled. However, as 'aesthetics' are about one's sensorial impressions, I find it to be an appropriate term, and therefore choose to use it in the following.

themselves, others and urban space through engaging in a series of self-regulatory practices through which they habitually manage their moods, volitions and desires (Bull, 2007, p. 121).

One of my informants explicitly states that his private music enables him to gain control over his thoughts. He explains that this has to do with creating a private space:

*[...] you feel as if you have a bit more control over your thoughts?*

Yes. [...]

*Yes, so without music it would become difficult?*

Yes, because then I don't have full control in a way. It's mostly because I don't get to be alone. There are always a lot of people around me, but when I have [music] then I have the chance to be alone if I want to (6: Male, 24 years).

This man expresses that he feels less in control without his MP3 player. This is mainly because he is unable to create a private space without his personal music. With his private music he would have the sense of being alone, even if he was in a crowd, which relates to the private room discussed in section 7.1.1. Within this private space, this subject feels more in control. As mentioned in chapter 6, self-regulation is often related to self-control. Having a sense of cognitive control will most likely increase the subjects' ability to regulate thoughts and affects, and is therefore a valuable aspect of self-regulation.

### **7.2.1.2 Social control**

Using an MP3 player provides a certain level of social control, in that the users can choose whether or not to interact with others. They can choose what to take part in, including choosing not to engage in social communication:

*[...] In a way I feel you can entrench yourself in your room and do as you want. But if you don't do that, then everyone can demand a piece of you, just like that, at any time, or just shout after you or stuff. If you're listening to music you can choose not to listen. [...] You can decide more what you want to participate in (6: Male, 24 years).*



This subject states that if he does not have his private music, “everyone can take a piece of you”. He prefers to control the interaction with his surroundings, for example by choosing not to listen to others talking to him. This social control enables him to maintain the private space created by the use of his MP3 player, shaping it the way he wants. He further talks about the discomfort he experiences when he is not able to listen to his private music, and relates this to a lack of control:

There was a period when my headset was broken. It was a *lousy* feeling. At that time I was in a period where there was a lot going on school-wise, so I was very stressed out. [...] Then it was difficult to sort of stay on track. It was difficult to break out of the negative spirals, all those situations where for example I was travelling somewhere. [...] I *want* to isolate myself, but I’m not able to. I can’t do it. And then you feel frustrated and it’s almost like entering a depression, not heavily, but you feel weighed down by not having the opportunity to be by yourself. [...] ‘Cause then I don’t have complete control, in a way (6: Male, 24 years).

This is a powerful story of how much the private music can come to mean for an individual’s sense of control. For this man, it appears that the deprivation of his music reduced his sense of both cognitive and social control, and that those two forms of control were related. When he felt unable to withdraw from his surroundings, he was also unable to regulate his internal stress and difficult thoughts.

One of the female subjects says: “I can demonstrate when I want to be by myself” (female, 37 years). “Not saying ‘hello’ to an acquaintance on the street, limiting the possibility of speaking to others [...] are just some of the tactics allowed when listening to headphones”, Thibaud observes (2003, p. 338). Plugging in earbuds or putting on a headset signals to others that they should leave the listener alone. This might be the case both in urban environments and in more familiar settings such as a work environment. In a work environment, constant interruptions by colleagues might be perceived as an obstacle in one’s work. By visually signalling that one is listening to music, one can achieve the same effect as closing the door to one’s office or putting up a ‘do not disturb’ sign. In urban settings, social control might be desirable in situations where one bumps into or eye an

acquaintance or colleague whom one does not wish to talk to at that time. The MP3 player 'allows' the listener to ignore the other, pretending not to see her. Instead, the MP3 user can continue listening, not being interrupted – and maintain her private space. Listening to private music leaves it up to the listener to decide the terms of interaction and communication, as Bull writes: "It is apparent that iPod use permits users to choose the terms and conditions of potential interactions, engendering feelings of power among them" (Bull, 2007, p. 58). Thus, listening to an MP3 player may enhance the listener's sense of social control, which might further lead to a sense of heightened empowerment.

While users of MP3 players might choose not to interact with others, Bull (2007, p. 59) points out an important issue: "The use of an iPod isn't primarily about the disregarding of others; rather, it concerns the reclaiming of the user's time in urban culture". Signalling to others that one is fully engaged in listening, and thus not available for interaction, is not so much about avoiding others, but more about carving out private and personal time and space in public environments. As we have seen, this privatised time and space is desirable for many of the subjects who have otherwise little time to themselves. Controlling interaction with others might therefore be seen as a way of protecting the private space created with the use of the MP3 player.

### **7.2.1.3           Aesthetic control**

"We have no ear lids. We are condemned to listen", writes Schafer (2003, p. 25). While we have no ear lids, and therefore cannot choose to 'turn off' sound impulses, as we can choose to shut out visual stimuli by shutting our eyes, the personal stereo empowers the ears. The subjects consciously use their MP3 players to block out sounds from their surroundings. Most of the subjects enjoy the ability to withdraw from the environment, and particularly to shut off what they perceive as noise: "Like on the train, there's a lot of talking going on, especially on mobiles. And there it's extremely good to be able to use music to block out all the noise" (male, 44 years). One of the other informants also explains that her music helps her to mask other people's conversations and other sounds she does not wish to hear:

*If I understand you correctly, you don't actually relate to your surroundings at all?*

I try not to, really. Unless something's going on that's completely crazy, I try my best to avoid it, because there are people talking on the phone, and if they talk on the phone then I listen to it, involuntarily. It's like that, and then I listen to what they're saying anyway, if they're sitting right behind me or just in front, or babies who scream. I don't have anything against babies, but it's very difficult to listen to screeching babies for long. And so on and so on. Or people who talk together, so that I listen to the conversation without wanting to, because I can't block out things on my own. And I don't want to listen to what they're talking about, I just don't want to. I feel it's rude to listen to what they're saying, although it's they who are actually talking too loudly, so I feel that I shouldn't really be listening. I want to avoid that (7: Female, 24 years).

To drown out other people's conversations is an issue that recurs in the interviews. The subjects obviously find it disturbing to listen in on phone calls and private conversations. One of the informants says that he finds it hard to relax when people around him are chatting. It also makes it more difficult to focus on one's own state of mind when one is constantly drawn into conversations one is not taking part in. By listening to private music, the subjects find it easier to relax and direct their focus towards their own state of being. What we perceive as noise can be extremely wearing, and the MP3 player offers a 'remedy' for this, not by offering silence, but rather a personalised, desired sonic environment. Consequently, the subjects do not create a *quiet* 'bubble', but manage to produce a stable, chosen, enjoyable soundscape.

Truax (2001) characterizes sound as having a mediating effect on the individual and the environment, and therefore as creating relationships between the two. "Noise seems to be the source of negative mediation of such relationships, an alienating force that loosens the contact the listener has with the environment, and an irritant that works against effective communication", he explains (Truax, 2001, p. 94). While 'objective' proposed definitions of noise have been concerned with the properties of the sound, such as nonperiodic vibration and the sound's intensity level, a

generally accepted subjective definition is that noise is 'unwanted sound' (Schafer, 1977; Truax, 2001).

Bull and Back (2003) point to the fact that everyday life is increasingly accompanied by reproduced sounds. Further, they describe cities as more noisy than ever, which is mirrored in more complaints about levels of noise. However, sounds hold different meanings for listeners. On one hand, they might enable people to form personal and manageable spaces. On the other hand, sounds can become unwanted experiences of noise, perceived as threatening to the subject (Bull & Back, 2003).

Truax warns us of the 'deaf spots' of noise, that is, the noise we cannot hear, the noise we get used to, the noise defined as 'average' sounds, and the idea that sound levels need to be high to be identified as noise. Even if we get used to the noise at the level that we do no longer notice it, or if the sound level is low or the vibration is such that the ear does not pick up the sound, we can still react to the noise as a stressor, resulting in tension, discomfort and reduced well-being (Truax, 2001).<sup>54</sup> We should therefore be careful in exposing ourselves to noise, and remove ourselves from noisy environments to the degree to which it is possible. Living or working in an urban environment makes noise part of the subjects' daily sonic environment, and adapting a strategy to manage noise is therefore necessary. The use of MP3 players seems to function as such a strategy. "Technology has come to the aid of the ears through the invention of headphones", writes Bull, "empowering the auditory self" (2007, p. 12). He continues the argument:

Technology has empowered the ears – it has turned the ears from the most democratic of the senses (Simmel 1997) to the most exclusive. This empowerment is embodied in earphones, which supplant the uncontrollable and chaotic noise of the street with the chosen sounds of the individual consumer (Bull, 2007, p. 21).

DeNora (2000) points out that music is used to seal off an environment, and Stockfelt (1994) claims that technology enables us to shape our sonic

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<sup>54</sup> See more about stressors and stress response in section 7.3.1.

environments<sup>55</sup> according to our own wishes. We use music in everyday life to substitute, disguise or complement other sounds which are difficult to do anything about. The use of music is in other words the most common way to create desired soundscapes (Stockfelt, 1994).

While the subjects speak of 'blocking out' sounds from their surroundings and DeNora claims that music seals off environments, does the MP3 player really screen out the urban soundscape? In reality, the music is probably often interrupted by the sounds of the city (Beer, 2007). Mobile music might often function more as a complement to other sounds rather than a substitute. However, the subjects speak of their MP3 use in terms of creating personal soundscapes, and shutting out what they perceive as noise. With new technologies, such as earbuds that function as ear defenders and headphones designed to block out background sounds, the soundscape of the city can more easily be disguised in favour of one's personally created soundscape.

Schafer (1977) perceives the development of the radio and use of music in private and public spaces as "the first sound wall". He claims that sounds, such as the radio, become walls that function as isolation. While the radio, as a sound wall, reunites the individual with something familiar, it also removes the enemy, according to Schafer (1977, p. 93). This idea is easy to relate to the use of MP3 players. When listening to one's private music, one removes 'the enemy', as in disturbing or unwanted sounds from the surroundings, and is at the same time reunited with one's familiar, personal music. Schafer writes further of such sound walls:

Walls used to exist to isolate sounds. Today sound walls exist to isolate. In the same way the intense amplification of popular music does not stimulate sociability so much as it expresses the desire to experience individuation ... aloneness ... disengagement (Schafer, 1977, p. 96).

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<sup>55</sup> Truax (2001) differentiates between 'sonic environment' and 'soundscape'. While he defines 'sonic environment' as all sounds – both the heard and unheard – within an environment, he uses the term 'soundscape' to describe the information exchange between the environment and the people living in it, and stresses a communicational approach. Although I am mostly concerned with the sounds that are perceived by listeners, I choose not to distinguish between 'sonic environments' and 'soundscapes' in this context.

Schafer wrote about these sound walls prior to the introduction of personal stereos ('the Walkman'). He referred instead to the teenager listening to his radio, the housewife in front of the television, the worker in the presence of recorded music. However, his idea is perhaps of even more current interest, considering the individualising technology of the MP3 player. 'The desire to experience individuation' is part of the picture, as we have seen, but the 'disengagement' Schafer writes of might as well be a desire to disengage from unwanted soundscapes. The MP3 player enables the listeners to replace unwanted sounds and noise with their own desired music:

*But you have used music consciously to block out sounds from your surroundings if you find them too noisy?*

Absolutely. And especially on planes and such, I've bought a blocking thingummy that helps me block out background noise, and then travelling becomes quite a different experience. You increase your life quality during the journey [laughter] by avoiding listening to the engines and the clamour from all the passengers and stuff. In addition to music, you hear only the music. So I definitely use it actively to block out this kind of drone and clamour in general (5: Female, 27 years).

Not having to listen to tiring sounds "increases your life quality during the journey", according to this subject. Ruud (2005) writes, in accord with this informant, that our quality of life is affected by noise. He mentions that the experience of noise can result in negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, dissatisfaction, withdrawal, anxiety, distraction, agitation, or exhaustion. Stedje (2009), who has written a Master's thesis on soundscapes in nursing homes, believes that sonic environments affect our health, and claims that there are healthy and damaging sonic environments. She calls upon an awareness regarding the sounds we are surrounded by in daily life. Sounds that are perceived as noise *are* noise, she states. As Stockfelt (1994, p. 23) points out: "The only possible judge of what constitutes a good soundscape for a specific individual in a specific situation is the individual herself". He claims that almost all of us, everywhere and every day, use a considerable amount of time and money on creating a more positive soundscape, precisely by playing music.

