

Music, Adolescents and Health: Narratives About How Young People Use Music as a Health Resource in Daily Life

Hege Bjørnestøl Beckmann

About a month ago, I accidentally ran into one of the youths who earlier had participated in my PhD project. He showed me his recently acquired 'Music Angel', a portable speaker just