However, in the same way as music can create bonds between people, it is also an expression of power, and can create conflicts between individuals or groups of people. An example is the shopping mall, where certain music is used to define the profile for the store and the clientele they wish for. The same music some people identify with seems alienating to others (Ruud, 2005; Stockfelt, 1994). Music in itself is therefore not the equivalent of a positive soundscape. Ruud (2010, p. 99) notes that background music in public spaces which seems to be out of place, or music which is perceived to clash with our musical identities, “threatens our agency and leads to bodily stress”. North and Hargreaves (2008) write of the controversies regarding use of music in commercial environments such as restaurants, hotels, and shopping malls: People *campaign* to have music removed in public spaces.<sup>56</sup> It seems that music played in public is perceived as particularly invading. Because perception of music, as with other sounds, is highly individual, the MP3 player offers a unique way of shaping one’s personal sonic environment according to one’s personal taste. The alternative, proposed by one of my informants, would be to play music on loudspeakers on the tube:

It happens that I crave for a huge Hi-fi with enormous loudspeakers and plugs while sitting on the train and listening to something incredibly good, I want to share it with others. [...]

*You think it’s nice to be able to share your music with others?*

Yes.

*If you can? Like on the train [laughter].*

[Laughter.]

*So you would’ve liked to share it with others?*

Yes. Sometimes. Should’ve had control over it, a stereo up there in the ceiling.

*So it’s not like you seek out the private musical experience that you want to keep to yourself?*

No. But actually it’s a good thing that you can’t put music on the train, because I think then there would’ve have been a lot of bad stuff that would have been played by all kinds of people.

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<sup>56</sup> A UK-based group, Pipedown, was founded in the 1990s to work for the removal of music played in public spaces. Their arguments are based mainly on the fact that the music is harmful and that it interferes with people’s freedom of choice. See North and Hargreaves (2008) for a discussion, and Pipedown’s webpage: [www.pipedown.info/](http://www.pipedown.info/)

*That's probably true.*

Yes. Should have had a license or something.

*[Laughter.] Yes, but that's what I think, people like different types of music.*

Yes. But certain types of music have no right to live [laughter] (8: Male, 27 years).<sup>57</sup>

This interview section illustrates the problem of playing the same music for a large group of people. They will most likely disagree on what music they perceive as 'good' and 'bad', 'beautiful' and 'ugly'. What some people identify as beautiful sounds, others would describe as noise. It is therefore nearly impossible to come to an agreement on what music should be played in public, and therefore it is probably a better option, at least aesthetic-wise, to listen to private, individualised music on personal devices such as MP3 players.

Perhaps the best alternative to noise would be silence. As Ruud (2005) points out, our ears need rest from sonic stimuli. When constantly exposed to sound, hearing damage becomes a risk. Listening to music as a way of dealing with unwanted sonic environments is therefore perhaps not the best solution for our ears. It is also an important point that sound affects the whole body with its physical vibration. So even if we cannot hear the sound, it does not mean that it does not affect us. Masking unwanted sound with music will therefore not remove the stressor as such, in that the sounds not heard can still affect the body. But when silence is not an option, as in urban environments, the private music on the MP3 player offers a way of controlling one's aesthetic soundscape, which might allow the listener to avoid some of the psychological stressors and negative emotions linked to the perception of noise.

### **7.2.2 Perceived control**

I have shown that use of MP3 players can offer a sense of control to its users. Particularly one of my informants (male, 24 years) talks explicitly of

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<sup>57</sup> This quote illuminates that users of MP3 players are people with individual needs. Although many speak positively about the possibility of creating a private space, this subject does not have such needs.



being in control, and feeling out of control without his MP3 player. A sense of personal control has positive consequences for emotional well-being in almost every life-arena, according to Thompson (2005). She defines 'perceived control' as "the judgement that one has the means to obtain desired outcomes and to avoid undesirable ones" (2005, p. 203). A sense of control is beneficial for several reasons (Maddux, 2005; Nelson, 1993; Thompson, 2005; Thompson, Sobolew-Shubin, Galbraith, Schwankovsky, & Cruzen, 1993). It is related to positive emotions and positive reactions to stressors, it leads to active problem solving, and can protect against negative psychological and physiological responses. Most theorists agree that a sense of internal and external control is vital for individuals' happiness and subjective well-being. Perceived control has also been linked to positive health behaviour (Zimmerman, 2000). When the environment seems predictable and our internal states seem to be controllable, we are more capable of meeting the challenges of life, and are better fit mentally and socially (Maddux, 2005).

A sense of control does not have to be about a belief that one can control one's environment or daily existence. A sense of control might instead be about one's ability to control one's *attitude* towards the circumstances in which one finds oneself (Thompson, 2005). Using an MP3 player is precisely about that. Listening to music one enjoys; carving out a pleasurable, private space; blocking out what is perceived as noise; having the sense that one can control social interaction as well as one's aesthetic environment – all these aspects of private listening most likely enable the listener to regulate and control her attitude towards circumstances which might otherwise be experienced as less pleasant.

According to Thompson (2005), perceived control consists of two parts: internal locus of control and self-efficacy.<sup>58</sup> The concept of *locus of control* was first introduced by Rotter. He explains the concept like this:

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<sup>58</sup> I choose here to introduce the terms locus of control and self-efficacy to give a broader understanding of perceived control. Although these are important concepts, I will not use much space here for a review. Rather, I refer the reader to the background literature for an exhaustive discussion. For more on the concept of locus of control, see Rotter (1954, 1966, 1975) and Lefcourt (1966, 1976). For a thorough introduction to self-efficacy, see Bandura (1997).

Briefly, internal versus external control refers to the degree to which persons expect that a reinforcement or an outcome of their behavior is contingent on their own behavior or personal characteristics versus the degree to which persons expect that the reinforcement or outcome is a function of chance, luck, or fate, is under the control of powerful others, or is simply unpredictable (Rotter, 1990, p. 489).

The way I understand the notion of internal locus of control, it is about the belief that one can influence one's circumstances, either by changing one's environment or one's attitude towards one's environment. An internal locus of control most probably leads to an increase in perceived control, because one is not dependent on others, fate, or luck, as one would believe with an external locus of control.<sup>59</sup>

*Self-efficacy* is defined as the individual's judgements of personal capability; subjects' beliefs of what they can do with their skills under certain conditions (Bandura, 1997; Maddux, 2005). Simply put, it can be described as 'the power of believing you can' (Maddux, 2005). Although locus of control and self-efficacy are parts of perceived control, it is important to note that neither of them are the same as perceived control. Further, locus of control and self-efficacy should not be mistaken for the same phenomenon. Bandura (1997) stresses that they represent entirely different concepts. He states: "Beliefs about whether one can produce certain actions (*perceived self-efficacy*) cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be considered the same as beliefs about whether actions affect outcomes (*locus of control*)" (1997, p. 20, emphasis in the original). Rather, internal locus of control and self-efficacy should be viewed as separate parts of perceived control, c.f., Thompson (2005). Relating locus of control and self-efficacy to the use of MP3 players, experiencing that using one's MP3 player can increase one's ability to manage oneself and the environment can improve one's sense of internal locus of control and self-efficacy associated with these matters. Perceived control is improved when one experiences a connection between one's actions and desired outcomes (Thompson, 2005). Thus, when the subjects experience that listening to

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<sup>59</sup> Locus of control is an important concept also within health psychology, termed *health locus of control* (Ogden, 2000). As this concept is often used in relation to health *behaviour*, I choose not to go further into it here.

their MP3 players results in wanted outcomes such as regulating moods, creating a private room, or blocking out unwanted sounds, their perceived control is likely to increase.

We have seen that a sense of control is vital in psychological functioning and subjective well-being. Although there are several aspects of their daily existence the subjects cannot control with the use of their MP3 player, knowing that they can control some parts of their daily experiences and focusing on these controllable elements probably makes the uncontrollable aspects of their everyday easier to bear (c.f. Bandura, 1997). So even if the subjects cannot control their environments, for example, and are forced to commute on crowded subways surrounded by crying babies and people chatting on their phones, they can still control parts of their experiences, as I have shown. Being able to withdraw from stressful surroundings, masking noise, listening to music they enjoy, and focusing on their own states of being increases the subjects' cognitive, social, and aesthetic control. Thus, focusing on their perceived control, being in otherwise stressful environments becomes easier to tolerate.

### **7.2.3 Empowerment and agency**

A sense of control is related to empowerment. Naturally, believing that one can control parts of one's life is empowering. Within the field of music and health, theories of empowerment are linked to positive psychology and a resource-oriented approach (Rolvjord, 2004, 2008; Ruud, 2010). Rolvsjord (2004) writes that empowerment as a concept is always situated in a context, and that the definition of the concept differs according to the situation in which it occurs. In this context, the notion of psychological empowerment is most relevant. It includes, among other things, a belief about one's competence and efforts to exert control (Zimmerman, 2000). Rolvsjord brings up intrapersonal aspects of psychological empowerment such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control. In pointing out self-efficacy and locus of control, the link between perceived control and empowerment becomes evident. Zimmerman (2000) also notes that efforts to exercise control are essential in empowerment. Simun (2009) describes how users of MP3 players are empowered as actors:

In some ways, users do succumb to the status quo, for they disengage rather than challenge, cope rather than instigate change. But in this very disengagement – and users’ ability to choose when, where, to what degree, and in which fashion to do so – users are empowered as actors (Simun, 2009, p. 937).

It is precisely in their disengagement, and in their personal control over how and whether to disengage, that the subjects are empowered as actors. This quote is also interesting in relation to agency. “Agency refers to acts done intentionally”, writes Bandura (1997, p. 3). Thus, agency has often been linked to the acts people do on their environments. In this sense, users of MP3 players would not be defined as agents, since they act on themselves rather than instigate change on their surroundings. However, social cognitive theory rejects the dualism between the environment and the subject.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, reflecting on one’s experiences and thinking about how to manage the environment makes the individual just as much an agent as the individual who sets out to change her environment (Bandura, 1997). Although I do not use social cognitive theory as framework for this study, I share this view. Hence, the subjects in this study should be defined as active agents, as they use their MP3 players as a technology of self-regulation, as a tool in exerting control over their experiences, and as a coping strategy, as we shall see in the following section.

## 7.3 STRESS AND COPING

I will devote this section to the MP3 player as a technology of coping – or a *coping strategy* – related to the stress of everyday life. The field of research on stress and coping is large, and I will only look into a small part of it. To gain a better understanding of how music listening might be used to cope with stress, we should recognize what stress actually is. I will therefore present a few definitions and explanations, mainly based on Antonovsky’s (1979) theories. Hence, before I present data related to the MP3 player as a coping strategy I will focus on a few theories on stress and coping.

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<sup>60</sup> For more on social cognitive theory (and self-efficacy), see e.g. Bandura (1997), Maddux (2005), and Barone, Maddux and Snyder (1997).

### 7.3.1 Stress

“Stress occurs whenever there is a mismatch between perceived threat and perceived ability to cope”, according to Marks et al (Marks, Murray, Evans, & Estacio, 2011, p. 279). Simply put, stress involves a stressor and a stress response (Antonovsky, 1979; Collins, Sorocco, Haala, Miller, & Lovallo, 2003). A stressor, according to Antonovsky, “can be defined as a demand made by the internal or external environment of an organism that upsets its homeostasis, restoration of which depends on a nonautomatic and not readily available energy expending action” (1979, p. 72). Stressors include both physical and mental challenges to the body that threatens homeostasis. Examples of physical stressors are physical injury, physical exertion, noise, overcrowding, and extreme heat or cold. Psychological stressors include time-pressured tasks, speech tasks and overcrowding, among other challenges (Collins, et al., 2003). Particularly interesting in the context of this study is that overcrowding is both a physical and psychological stressor. Indeed, I will show that this is something many of the subjects experience on a daily basis when they commute to work or school.

Stress responses consist of behavioural and physiological responses. Behavioural responses are actions such as leaving the situation or implementing a coping skill. Examples of physiological responses are increased blood pressure, enhanced heart rate, or altered metabolism. The purpose of these changes in physiological functioning is to restore the imbalance in homeostatic functioning (Collins, et al., 2003). Collins et al assert that the different kinds of stress responses may be related to negative affective states for the individual. Stress does not necessarily cause disease, but has been established as a risk factor for the development of illness as well as for worsening an existing disease (Collins, et al., 2003). The ability to regulate levels of stress is therefore central for the maintenance of good health. As Antonovsky (1979, p. 70) maintains, “stressors are omnipresent in human existence”. The goal is therefore not to exclude stressors, but rather to manage the tension that accompanies the stressor. Good tension management leads to good health, or “health ease”, in the words of Antonovsky (1979, p. 71).

It should be noted that Selye (1975) differs between *eustress* and *distress*. Stress response which is damaging or unpleasant is defined as distress, while eustress is a positive response to stressors.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Antonovsky (1979) distinguishes stress from tension. Tension as a stress response can lead to stress and can therefore be damaging, but it can also be perceived as pleasurable and even be salutary. In this context, I am mainly concerned with the stress responses which are defined as distress by Selye. I have therefore chosen to refer to these responses as 'stress' for the sake of simplicity.

In stress research, stressors are often taken to be overarching incidents or periods in one's life, such as big changes in life, life crises, poverty, relocation, accidents, traumas and illness (Aldwin, 2007; Antonovsky, 1979; Marks, et al., 2011; Selye, 1976). In this context, I am more concerned with the stress of shorter duration in everyday life, such as commuting to work. In this environment, crowding and noise are often mentioned as stressors by my informants. These stressors are also mentioned in the stress literature (Aldwin, 2007; Antonovsky, 1979; Collins, et al., 2003; Selye, 1976). I do not want to undermine the stressors of longer duration, such as those mentioned above, but rather focus on situations where my informants employ their MP3 players as a coping strategy. Lazarus and Cohen (1977) categorize *daily hassles* as one of three environmental groups of stressors (the other two being 'cataclysmic phenomena' and 'changes affecting fewer persons'). The authors point out that this category is in sharp contrast to the other two, "which emphasize extraordinary changes of some sort or another in the fundamental conditions of the environment on which people have come to depend" (1977, p. 92). In context of the present research, the most interesting examples mentioned in the category of daily hassles are noise and pollution, and even more relevant, "the hazards of commuting to work during rush hour" (1977, p. 93). These stressors are examples of "difficulties encountered when the physical environment is

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<sup>61</sup> Selye (1975, pp. 18-19) explains the origin of the word "stress" like this: "The word "stress" allegedly came into common English usage, via Old French and Middle English, as "distress." The first syllable eventually was lost through slurring, as children turn "because" into "cause." In the light of our investigations, the true meaning of the two words became totally different despite their common ancestry, just as in correct usage we distinguish between "because" (since) and "cause" (reason). Activity associated with stress may be pleasant or unpleasant; distress is always disagreeable."

usually unyielding, harsh, or uncomfortable, especially when the persons affected regard such conditions as destructive to their well-being”, according to Lazarus and Cohen (1977, p. 93). As we have seen, and will see, the informants can perceive their daily trips to work or school precisely as harsh or uncomfortable. In these situations, the MP3 player becomes a valuable coping device.

### 7.3.2 Coping

We are constantly surrounded by stressors. As Antonovsky (1979, p. 89) so proficiently observes: “even the most fortunate of people and groups know life as stressful to a considerable degree”. Therefore we cannot, and should not, avoid stressors (Antonovsky, 1979; Selye, 1975). The difference between people who become stressed and those who do not lies in their coping abilities. While poor management of tension leads to poor health, good tension management leads to maintenance of or improved health (Antonovsky, 1979). Antonovsky poses the question of the determinants of successful tension management, and proposes the answer to be found in the construct of resistance resources. At a general level, he defines resistance resources (GRRs) as “any characteristic of the person, the group, or the environment that can facilitate effective tension management” (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 99). The way I see it, use of MP3 players is not a characteristic of the person, and can therefore not be described as a general resistance resource.<sup>62</sup> Rather, it can be defined as a specific resource, exemplified by Antonovsky as for example a certain drug, telephone lifelines or an understanding look in the eye of an audience. These resources “can be of great help in coping with particular stressors”,

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<sup>62</sup> In his discussion on general resistance resources, Antonovsky mentions particularly two recourses I find interesting in this context. First, he mentions *Artifactual-Material GRRs* – material recourses. Access to money facilitate coping with stressors for example by paying for a safe abortion and consequently dealing with the stressor of an unwanted pregnancy (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 106). In the same way, money is a necessary premise for buying and owning an MP3-player (unless it was given to the user as a gift). The second GRR mentioned by Antonovsky interesting in this context is *Cognitive and Emotional GRRs*. Knowledge-intelligence as a GRR encompasses information about the world and “the skills that facilitate acquiring such knowledge” (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 107). An example of such knowledge is about smoking and the risk of cancer. Related to the use of MP3-players, knowledge of how specific music works as a resource for different purposes enables the individual to utilize this music according to personal needs.

according to Antonovsky (1979, p. 99). But, Antonovsky claims, these specific resources are often a matter of luck and are only helpful in particular situations. If we should define the MP3 player as a specific resistance resource, it is true that it is only helpful in particular situations. Listening to private music cannot and should not be used as a coping strategy against any stressor. But it can be helpful in certain situations, for example when on a crowded train or in a city filled with noise and bombardments of stimuli. I would also claim that the MP3 player as a specific resistance resource is *not* a chance of luck. On the contrary, the use of these players is highly controllable, and can even lead to perceived control, as we have seen. I would therefore suggest that the MP3 player can be a successful resistance resource.

### **7.3.3 Use of the MP3 player as a coping strategy**

As we have seen in the previous sections, use of MP3 players enables the subjects to create boundaries around a personal space, and to control their aesthetic and social environment. This leads to an experience of control, and I would like to suggest that these aspects of the private music listening is part of the use of the MP3 player as a coping strategy. As Thompson (2005, p. 205) points out: "Having a sense of control is typical of those who handle stress well". Based on the concept of locus of control, Lazarus and Cohen (1977) also expect people who believe they are in control – regardless of whether they actually are – to experience less stress in life. There is in other words a relation between a sense of control and stress management. Because I refer to Antonovsky's theories on stress and coping, I should mention here that Antonovsky (1979) maintains that locus of control and sense of coherence is not the same. Still, it seems that both a sense of control and sense of coherence might be resources in coping with stressors.

When it comes to music as a coping strategy, Ruud (2002, 2005, 2010) maintains that individuals employ music in their everyday lives to regulate their levels of stress. He devotes a section to elaborate on how a female informant makes use of music when she is feeling stressed, and writes that she uses music to suppress ruminating thoughts. By listening to music,



singing and dancing as one integrated activity, she is able to control the thoughts that create bodily tension, and thus releases the stress. The musical activity does not only alter her mental states, but also enhances her levels of adrenalin and energy.<sup>63</sup> It becomes clear in this example that both the experience and regulation of stress is a complex experience where thoughts, bodily tension and energy, and emotions are involved.

When I asked my informants whether they could use music when they were feeling stressed, they often perceived 'stress' as being in a hectic situation, being busy and having a lot to do. Most of them responded that they would not use music in those situations, but rather focus on their tasks. If they used music in such situations, it would not be to calm down, but rather to keep up the tempo as to be able to finish their mission. However, if one thinks of 'stress' as marked off from specific tasks, it seems that the subjects can use music as a way of regulating this stress. As we saw in section 6.2 (cognitive regulation), one of the subjects says that "if there's stress inside the head, if I have a lot to think about or dilemmas that keep reappearing, which I can't quite finish thinking about, I use music to try to control it a bit, try to focus on something else" (female, 26 years). Even if she does not seem to be aware of it, this subject also seems to use music to regulate herself when she is in what I interpret as stressful situations:

Today, I haven't used music. But this is a typical day that I would've found my iPod very useful, because I don't have it with me, today. But then I've been a bit more stressed at home, because a lot more has happened than I was expecting. I'm a bit off my schedule, and somewhat lagging behind when it comes to all the stuff I have to do. And so I become a bit stressed and cranky because of that. Then I set out to come here for the interview, and there's so much time when I just sit and look at people or begin to think and stuff. And then I have to work with myself all the time like "Ok, it's all right. It doesn't matter. Pull yourself together. It'll be fine. Life is good anyway." A bit like that. And if I'd had my music, I bet I'd gone in on my '25 most

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<sup>63</sup> Ruud first presented this narrative in his article 'Three Narratives on the Use of Music as a Technology of Health' (2002), and later elaborated on it in his Norwegian book *Lydlandskap: Om bruk og misbruk av musikk [Soundscapes: On use and misuse of music]* (2005). He repeats parts of the narrative and discussion in *Music Therapy: A Perspective from the Humanities* (2010). For English readers, I can refer to the latter reference.

popular' list for example, or maybe a new album I got for Christmas, or something like that. Music that I know I find somewhat exciting and which give me a good feeling. And I think I would've listened to it on my way here, and felt a little happier. Or more content. Yes. Absolutely (1: Female, 26 years).

This subject regulates stress by focusing on the music instead of her thoughts. She said in the first quote that she can use music to take control over her stressful thoughts and focus on something else. In the second quote, she explains that she needs to work actively with herself to 'get it together' after the morning turned into a stressful situation. She believes, and says she has experienced, that music would be a good help in such a situation. By listening to music she enjoys, she would become happier and more content, and less stressed. In other words, music would work as an efficient tool in regulating stress and mood, whereas the same regulation takes much more effort and energy without the music at hand.

### **7.3.3.1 Coping with the urban environment**

One of the subjects who commutes to work says that he "easily turns to music, so there is perhaps a preventative effect" when it comes to being stressed (male, 43 years). He says that he enjoys his trips to work – although it takes about an hour each way, and includes changing between several different means of public transport – and credits the ability to listen to music for this enjoyment. It seems in his situation that music can divert his focus from his stressful surroundings and enable him to avoid being caught up in the stress of the commute. As he notes:

I'm actually quite happy with my commute, and the length is just fine. It could've been slightly more comfortable on the tram sometimes, but that's how it is. But that's also because of my music. I've got something that takes the hub away a bit from all the stress out there and the crowd and heat, and the exhaustion and people screaming and the racket. In a way, it becomes somewhat remote. I see it there, and I manage to respond if something happens around me. But of course, a good song and 3-4 minutes have gone, and so I don't need many songs before I'm [half way] [...] so it's a regular record length from when I leave home [laughs] to work, and as such quite an all right time (4: Male, 43 years).

This subject describes the stress of commuting to work as mainly related to crowding and noise. For him, listening to his MP3 player helps him block out both the sounds of his surroundings (perceived as noise) and the experience of being in close distance to other people, described as “cramped and warm and tiring”. Thus, he avoids the negative physical and psychological tension that would otherwise be a consequence of commuting.

Crowding is mentioned as a stressor in the stress-literature, but is often related to population density. Dubos (1991, p. 88) claims that “crowding affects the response of the individual and social body, not only to infection, but also to most of life’s stress”. However, the author points out that the world has become more urbanized, and that people have adjusted to constant and intimate contact with large groups, which has now become what we define as ‘normal life’. Nonetheless, Dubos points to the fact that sustaining a certain distance from other people is probably a real biological need for humans, just as it is for animals, but that this need is culturally conditioned. In large cities such as Oslo, individuals normally maintain a certain reservation towards each other, and keep a slight physical distance when possible. According to the literature, this is not only a feature of Oslo, but is probably the case in most Western urban environments.

As Altman and Vinsel (1977, in reference to Hall, 1966) describe, intimate distances between individuals generally span 0 to 18 inches and personal space spans 1.5 to 4 feet.<sup>64</sup> They explain that having strangers within the intimate distance may be perceived as overwhelming because of the highly increased sensory inputs, and this intrusion beyond the personal distance is assumed to produce tension, anxiety and discomfort manifested by the tension in our bodies. This ‘stimulus overload’ results in physical disengagement, whereby individuals physically compose themselves to avoid making physical or eye contact with their surroundings:

In crowded urban settings, people seem to be more-or-less isolated from one another, a product, says Milgram, of their tendency to

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<sup>64</sup> Hall’s (1966) description of spatial distances was based mainly on qualitative observations and interviews. The interviews were conducted with middle class, healthy adults from the USA. A large percentage of the subjects were from business, and many could be classified as intellectuals. The cultural context of Hall’s research is therefore similar to the context of this study.

disengage to protect themselves against the excessive stimulation that would ensue if they interacted with others in more than a cursory or superficial way. In other words, such behavior is a form of coping with the stress of overload. Thus, in subways and trains, on streets and elevators, and in other public contexts, people barely even look at each other, each going his or her own way and following private agendas (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977, p. 95, with reference to Milgram, 1977 [1972]).<sup>65</sup>

Physical disengagement from our immediate surroundings, therefore, is an important coping device in crowded environments. Most of the subjects in this study have discovered that the use of their MP3 players can function as an alternative coping strategy. Listening to personal music is often described as a way of making the situation more tolerable. This is probably because the music blocks out what is identified as noise, but also because it creates a psychological distance to other people:

I use public transport during the rush hour [...], and at times it's not very pleasant, particularly on the way home, with loads of people and it's crowded and hot and all that. I think that with a little music in my ear I become like...

*It's easier to endure?*

Yes, a little like Valium light [laughter], just listening to something you like and not having to hear everything. Because there's a lot of noise around you and people talking on their mobiles and many other conversations you don't really need to be a part of (4: Male, 43 years).

This man describes the pleasure of drowning out the noise from his surroundings with his private music. He portrays his music as 'Valium light', because it enables him to be in otherwise stressful and uncomfortable surroundings without being too affected by it. The music creates a private, pleasurable soundscape, but it also creates a psychological distance to the people around him. Even if he is standing in the middle of a crowd where it is 'cramped and warm', the music helps him block out what he perceives as

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<sup>65</sup> Lazarus and Cohen refer to Milgram's paper *The Familiar Stranger* from 1972, which I found in his essay collection from 1977. Milgram's idea of the familiar stranger is the person we see on a regular basis, for example when waiting for the bus to work, but who we do not interact with. Milgram explains that to become a familiar stranger "a person (1) has to be observed, (2) repeatedly for a certain time period, and (3) without any interaction" (Milgram, 1977, p. 51).

wearing, he says, and makes the experience of commuting more pleasant. Others also describe the experience of cramped buses or metros as more tolerable when they have their personal music. One man (24 years) explains that listening to his MP3 player enables him to disengage: “That you don’t stand together with everyone else, when you listen to music you block out others a bit, so you can be on your own a bit, even if you’re standing close to others.” In other words, the music creates a psychological distance to the people around him, and allows him to feel that he is by himself, even if he is in fact in a crowd. Thus, because being physically close to strangers can feel uncomfortable (Altman & Vinsel, 1977), and one can feel that one’s private space is invaded, music makes the situation easier to bear, like ‘Valium light’, in the words of the informant above.

It is acknowledged that a strong relationship exists between physical environments and human health and well-being (Suresh, Smith, & Franz, 2006). Antonovsky describes the urban environment as “a cultural pattern of information-input overload” (1979, p. 169). He believes the sociopsychological factors of the urban environment are crucial to health status, and relates this to his theory on sense of coherence:

It seems reasonable to view these findings as corroborating the hypothesis that when people, for whatever reason, are somehow able to translate a difficult, complex bombardment of stimuli into a whole that is meaningful, high health levels are likely to be maintained. Thus, while there is little doubt that the evidence points to cultural disruption and transition, which involve a weakening of the sense of coherence, as dysfunctional for health, some people are capable in these circumstances of maintaining a sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 170).

I find particularly the first part of this quote interesting in relation to the use of MP3 players. Antonovsky claims that when people manage the complex bombardment of stimuli (which is a hallmark of urban environments), *for whatever reason*, and translate them into a whole that is *meaningful*, then high levels of health are likely to be maintained. I have shown that the MP3 player does enable the subjects to manage their environments, precisely by filtering the large amount of stimuli from their surroundings. In this case, the personal music may be understood as the

reason why these subjects manage to translate impressions into a meaningful whole.

### **7.3.3.2 The MP3 player as a coping resource**

One of the subjects expresses, perhaps more explicitly than the others, that music offers a coping strategy against stress. If he feels stressed, it becomes more difficult to handle it without music or some other tool, he says:

You have less control [without music]. So it's difficult to go in deliberately and direct the things you want. You're stressed, you know you're stressed, like "yeah, I'm stressed, I know I'm stressed, but I don't have time to be so stressed." So, in a way you have to try and change its direction. But if you don't have anything to help you, it's very hard (6: Male, 24 years).

Again, we see that without music, or some other tool, it takes a lot more effort to manage or regulate stress. We see that the MP3 player gains a double function: It can help to reduce stress because it blocks out stressful environments, thus keeping the listener calm. Further, the music itself helps the listener to gain control over her thoughts and shift focus away from stressful chains of thoughts. These are both strategies that diverts attention from the stressor (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). Moreover, by listening to music one enjoys, the listener becomes more satisfied, and the experienced stress becomes reduced. This coping strategy is about changing the subjective meaning of the person-environment relationship, or the appraisal of the situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). Cognitive appraisal is explained by Lazarus and Cohen (1977, p. 111) as an "evaluative perception of person-environment transactions". It includes a judgment of the implication an event has for the individual's well-being. A key factor contributing to the appraisal is the judgment of available coping resources, according to Lazarus and Cohen. Subjects who have learned how to use their MP3 player as a coping device will know that they have an available coping resource on them, and perhaps evaluate 'the hassles of commuting' differently than someone who has not learned to use the MP3 player as a resource.

Monat and Lazarus (1991) differ between problem-focused and emotional-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is about doing things for the sake

of improving the disturbed person-environment relationship. Emotional-focused coping refers to “thoughts or actions whose goal is to relieve the emotional impact of stress (i.e. bodily or psychological disturbances)” (Monat & Lazarus, 1991, p. 6). Examples of the latter coping style are avoiding thinking about the stressful matter, distancing or detaching oneself, or trying to relax. The use of MP3 players as a coping strategy must be said to be mainly emotional-focused. It can function to divert attention from the stressful environment, or alter the significance of the episode in order to feel better about it (c.f. Monat & Lazarus, 1991) – for example by listening to music on the way to work, and accordingly transforming the time spent travelling into desired time. Problem-focused coping is most likely used in situations where change is liable, whereas emotion-focused coping is normally utilized in situations that are unchangeable (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). The MP3 player is generally used in situations that are not about to change, such as being on a cramped bus on the way to work – and listening to music is not a strategy of changing one’s physical environment. However, when personal music listening is used to change one’s sonic environment, it may also include aspects of problem-focused coping.

When it comes to coping, Aldwin (2007, p. 8) states that “how a person copes with a particular stressful situation may add to his or her coping repertoire or may alter a person’s outlook on the controllability or uncontrollability of the environment (e.g. locus of control or explanatory style)”. I would suggest that the experience people have with music is a vital contributory factor in how they use it as a coping strategy. Because most people in our Western culture have listened to a large amount of music throughout their lives, we can assume that they develop the knowledge of how to use music as a resource, confirmed by e.g. DeNora (1999, 2000, 2007), Ruud (2002, 2005), Batt-Rawden (2007a, 2007b) and van Goethem (2010). Among these resources, music can be used to cope with stressors in everyday life. Aldwin (2007, p. 95) explains that all individuals “develop certain management skills to help him or her deal with life”. She refers to proactive coping, such as brushing teeth, dealing with common tasks at work, negotiating the subway to get to work – that is, actions with the purpose of preventing the occurrence of a problem. When these actions become routinized everyday skills that prevent stress, they are no longer coping strategies, according to Aldwin, but life management skills. Drawing

on Aldwin's explanation of management skills, it is probable that individuals who have used music as a coping strategy for a longer period of time have developed management skills with music. It is therefore perhaps not correct to speak of the MP3 player as a *coping strategy*, but rather as a *coping resource*, or what Antonovsky (1979) referred to as *general resistance resources*, according to Aldwin. Hence, the MP3 player may be described as a resource to cope with everyday life.

## 7.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter I have looked into the use of MP3 players in relation to the creation and maintenance of personal boundaries, a sense of personal control, and as a coping strategy. As I mentioned in the introduction, I believe these are different aspects of the same phenomenon. Carving out a personal space enhances the subjects' sense of control, which is an essential part of the ability to cope with the stressors of everyday life.

We have seen that the MP3 player becomes a privatising technology, enabling the listeners to create boundaries around a private room, and to carve out some private time where they are left alone, able to focus on their personal music and personal experiences. The privatising aspect of the MP3 player is thus experienced as an asset. The subjects enjoy withdrawing from their surroundings, and use their private music consciously to create a private space. Further, the private music enhances the subjects' sense of cognitive, social, and aesthetic control, in that they are able to regulate themselves, control their interaction with others, and create a personal, desired soundscape that drowns out unwanted sounds. Shutting out what is perceived as noise can also be seen as a way of coping with environmental stressors. It seems that the MP3 player can function as a coping resource on several levels, both when it comes to coping with internal stressors, such as destructive chains of thoughts, and as a way of coping with external stressors such as noise and crowding. The experience one has with using the MP3 player as a coping strategy might turn it into what Aldwin (2007) refers to as a management skill, or what Antonovsky (1979) defines as a resistance resource. Hence, learning how to use the MP3 player and the



private music as a resource might turn it into a *preventative* coping resource, enabling the subjects to deal with prospective stressors *before* they lead to tension and stress.



## 8. DISCUSSION

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This chapter begins with a recapitulation of the previous chapters, offering a summary of the theoretical framework, methodological choices and the main research findings. Some implications of the study are presented, and certain limitations are discussed. Critical questions are also posed. Possible relationships between MP3 listening, subjective well-being and positive health are discussed, before I propose a summary to the study. Finally, proposals for further research are presented.

## 8.1 RECAPITULATION

The present study began with the question *Can the MP3 player function as a medium for musical self-care, and if so, how?* And the subquestions *Can the MP3 player function as a technology of subjective well-being, and if so, how?* And *Can the MP3 player function as a resource regarding positive mental health, and if so, how?*

The study has been based on an understanding of music as resource. That is, music is thought to *afford* certain opportunities to the listener. The listener is seen as an active agent who *appropriates* the music. Thus, the musical object is seen as less relevant. Music is not a stimulus that ‘acts’ on the listener. Rather, meaning occurs in the interaction between listener, music, and context, and the effects of music derive from the way it is appropriated by the listener. I challenge the dichotomy between active and passive music listening, and argue that the MP3 listener is moving between states of active and passive *musicking*.

The theoretical framework of the study has been based on health theories and positive psychology. My understanding of health relates to the sociological model: Health is seen as *resource* and *well-being*, and relates to an experience of life quality as defined by Næss’ (2001a, p. 10, my translation): “An individual’s quality of life is strong in the degree to which the individual’s conscious cognitive and affective experiences are positive, and low in the degree to which the individual’s conscious cognitive and affective experiences are negative.” This definition correlates with definitions of subjective well-being, understood as the experience of “life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experiences of unpleasant emotions such as sadness or anger” (Diener, et al., 1997, p. 25). Life quality and subjective well-being can therefore be understood as related.

Theories on subjective well-being derive from the field of positive psychology. The main focus of positive psychology is positive experiences as well as positive character and virtues. In line with Antonovsky’s salutogenic theory (1979, 1987), positive psychology is concerned with human *resources* and *positive functioning*. Hence, we see a close relation between the sociological model of health, represented by Antonovsky; life

quality; positive psychology; and subjective well-being. Together, they make up the conceptual framework of the present study.

The study has been carried out within a hermeneutic, qualitative framework. Twelve interviews with six men and six women between the ages of eighteen and forty-four were conducted in 2009. The interviews investigated how the subjects used music on their MP3 players in relation to cognitive, emotional, and bodily aspects, as well as their experiences of their environments, boundaries, and social and private spaces when they listened to their mobile music. The interviews, which lasted about one hour each, were categorized according to thematic types. The main themes that appeared in the interviews were *'use of the MP3 player'*, including subcategories such as choice of music, listening outside versus indoors, and the importance of the MP3 player; *'self-regulation'*, including cognitive regulation, affect regulation, and bodily regulation; and *'coping'*, including boundaries, sense of control, and coping with the urban environment.

The subjects use their MP3 players regularly and in most situations. They describe the MP3 player as easy to use, convenient, and easily accessible. It appears that all the subjects bring their player whenever they leave home, 'just in case', and is thus a part of their daily routine. Several of the subjects say that the MP3 player adds extra value to the situation they are in and that the music enriches their experiences. The MP3 player offers a personal space where the subjects can listen to exactly the music they want at the volume level they like, without considering partners or families at home. However, listening to music in public environments may make the subjects self-conscious. Certain music might bring out emotions which they may not feel comfortable handling in a public environment. Still, the MP3 player is described as an available coping device that the subjects can choose to turn to as to deal with different affects. One of the most prominent traits of the MP3 player is the vast availability of music. This immense choice of music is valued by the subjects, but they are particular about what they listen to. There is a 'correct' and 'wrong' type of music for every occasion, and they normally choose music according to their mood. A key aspect of the use of MP3 players is that the subjects have control over when, where, and what music to listen to. Hence, they can choose music according to mood and emotions, personal needs or goals.

The MP3 player appears to be an effective technology of self-regulation. The private music can be used for cognitive regulation by using the music to take control over one's thoughts – either to guide thoughts onto a particular track or as a diversion from rumination. The private music is also commonly used to unwind after work. Listening to the MP3 player appears to be an efficient strategy for 'pulling the plug' on taxing thoughts concerning work. The music offers recreation once the office is left, and puts the subject in a more pleasant state before she enters home. Some of the subjects compare music listening to meditation, as they experience that the music helps them to relax, focus attention, and stop dwelling on ruminating thoughts. Further, for some of the subjects, music appears to help them concentrate. This is explained by the fact that music blocks out other disturbances as well as assisting the subjects 'staying on track', described as "getting into the rhythm".

The subjects also use the private music on their MP3 players to regulate mood and affects. Most of them listen to music that matches the mood they are in, and use the music to either sustain or enhance their mood. However, in some situations, the subjects use music to change their mood, normally according to the demands of the situation they are in. Although listening to music is normally described as a pleasant experience, the subjects also listen to music to sustain negative moods and indulge in their emotions. By maintaining negative moods, the subjects gain a better understanding of the feelings they are experiencing, and use the music to work through their affects. Several of the subjects explain that the music helps them to clarify their mood, and lets them reflect on and gain a better understanding of what they actually feel. Music is also used to access and induce specific emotions. Several of the subjects say that they become more positively attuned towards their environment when they listen to their MP3 player, and the music often enhances their positive emotions. However, the music can also be used to enhance negative emotions, and can further be used to vent affects. In sum, it seems that the private music can function as an efficient strategy in regulating and controlling affects.

When it comes to bodily regulation, it seems that music can be used as an effective tool in increasing bodily energy and motivation; at the beginning of a new day, on the way to work, and during work-out. Increasing energy

levels seems to be related to the increase of positive moods. Music can also be used to relax, in that certain types of music help the listener calm down. In addition, the MP3 player provides a private space for the subjects where they are able to relax. Some of the subjects also use music as an aid to fall asleep at night. Notably, bodily-, affective-, and cognitive regulation seem to be related. Thus, when music is used for example to relax, it is used simultaneously to calm down the body, to induce a pleasant or neutral mood, and to short-circuit rumination.

The MP3 player further appears to function as an efficient coping resource. The MP3 player allows the subjects to withdraw from their environment, creating boundaries around a private space. They consequently carve out some private time where they can be left alone, avoiding 'unnecessary' disturbances. The subjects enjoy the ability to withdraw into their private space, and explain that listening to their MP3 player transforms their daily commute into *desired* time. The private music further enhances the subjects' sense of cognitive, social, and aesthetic control. This control can be seen as part of the use of the MP3 player as a coping strategy. Further, the MP3 player is an aid in creating personal, desired soundscapes that drown out unwanted sounds, and in creating a psychological distance to other people, consequently avoiding the tension of crowding. The MP3 player can thus be seen as a way of coping with environmental stressors. I argue that the MP3 player can be used as a *preventative* coping resource that enables the subjects to deal with prospective stressors *before* they lead to tension and stress.

## 8.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study can be placed in the intersections of music psychology, music sociology, and the field of music and health. The study relates to other research on music in everyday life within these fields, particularly studies conducted by Sloboda and colleagues (music psychology, e.g. Sloboda, 2005c, 2010; Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001; Sloboda, et al., 2001), DeNora and Bull (music sociology, e.g. Bull, 2000; 2007; DeNora, 1999, 2000, 2003),

Batt-Rawden and Ruud (music and health, e.g. Batt-Rawden, 2007a; Ruud, 1997a, 2002).

The present study fills a gap in research, precisely by merging these different fields. Previous research on the use of MP3 players has mainly been based on sociological theories. By investigating the field from a viewpoint that also integrates theories from psychology and health, the current study allows for a broader and deeper understanding of the use of MP3 players and the implications this use has for the MP3 users' subjective well-being and mental health.

Although this study offers new insights into the relationship between new technologies, music listening, subjective well-being, and positive health, the results confirm findings from other research concerning music listening in everyday life, in particular research by Bull and DeNora.

Bull (2000, 2007) has carried out extensive research on use of personal stereos. He states that the iPod is used by listeners as a strategy to manage themselves, others and the urban space. He further relates these management strategies to self-regulatory practices (Bull, 2007). The present study relates to and further extends the findings from Bull's research. By interrogating the use of MP3 players as a technology of self-care, the current study has resulted in a more comprehensive understanding of the mobile music's role in the listeners' self-maintenance. Although Bull touches upon self-regulatory and management strategies, he does not examine these strategies more thoroughly. This is where the present study fills a gap and further illuminates an important phenomenon. The approach of the present study also differs from that of Bull's, in that it is psychological and health-oriented. This indicates that the framework for the analysis has helped to shed light on somewhat different aspects of MP3 use than that of Bull's research, which has been based on a sociological approach.

The current study also relates in large part to DeNora's (2000) research on the role of music in everyday life. The findings from the present study confirm many of DeNora's findings, particularly how music is used as a resource in relation to the self. In recent years, DeNora has been concerned with the health aspects of music listening (DeNora, 2007). The present



study has given a more thorough analysis of this relationship, extending and going beyond DeNora's interrogations. In addition, this study has incorporated theories concerning health, positive psychology, well-being, and coping, while DeNora mainly relies on theories from the field of sociology. Thus, the present study offers a broader and deeper understanding of the relationship between everyday music listening and positive health.

## **8.3 LIMITATIONS AND SELF-CRITICISM**

### **8.3.1 Methodological limitations**

The methodological choices that were made in relation to this study have resulted in certain limitations to the findings. The number of subjects, the recruitment of subjects, and the context of the study has had certain implications for the findings. The results presented in this thesis are based on the experiences of twelve Norwegian, urban citizens. Thus, the study does not take into account how people who live in more rural contexts use MP3 players, and how they experience this use. Further, this study says nothing about how people in other cultural settings use MP3 players. Consequently, the findings from the present study are restricted to a Western, urban location, and are based on the experiences of people who must be said to be wealthy and well-educated.

Interviewing a different group of individuals could have offered different or supplemental results to the findings presented in this thesis. The current study has focused on people who have chosen to use their MP3 players regularly. This implies that they have mainly positive experiences with this use. It is possible that some individuals who have tried to use an MP3 player have chosen not to use it on a regular basis. It could have been interesting to talk to these individuals and ask them why they have discontinued using their player. They probably have other experiences than the subjects in the present study, and these experiences are likely less positive than what the findings in the present study illustrate.

Choosing interviews as the main method to interrogate the research questions raises some questions about the validity of this method. As discussed in chapter 4, part 4.7.3, the challenge to retrospect methods such as the interview is that mundane everyday experiences can easily be filtered out by the interviewee, and we may therefore ask whether the findings are 'true'. As noted, however, we may consider changes in memory as a way for the interviewees to construct meaningful memories. Thus, their possible modified recollections might say something about the *meaning* of their MP3 use. Further, basing the study on a hermeneutic approach, I do not believe in one neutral reality, but in *subjective interpretation* of experiences. This interpretation has been carried out both by the informants and by me, the researcher. Thus, we may say that knowledge has been constructed in the interview conversation between me and the informants.

Limitations of generalizability were discussed in chapter 4, part 4.7.5, and I will briefly touch upon the issue again here. Generalizability of the findings has not been aimed for as the study has been conducted within a naturalistic, qualitative context. However, the findings should be transferable to other contexts. Nonetheless, as discussed in chapter 4, the findings cannot be transferred to other contexts unreservedly. The context should be similar to the context of this study, and there are therefore some limitations when it comes to the cultural background of the subjects, as well as their age, social status, and health status. Still, I believe people who use MP3 players regularly will recognize the findings from this study. The MP3 player makes music available to many of us at all times, and it is probable that the use of these players has consequences for people's well-being also in other urban, Western societies.

### **8.3.2 Alternative methodological choices**

The study is based on interviews and written reports from the subjects. In general, the written reports turned out to yield little new knowledge, and were therefore not included in the analysis. Other methods could have supplemented the interviews, however, had there been enough time. For example, it would have been interesting to begin the study with diary

reports from the subjects. Prior to the interviews, they could have written diaries concerning their MP3 use each day for a week. They could either have written freely, or filled out a response form that was given to them at the beginning of the week. The diaries, which contain information about the time and context for their listening, as well as what music they chose to listen to, could have been a fruitful starting point for the interview conversations. The diaries could also have offered supplementary information to the interviews. Such additional methods could have offered a broader understanding of MP3 use, as it could have uncovered information that the subjects were unconscious about, or that was not asked about in the interview. Such knowledge could have shed light on daily rituals concerning the subjects' listening, specific listening habits that the subjects are unaware of, or so-called 'mundane' listening situations that the subjects did not find interesting enough to mention in the interviews.

### **8.3.3 The role of 'music'**

In chapter 3, part 3.1, I argued that the *meaning* of music appears in the intersection of the musical object, the listener, and the context. In this study, I have mainly focused on the listener and how music is *appropriated*. This means that the affordances of music and the context of the music listening have been placed somewhat in the background. I have argued that the musical object is less relevant when interrogating the meaning of music because its meaning changes according to the listener's needs and how the listener relates to and interacts with the music. Thus, the powers of music are composed by the listener. This does not mean, however, that the musical object is irrelevant. It is the music-listener interaction that creates meaning, and the music is of course a crucial part of this interaction. I have chosen not to focus on the specific music that is listened to by my informants, mainly because different music means different things to people and because different music can gain different meaning in different circumstances. Chapter 5 (use of MP3 players) serves to contextualize the informants' use of their MP3 players, as well as their listening-habits. The chapter also looks into how the informants choose music (section 5.5), although I did not ask them explicitly about what music they listened to. I

do however acknowledge that the music could have been put more in the foreground, together with the context and the informants' experiences.

## **8.4 MP3 USE, SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING, AND HEALTH**

### **8.4.1 MP3 use and subjective well-being**

Do the findings from the present study suggest that there is a relation between the use of MP3 players and subjective well-being (SWB)? The study has focused on *self-regulation* and *coping*, and the findings imply that the MP3 player does work as a technology of both. How can self-regulation and coping contribute to SWB? Affect regulation is a vital contributor to SWB, as SWB is adjusted by regulation of affect – normally by upgrading positive emotions and downgrading negative emotions (Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). We have seen that the subjects commonly use their MP3 players in regulation of affect, either by sustaining, enhancing or changing their present mood or emotions. However, the regulation work is not as simple as upgrading positive emotions or downgrading negative emotions. It appears that the subjects choose to also maintain and enhance their negative affects with use of music. This choice can be explained by a need to improve their understanding of how they feel and why they feel that way, and the music is described as a 'comfort' as well as something which 'allows' the subjects to feel the way they do. In this way, the subjects find acceptance for their affects. Further, the music enables them to work through their affects, which, in the end, leaves them feeling better. Hence, in general, music seems to upgrade positive emotions, but not necessarily as simply as changing negative affect by listening to 'up-beat' or 'positive' music.

The ability to regulate affects is further an important aspect of emotional intelligence (Grewal & Salovey, 2006; Gross & Muñoz, 1995). If music listening can lead to better insights into one's affective life – and offer clarity and understanding as to what one is feeling – then this insight may

play a part in, and perhaps even enhance, one's emotional intelligence. The subjects say that they choose music according to their affects. The choice of music – music that 'feels right' – helps them to clarify their affects. Moreover, music listening enables them to further understand their mood and emotions. Hence, it seems that music listening broaden the subjects' understanding of their affects, and may therefore add to their emotional intelligence. Both affect regulation and emotional intelligence have been proposed as vital factors in mental health (Fave, 2006; Grewal & Salovey, 2006; Gross & Muñoz, 1995; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004). This implies that use of MP3 players and mobile music as a resource in self-regulation may contribute to maintaining both SWB and positive mental health. Indeed, several of the subjects speak of their MP3 listening as a form for 'therapy'. This 'self-therapy' appears to be linked to affect regulation.

There is little doubt that many people find pleasure in listening to music (Gabrielsson, 2010; Juslin & Laukka, 2004; Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001), and most of the subjects in the present study also state that they listen to their MP3 players because they find it pleasurable. They say that music can cheer them up, or that it is harder for difficult thoughts to linger when they listen to music that makes them happy (section 6.3.2.2). The positive emotions experienced while listening to music on the MP3 player may have several beneficial consequences for the subjects, according to the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. Positive affects, according to Fredrickson, may "a) broaden people's attention and thinking, b) undo lingering negative emotional arousal, c) fuel psychological resilience, d) build consequential personal resources, and e) trigger upward spirals toward greater well-being in the future" (Fredrickson, 2006, p. 97). It seems that listening to music that is perceived as pleasurable may therefore increase SWB in the present and in the long term. Thus, the positive emotions related to music listening may have important beneficial consequences for the individual. This implies that the *pleasure* of listening to MP3 players, as described by the subjects, should not be disregarded as unimportant. Instead, by listening to their MP3 players, the subjects may in fact stimulate psychological resilience and engender improved well-being for the future. Although they may not be aware of it, the subjects' use of their MP3 players in self-regulation may consequentially contribute to their enhanced well-being in the present and in the long run.

The MP3 player allows the subjects to retract from their social environments, into their own private space. They say that creating a 'private room' with their private music enables them to relax by blocking out unwanted stimuli. This way of using their MP3 players may be interpreted as recuperation – the subjects listen to their private music in order to find rest and gather strength. As one of the subjects puts it, being allowed to sit in peace and listen to private music while commuting becomes a 'breathing space'. We have seen that without the MP3 player, the subjects often describe the experience of commuting as "cramped and warm" and even "awful". This experience is completely transformed when they are allowed to listen to their private music; commuting while listening to their MP3 players is described as *quality time*, and becomes desired time for many of the subjects. Thus, it seems that the subjects' SWB increases when travelling accompanied by their personal, private music.

As we saw in chapter 7, use of MP3 players may further lead to an increase in perceived control. Having a sense of control can be understood as individuals' ability to control their *attitude* towards their circumstances, and using an MP3 player is about precisely that. There exist a relation between a sense of control and stress management, and sense of control is believed to be vital in psychological functioning and SWB (Maddux, 2005; Thompson, 2005). A sense of control is related to positive emotions and positive reactions to stressors, among other things. If the use of MP3 players can lead to a heightened sense of control, it is therefore natural to assume that it can also lead to increased SWB.

### **8.4.2 MP3 use and positive health**

The subjects seem to use their MP3 player as an efficient coping resource against both internal and external stressors. In the city, the private music is used to cope with particularly noise and crowding. *Coping* is related to positive health as understood by e.g. Hjort (1994) and is linked to the sociological model of health, where health can be understood as e.g., *resource* and *well-being* (Blaxter, 2004; Mæland, 2005). Coping is further related to Antonovsky's notion of salutogenic health and his concept of *sense of coherence*. A person with good coping resources is believed to move

towards the positive end of the health ease/dis-ease continuum (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987). Using the MP3 player as a *preventative* coping resource may consequently enable the subjects to maintain their SWB and positive health.

As seen in chapter 3, I base my understanding of health on the sociological model, and view health as *resource*. From this point of view, Ruud writes:

If we look at the concept of health from an interpretative perspective, health is seen more as an experience, which means that health is to experience well-being and meaning in life. Within our perspective we conceive of health as a resource and a means to achieve goals we have set in our lives. Such a goal may be to achieve well-being. Health is then a resource in the same way as education, work, and housing. Health becomes a reserve of energy, a force we can rely upon to resist illness or restore ourselves faster (Ruud, 2010, p. 103f).

Health is seen as a *reserve of energy* and a *strength* to defy illness. We have seen that the MP3 player can be used as a coping resource, and that it can be used as a *preventative* against stressors of daily life. If this use works to prevent stress, then it may be seen as a way to save energy and strength, and thus contribute to maintaining positive health.

Van Hooft claims that health is a *state of subjectivity*, rather than an observable state of the body. Drawing on Levinas (Levinas, 1969; in van Hooft, 1997), he argues that the tentative feeling that life consists of enjoyment and nourishment – what Levinas describes as ‘love of life’ – is the tacit experience of health. “Health in this sense is when things go well with us in the conative mode of our subjectivity”, van Hooft writes (1997, p. 23). He relates *conative* health to desire, emotion, and inclination. *Enjoyment* becomes a vital part of conative health. Van Hooft even speaks of health *as* enjoyment. Referring to van Hooft’s concept of conative health, Schei (2009) writes about the importance of art:

The art form can be seen both as raw material for and expression of conative health; the aesthetics offer a language that can carry forward the subjectivity, to realize it. Art allows us, in different ways, to get into experiencing contact with sensory processes that both creates and satisfies desire. At the same time, aesthetic expressions and experiences go beyond the individual and represents contact,

community and belonging. It is of course not accidental that music has been, at all times and in all cultures, a natural and important element in ceremonies, joyful events, in sorrow, thanksgiving and rhythm of life. Music is a part of the phenomenon human being, a part of the symbiosis between the self and the world (E. Schei, 2009, p. 9f, my translation).

Music listening can rouse *desire* and *pleasure*, which seem to be important aspects of conative health. We have seen that the subjects in the present study use their MP3 players as a medium to “get in touch with experiencing contact with sensory processes that both creates and satisfies desire ” (c.f. E. Schei, 2009). Thus, perhaps music listening – in this case *mobile* music listening – can contribute to conative health, in that it is related to enjoyment, emotion and desire, stimulation and contentment (c.f. van Hooft, 1997).

### **8.4.3 Negative consequences of MP3 use?**

This study has focused on *how the MP3 player can function as a positive resource* in people’s everyday lives, and consequently not focused on the negative effects of the MP3 player, such as hearing damage, ‘unhealthy’ use of music and so on. Still, this does not mean that I do not believe that there may be such consequences to the use of MP3 players. I did not ask the subjects to describe their *positive* experiences of their MP3 use however, but asked about their experiences in general. This means that there could have been a ‘negative outcome’. One of my questions asked explicitly about whether the subjects had any negative experiences with the use of the MP3 player. The response to this question was in general related to technical aspects of the player. That is, some of the subjects had negative experiences with the MP3 player not functioning correctly or the battery not lasting long enough. No one replied that they had any negative experiences with the mobile music listening. Of course, the subjects in this study have chosen to use their MP3 players regularly, and must therefore be expected to enjoy this use. Also, if they ever feel uncomfortable using it, they can easily turn it off.



Even if I have had a resource-oriented approach, I have not avoided possible negative aspects of the MP3 player. On the other hand, my agenda has not been to criticize MP3 use, or study negative outcomes of this use. Rather, I have asked questions like whether and how the MP3 player can function as a technology of musical self-care, and how the mobile music can work as a resource for the listeners.

A typical response to the MP3 player's role in self-regulation and coping articulates that individuals should be able to regulate thoughts, feelings, stress and so on their own, without external tools such as music. The idea is that the tool, in this case the MP3 player, acts as a disservice by making the individual unable to regulate herself without such means. The MP3 player and the music is often compared to drugs, in the way that the individual becomes addicted to something outside of herself as to reach certain states of being – which is perceived as positive by the subject, but which is in fact harmful.

It is true that the subjects in this study have become more or less addicted to their MP3 player and to having their music available at all times. However, a vital distinction to drugs is first of all that the music is not a physical addiction – and therefore the two should probably not be compared – and secondly, that music does not have harmful side effects. The subjects reflect on their 'addiction' to music, and one of the subjects (female, 27 years) points out that she is indeed more or less addicted, but says: "Why not be addicted? It's a good thing". It is perhaps not merely positive to be dependent on something outside of oneself, but music does not have the damaging effects that follow from alcohol, tobacco, narcotics and the like (van Goethem, 2010).<sup>66</sup>

When it comes to using external tools for self-regulation and coping, it seems that this is a common tactic for engaging in such work. Among others, Thayer et al (1994) and Larsen (2000) point to different tactics for mood regulation. These tactics include exercising, eating, shopping, watching TV, calling a friend and so on – all of which are 'external tools'.

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<sup>66</sup> However, hearing damage can become a problem by listening to headsets over long periods of time and/or at loud volumes (Park, 2009; Vries, 2005) . Hearing damage is outside the frames of this study, but is nonetheless a side effect to MP3 use that is important to be aware of.

Antonovsky (1979) further proposes that successful coping is a consequence of an individual's available *resistance resources*. These can be *general resistance resources*, including material resources such as money, or *specific resources*, exemplified by certain drugs or telephone lifelines – again, so-called 'external tools'. Music can function as an external tool in the same way. Music can help the listener to focus in environments where there are several other impressions, and make her able to regulate thoughts, affects and bodily energy, as well as to cope with stressors. Therefore, based on the fact that most of us appropriate different tactics in self-regulation and stress management, the MP3 player should be considered a useful resource.

## 8.5 CRITIQUE

Researching music listening from a health perspective raises some critical questions about the general focus on health and soundness in our society. "Soundness has become the new superior value in modern society", Brinkmann notes (2010, p. 15, my translation). We live in a society where health and soundness has been commercialized and where individuals are extremely focused on their physical and mental health. Soundness has become a status symbol and a way to achieve recognition for the individual. Thus, individuals are increasingly imposed to monitor, administer and take responsibility for their own health and soundness (Brinkmann, 2010).

Can this imposed responsibility for one's own health explain why the subjects in this study utilize their mobile music in their self-administration, including self-regulation and coping? Can their use of music as such a tactic be explained by a subconscious wish to continuously administer their functional ability? And does this possible subconscious wish link to society's demand for individual soundness?

Obviously, there are positive consequences of engaging in music for the subjects in this study. Using music as a resource in self-care should be understood as beneficial for the individual. The question I pose here is whether society's focus on health and soundness leads to a monitoring of

the self that becomes in fact unhealthy (c.f. Brinkmann, 2010)? Does music ultimately become a means in the pursuit of positive health?

The purpose of the present study has not been to 'reduce' music to a means for positive health. I do not wish to impose individuals to listen to music for the sake of their health maintenance. However, this study shows that there may be positive consequences of engaging in music listening, and that music can function as a tactic for self-regulation and coping with everyday life. Thus, music listening may have beneficial consequences for individuals' well-being, and should therefore be understood as a valuable resource for the individual. Although critical questions can be posed concerning our society's focus on health and soundness, this should not overshadow the fact that individuals appear to enjoy music listening, and that this enjoyment may have positive consequences for their subjective well-being and mental health maintenance.

## 8.6 SUMMARY

The study presented in this thesis has taken a *positive, resource-oriented* approach to the research on use of MP3 players. Although there seem to be several risks related to the use of such players – hearing damage, concern about traffic safety, and issues concerning isolation and the social environment – it appears that use of MP3 players also has positive consequences for the users.

The present study has asked the questions of whether and how the use of MP3 players can function as a medium of musical self-care, subjective well-being, and positive health. Interrogating the possible role of MP3 players in individuals' self-care, the study has focused on *self-regulation* and *coping*. It appears that the private music can function as an efficient resource for cognitive-, affective-, and bodily regulation. It seems that the regulation of these aspects is related, in that e.g. regulation of mood often also involves regulation of thoughts and bodily energy. Since music works to regulate all these aspects, it might function as a particularly efficient self-regulation tactic. Self-regulation is a crucial element in subjective well-being, and we may therefore presume that the use of MP3 players as a technology of self-

regulation might further make it valuable in subjective well-being. Theories concerning self-regulation, and affect regulation in particular, also suggest that this regulation is vital in positive mental health (Fave, 2006). We may therefore assume that the role of private music in self-regulation also makes it valuable regarding positive mental health.

The MP3 player is most commonly used when the subjects are travelling. On a daily basis, the MP3 player is used while the subjects are commuting to and from work. While commuting, the subjects face stressors such as noise and crowding. The MP3 player and the private music appear to function as a successful coping resource against these stressors. Thus, the MP3 player takes the role of a *preventative* coping resource, enabling the subjects to deal with the stressors of commuting *before* they lead to tension and stress. Since stress has been established as a risk factor in developing disease, having an available coping resource may be seen as a way of maintaining positive health. The role of the MP3 player in the subjects' experience of their daily commute as valuable, desired time and space further indicates that the MP3 player may also be crucial in the subjects' subjective well-being.

I would claim that self-regulation and coping should be seen as parts of taking care of the self (see e.g., DeNora, 2000; Ruud, 2008). Thus, if the MP3 player can function as a technology of self-regulation and coping, it should also be seen as a technology of self-care. We may therefore assume that the MP3 player can function as a medium of musical self-care, where the mobile music can be used to take care of bodily conditions and energies, emotions, moods, and cognitive orientations (c.f., DeNora, 2000; 2007; Ruud, 2008, 2010), as well as an aid in coping with stressors of everyday life.

In conclusion, then, we may say that the MP3 player *may* function as a technology of subjective well-being and positive mental health, because it promotes self-regulation and coping. Further, because of these aspects, music may be said to function as a way of taking care of oneself, and thus work as a technology of self-care. Hence, use of the MP3 player may function as a *medium of musical self-care*.

## 8.7 FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study has had a qualitative, hermeneutic approach to the research topic 'use of MP3 players'. The research questions have been investigated through interviews with twelve MP3 users. By talking to the subjects, it has appeared that the MP3 player can function as a positive resource for the users. In future research, it could be interesting to further investigate the consequences of music-listening for the listeners' subjective well-being and health promotion. In the present study, interviews were conducted with apparently healthy individuals. For them, the MP3 player appeared as a coping resource and a resource in self-regulation. Can the private music have similar effects on individuals who experience illness?<sup>67</sup> It could be interesting to hand out MP3 players to individuals who are hospitalized and ask them to utilize music of their choice as a way to cope with their situation. Investigating the effects of this use on a group of individuals with physical health problems and a group of individuals with mental health problems could possibly shed light on how the music can function differently among people who struggle with different forms of health problems. Are individuals with mental health issues capable of utilizing music as a self-regulating strategy? How can people use personal music to cope with physical pain and the stress of being ill? Are the MP3 player and the private music a satisfying coping resource for people who struggle with different forms of illnesses?

It would also be interesting to investigate further the role of music listening in individuals' well-being, implementing other methods than those used in the present research. For example, the participants' well-being could be measured at the beginning of the study, using for example scales for psychological well-being, life satisfaction and happiness (e.g. Keyes & Waterman, 2003) or the satisfaction with life scale (Diener, et al., 1997). During a limited time period, the experience sampling method (ESM) could be used to document the participants' music-listening and simultaneously to measure their SWB by using the same or similar scales as those used at the beginning of the study. Is there any measurable relationship between

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<sup>67</sup> Here, I speak of health from both a sociological and biological perspective, including both physical and mental health. Still, I want to maintain a *holistic* perspective on health.

the participants' SWB and music listening? Are there any changes in their levels of SWB while they listen to music as opposed to when they are not? Are there any detectable differences in the participants SWB when they listen to self-chosen music and when they listen to music they have not chosen themselves? The ESM should be followed up by individual interviews with the participants, where they should be allowed to comment on the findings, and discuss possible consequences of their music listening. Applying a mixed methods approach would allow for a broader understanding of the consequences of music listening on subjects' well-being.

The MP3 player has become a prime medium for everyday listening to music, and the unprecedented availability of music raises questions about its impact on the user. The present research has illuminated some of the issues related to the use of MP3 players, but the rapid development of new music technologies demand new research on how these listening technologies are made use of, and what influence they have on the listeners.

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# APPENDIXES

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1. Approval from NSD
2. Announcement for participation in the research in Norwegian
3. Announcement for participation in the research in English
4. Information and consent
5. Interview guide in Norwegian
6. Interview guide in English
7. Writing assignment in Norwegian
8. Writing assignment in English



## Appendix 1 – Approval from NSD

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS  
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



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nsd@nsd.uib.no  
www.nsd.uib.no  
Org.nr: 805 21 884

Marte Strand Skjotland  
Norges musikkhøgskole  
Postboks 5190 Majorstua  
0302 OSLO

Vår dato: 01.11.2008

Vår ref.: 2007/172/17 Deres dato:

Deres ref.:

### KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 26.09.2008. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet

20071

*Mp3-bruk som medlems for musikkalisk egenutvalg: En studie av sammenhengen mellom mp3-bruk og oppførselen av lærere*

Behandlingsansvarlig  
Daglig ansvarlig

*Norges musikkhøgskole, ved institusjonens ansvarlige leder  
Marte Strand Skjotland*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, [http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk\\_stud/skjema.html](http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html). Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.12.2011, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

  
Bjørn Henriksen

  
Lis Tenold

Kontaktperson: Lis Tenold tlf: 55 58 33 77

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

*personvernombudet@nsd.uib.no*

Ansvarlig for utveksling / Distribusjon:

OSLO: NSD, Universitet i Oslo, Postboks 105 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47 22 85 52 11, [nsd@nsd.uib.no](mailto:nsd@nsd.uib.no)  
TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7801 Svalbard. Tel: +47 73 58 15 07, [nsd@ntnu.no](mailto:nsd@ntnu.no)  
TRONDHEIM: NSD, Universitet i Tromsø, 9001 Tromsø. Tel: +47 77 84 42 26, [nsd@iuh.uib.no](mailto:nsd@iuh.uib.no)

## Appendix 2 – Announcement for participation in Norwegian

### ***Mp3-bruk som medium for musikalsk egenomsorg.***

*En studie av sammenhengen mellom mp3-bruk og livskvalitet.*

### VIL DU VÆRE MED PÅ ET FORSKNINGSPROSJEKT OM MP3-BRUK OG LIVSKVALITET?

Jeg trenger informanter som bruker mp3-spiller jevnlig og som vil snakke om denne bruken. Det vil bli gjennomført et intervju med deg på omtrent en times varighet. Du må være over atten år for å delta.

Studien er en doktorgradstudie ved Norges Musikkhøgskole og har som mål å belyse hvordan bruk av mp3-spillere kan ha sammenheng med opplevelsen av livskvalitet.

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke deg fra prosjektet uten at dette får konsekvenser for deg.

Ta kontakt med Marie Skånland for mer informasjon.

Telefon 23 36 72 28

marie.s.skanland@nmh.no



#### **Norges musikkhøgskole**

Postboks 5190

Majorstua

NO-0302 Oslo

Tel: +47 23 36 70 00

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mh@nmh.no

www.nmh.no

#### **Besøksadresse**

Slemdalsveien 11

#### **Kontaktperson**

Marie Strand Skånland

Tel: +47 23 36 72 28

marie.s.skanland@nmh.no

## Appendix 3 – Announcement for participation in English

### ***MP3 use as medium for musical self-care.***

*A study on the relationship between MP3 use and life-quality.*

DO YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT ON MP3 USE AND LIFE-QUALITY?

I need informants who use MP3 players regularly and who are willing to talk about this use. There will be conducted an interview with you, lasting about an hour. You need to be over eighteen years to participate.

The study is a Ph.D. study at the Norwegian Academy of Music and aims to elucidate how use of MP3 players may relate to the experience of life-quality.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the project without any consequences on your behalf.

Contact Marie Skånland for more information.

Telephone 23 36 72 28

marie.s.skanland@nmh.no



### **Norwegian Academy of Music**

Postboks 5190  
Majorstua  
NO-0302 Oslo  
Tel: +47 23 36 70 00  
Faks: +47 23 36 70 01  
mh@nmh.no  
www.nmh.no

### **Location**

Slemdalsveien 11

### **Contact**

Marie Strand Skånland  
Tel: +47 23 36 72 28  
marie.s.skanland@nmh.no

## Appendix 4 – Information and consent

### Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

*En studie av sammenhengen mellom mp3-bruk og opplevelsen av livskvalitet:*

*”Mp3-bruk som medium for musikalsk egenomsorg”*

#### Bakgrunn og hensikt

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i en forskningsstudie for å belyse sammenhengen mellom bruk av mp3-spillere og opplevelsen av livskvalitet; det vil si opplevelsen av trivsel, overskudd/energi, mestring/kontroll og forvaltning av følelser og tanker. Hensikten med studien er å bidra til ny kunnskap om hvordan musikk blir integrert i dagliglivet og hvordan bruk av mp3-spillere kan fungere som ”musikalsk egenomsorg”.

Du er valgt ut til å forespørres fordi du bruker mp3-spiller jevnlig. Studien er del av et doktorgradsprosjekt og gjennomføres av stipendiat Marie Strand Skånland som er ansatt ved Norges Musikkhøgskole. Funnene fra studien vil presenteres i Skånlands doktoravhandling og i eventuelle andre publikasjoner. Funn kan også presenteres på konferanser og i undervisning. Ditt navn og identitet vil ikke komme fram, og dine personopplysninger vil holdes konfidensielt.

#### Hva innebærer studien?

Det vil bli gjennomført et intervju med deg på omtrent en times varighet. Du bør sette av halvannen time. Det vil bli gjort lydopptak av intervjuet, men du vil bli anonymisert i etterarbeidet og publiseringen av funnene. Du vil ved senere anledning kunne bli spurt om å skrive ned en opplevelse du har hatt ved bruk av mp3-spillere og/eller gjøre et oppfølgingsintervju. Ved deltakelse i studien gir du prosjektleder rett til å sitere fritt fra intervjuene. Det vil ikke ha konsekvenser for deg dersom du svarer nei eller trekker deg fra studien.

#### Mulige fordeler og ulemper

Mulige fordeler ved å delta i studien er å medvirke til å belyse hvordan bruken av mp3-spillere kan ha en sammenheng med livskvalitet. Deltakelse i studien vil kunne bidra til ny kunnskap om et felt det finnes lite eller ingen kunnskap om per i dag.

Det er ikke kjente ulemper ved deltakelse i studien.

#### **Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?**

Informasjonen som registreres om deg skal kun brukes slik som beskrevet i hensikten med studien. Alle opplysningene vil bli behandlet uten navn og fødselsnummer eller andre direkte gjenkjennende opplysninger. En kode knytter deg til dine opplysninger og prøver gjennom en navneliste.

Det er kun autorisert personell knyttet til prosjektet som har adgang til navnelisten og som kan finne tilbake til deg. Navnelisten vil slettes ved doktorgradstudiets slutt, det vil si når avhandlingen er levert og Skånland har disputert, etter planen høsten 2011.

Det vil så langt som mulig søkes å publisere resultatene slik at din identitet ikke kommer fram.

#### **Frivillig deltakelse**

Det er frivillig å delta i studien. Du kan når som helst og uten å oppgi noen grunn trekke ditt samtykke til å delta i studien. Dette vil ikke få konsekvenser for deg. Dersom du ønsker å delta, undertegner du samtykkeerklæringen på siste side. Om du nå sier ja til å delta, kan du senere trekke tilbake ditt samtykke uten at det vil få konsekvenser for deg. Dersom du senere ønsker å trekke deg eller har spørsmål til studien, kan du kontakte Marie Strand Skånland på telefon 23 36 72 28 eller på mail: [marie.s.skånland@nmh.com](mailto:marie.s.skånland@nmh.com).

**Ytterligere informasjon om studien finnes i kapittel A**

**Ytterligere informasjon om personvern finnes i kapittel B**

**Samtykkeerklæring følger etter kapittel B.**

## Kapittel A- utdypende forklaring av hva studien innebærer

### Kriterier for deltakelse

Du må være over 18 år og bruke mp3-spiller jevnlig. Utover dette stilles ingen spesielle krav til deg.

### Bakgrunnsinformasjon om studien

Mp3-teknologien fører med seg nye måter å lytte til og bruke musikk på, og endrer således våre lyttevaner og musikkopplevelser. Det finnes imidlertid lite kunnskap om hva lytting til mp3-spillere betyr for den enkelte, og eventuelt hvilken funksjon lyttingen har. Forskning på bruk av mp3-teknologien er med andre ord nødvendig for å forstå hvordan musikk blir integrert i dagliglivet. Studien er knyttet til fagfeltet musikkterapi og har til hensikt å undersøke hvordan mp3-bruk kan fungere som medium for "musikalsk egenomsorg". Spørsmålet er om bruken av mp3-spillere kan ha sammenheng med opplevelsen av livskvalitet? Kunnskap om hva musikk betyr for den enkelte i dagliglivet kan også få konsekvenser for musikkterapeutisk praksis.

Studien er en doktorgradstudie, og skal etter planen avsluttes høsten 2011. Da skal det også leveres en avhandling hvor funnene blir presentert.

### Tidsskjema

Det vil bli gjennomført et intervju med deg på omtrent en times varighet. Ved senere anledning kan du bli bedt om å skrive ned en opplevelse du har hatt ved bruk av mp3-spillere og/eller delta på et oppfølgingsintervju.

### Mulige fordeler

Mulige fordeler ved å delta i studien er å kunne bidra til å belyse hvordan bruk av mp3-spillere kan ha sammenheng med opplevelsen av livskvalitet, og således bidra til ny kunnskap om hvordan musikk blir integrert i dagliglivet og hvordan bruk av mp3-spillere kan fungere som "musikalsk egenomsorg".

### Mulige ulemper

Det er ikke kjente ulemper ved deltakelse i studien.



#### **Studiedeltakerens ansvar**

Det forventes at du møter til intervju på avtalt sted til avtalt tid, og at du tar kontakt dersom det blir endring i planene.

## **Kapittel B - Personvern**

#### **Personvern**

Opplysninger som registreres om deg er navn, fødselsdato og kontaktinformasjon, samt de opplysninger som kommer fram i intervjuet. Dine personopplysninger (navn, fødselsdato og kontaktinformasjon) vil bli oppbevart separat fra informasjonen som kommer fram i intervjuet. En kode knytter deg til dine opplysninger gjennom en navneliste. Alle opplysningene vil bli behandlet uten navn og fødselsnummer eller andre direkte gjenkjennende opplysninger.

Det er kun Marie Strand Skånland som har adgang til navnelisten og som kan finne tilbake til deg. Navnelisten vil slettes ved doktorgradstudiets slutt, det vil si når avhandlingen er levert og Skånland har disputert.

#### **Rett til innsyn og sletting av opplysninger om deg**

Hvis du sier ja til å delta i studien, har du rett til å få innsyn i hvilke opplysninger som er registrert om deg. Du har videre rett til å få korrigert eventuelle feil i de opplysningene som er registrert. Dersom du trekker deg fra studien, kan du kreve å få slettet innsamlende opplysninger, med mindre opplysningene allerede er inngått i analyser eller brukt i vitenskapelige publikasjoner.

#### **Informasjon om utfallet av studien**

Deltakerne har rett til å få informasjon om resultatet av studien.

## Appendix 5 – Interview guide in Norwegian

Forsknings spørsmål	Intervju spørsmål
<p><i>Kan bruk av MP3 spillere fungere som medium for "musikalsk egenomsorg"?</i></p> <p>A. Hvordan inngår musikken i forvaltningen av følelser og tanker?</p> <p>B. Hvordan inngår musikken i administrasjonen av oppmerksomhet og energi?</p> <p>C. Hvordan bidrar musikken til konstruksjoner av grenser rundt seg selv?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I hvilke situasjoner bruker du mp3-spilleren? Hvorfor bruker du den i disse situasjonene?</li> <li>2. Hvordan velger du musikk å lytte på – hva blir avgjørende for ditt valg av musikk (sinnsstemning, stress, reisedestinasjon osv)?</li> <li>3. Hvor mye/ofte lytter du?</li> <li>4. Opplever du at musikken påvirker deg på noen måte? Hvordan?</li> <li>5. Opplever du at musikken har noen innvirkning på dagsformen din? Hvordan? Kan du selv styre dette på noen måte?</li> <li>6. Hvordan bruker du musikken på en dårlig dag? (Når setter du på spilleren, hva slags musikk hører du på, hvordan påvirker dette deg?)</li> <li>7. Hvordan bruker du musikken på en god dag?</li> <li>8. Hvordan bruker du musikken når du føler deg stresset?</li> <li>9. Hender det at du bruker mp3-spilleren når du ikke får sove, når du er sliten, trist eller lignende? Hvordan fungerer dette?</li> <li>10. Hender det at du bruker musikken for å styre tanker i en bestemt retning eller for å blokkere tanker? Hvordan?</li> <li>11. Bruker du noen gang mp3-spilleren i situasjoner der du trenger mer energi? Hvordan fungerer dette?</li> <li>12. Hvordan bruker du musikken når du er på vei til jobb/skole, hjem, til venner, på fest? Hva slags musikk lytter du til i de ulike situasjonene? Hvorfor?</li> <li>13. Opplever du den samme musikken på samme måte uavhengig av humør,</li> </ol>

	<p>dagsform, tid og sted? Hva påvirker evt. opplevelsen?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. Hva slags forhold har du til musikken? Opplever du at det er "din" musikk?</li> <li>15. Påvirker musikken din selvfølelse eller opplevelse av deg selv på noen måte?</li> <li>16. Er det noen forskjell i måten du lytter på om du er hjemme eller ute?</li> <li>17. Er det noen forskjell i lytteopplevelsen om du hører på høyttalere eller headset?</li> <li>18. Om du lytter på musikk for å kjenne på stemninger eller følelser: Gjør du dette i like stor grad ute blant folk som hjemme? Hvordan er opplevelsen av dette?</li> <li>19. Hva betyr det for deg å ha med din personlige musikk når du er utenfor hjemmet?</li> <li>20. Hvordan opplever du omgivelsene når du lytter på musikk?</li> <li>21. Hvordan forholder du deg til andre mennesker når du lytter til musikk?</li> <li>22. Hender det at du lytter på musikk for å trekke deg unna omverden – på hvilken måte?</li> <li>23. Har musikken noen innvirkning på om du føler deg alene/ensom eller ikke? På hvilken måte?</li> <li>24. Har du hatt noen negative opplevelser ved bruk av mp3-spillere?</li> <li>25. Hvordan ville det vært uten mp3-spillere?</li> <li>26. Er det andre forhold du ønsker å ta opp, eller andre ting du ønsker å nevne?</li> </ol>
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## Appendix 6 – Interview guide in English

Main questions	Interview questions
<p><i>Can the MP3 player function as a medium for musical self-care?</i></p> <p>A. How does music contribute to the management and regulation of mood, thoughts, and emotions?</p> <p>B. How does music contribute to the management of focus and energy?</p> <p>C. How does music contribute to the construction of boundaries around one's self?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In what situations do you use the MP3 player? Why do you use it in these situations?</li> <li>2. How do you choose music – what is decisive for your choice of music (mood, stress, destination, etc.)?</li> <li>3. How much/often do you listen?</li> <li>4. Do you experience that the music influences you in any way? How?</li> <li>5. Do you experience that the music influences your day to day condition? How? Can you control this in any way?</li> <li>6. How do you use music on a bad day? (When do you put on the player, what music do you listen to, how does this influence you?)</li> <li>7. How do you use music on a good day?</li> <li>8. How do you use music when you are feeling stressed?</li> <li>9. Does it happen that you use the MP3 player when you cannot sleep, when you are tired, sad, or the like? How does this work?</li> <li>10. Does it happen that you use music to guide thoughts in a specific direction or to block thoughts? How?</li> <li>11. Do you ever use the MP3 player in situations when you need more energy? How does this work?</li> <li>12. How do you use music when you are on your way to work/school, home, to friends, to a party? What kind of music do you listen to in the different situations? Why?</li> <li>13. Do you experience the same music in the same way independent of mood, time and place? What possibly influences the experience?</li> <li>14. What kind of relationship do you have to the music? Do you experience it as "your" music?</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>15. Does the music influence your self-esteem or sense of self in any way?</li><li>16. Is there any difference in how you listen according to whether you are at home or outside?</li><li>17. Is there any difference in the listening experience when you listen to loudspeakers versus headsets?</li><li>18. If you listen to music for the purpose of experiencing mood or emotions, do you do this to the same extent outside among people as at home? How is the experience of this?</li><li>19. What does it mean to you to have your personal music available outside of home?</li><li>20. How do you experience your environment when you listen to music?</li><li>21. How do you relate to other people when you listen to music?</li><li>22. Does it happen that you listen to music as to pull away from your surroundings? In what way?</li><li>23. Does the music influence your experience of being alone/lonely or not? How?</li><li>24. Have you had any negative experiences with the use of the MP3 player?</li><li>25. How would it be without the MP3 player?</li><li>26. Is there anything else you would like to add?</li></ol>
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## Appendix 7 – Writing assignment in Norwegian

### MP3 bruk som medium for musikalsk egenomsorg

Takk for at du har valgt å delta i forskningsprosjektet om mp3-bruk og livskvalitet. Dette er en forespørsel til deg om å skrive ned en eller flere episoder du har hatt med bruk av mp3-spillere som du har opplevd som meningsfulle. Du kan selv velge episoder som hadde betydning for deg, eller svare på spørsmålene under. Du kan også velge å gjøre begge deler.

Fortell gjerne konkret om hvor du var, tid på dagen, tidspunktet du satte på musikken, hva du hørte på. Hvordan hadde du det før du satte på musikken? Hva tenkte du på, hvordan var sinnsstemningen din? Følte du noen endring i humør/stemning/energy mens eller etter du lyttet til musikken? Hvorfor valgte du å lytte/ikke lytte til musikk? Fant du "riktig" musikk med en gang eller måtte du lete deg fram? Hvorfor valgte du den musikken du gjorde? Beskriv gjerne episoden i detaljer – både om tid, sted og "indre" opplevelser.

Du kan sende svaret ditt til Marie Skånland på e-mail til [marie.s.skanland@nmh.no](mailto:marie.s.skanland@nmh.no) eller i posten til Marie Skånland, P.B. 5190 Majorstua, 0302 Oslo. Dersom du har spørsmål kan du ta kontakt via e-mail eller på telefon 23 36 72 28. Takk for hjelpen.

Forslag til tekst:

Fortell om en episode du følte deg frustrert/trist/sint/stresset – hvordan brukte du mp3-spillere denne dagen? Hvor var du? Når på dagen var det? Hvordan følte du deg? Hvorfor valgte du å lytte/ikke lytte til musikk? Fant du "riktig" musikk med en gang eller måtte du lete deg fram? Hvorfor valgte du den musikken du gjorde? Følte du noen endring i humør/stemning/energi mens eller etter du lyttet til musikken?"

Og tilsvarende:

Fortell om en episode du følte deg lett til sinns – hvordan brukte du mp3-spillere denne dagen? Følte du noen endring i humør/stemning/energi mens eller etter du lyttet til musikken? Hvorfor valgte du å lytte/ikke lytte til musikk? Hvorfor valgte du den musikken du gjorde?

## Appendix 8 – Writing assignment in English

### MP3 use as medium for musical self-care

Thank you for participating in the research project on MP3 use and life-quality. This is an enquiry to you about writing about one or several episodes you have had when using your MP3 player which you experienced as meaningful. You can choose episodes yourself which were significant to you, or answer the questions below. You can also choose to do both.

Please write concretely about where you were, time of the day, at what time you put on the music, what you listened to. How were you before you put on music? What were you thinking, how was your mood? Did you experience any change in affects/mood/energy while or after you listened to the music? Why did you choose to listen/not to listen to music? Did you find the “correct” music at once or did you have to search for it? Why did you choose the music you did? Please write about the episode in details – about time, place, and “inner” experiences.

You can post your response to Marie Skånland via e-mail to [marie.s.skanland@nmh.no](mailto:marie.s.skanland@nmh.no) or via mail to Marie Skånland, P.B. 5190 Majorstua, 0302 Oslo. If you have questions, you can contact me via e-mail or by phone 23 36 72 28. Thank you for your help.

Text proposal:

Write about an episode when you were feeling frustrated/sad/angry/stressed – how did you use the MP3 player this day? What time of the day was it? How did you feel? Why did you choose to listen/not to listen to music? Did you find the “correct” music at once or did you have to search for it? Why did you choose the music you did? Did you experience any change in affects/mood/energy while or after you listened to the music?

And correspondingly:

Write about an episode when you felt cheerful – how did you use the MP3 player this day? Did you experience any change in affects/mood/energy while or after you listened to the music? Why did you choose the music you did?

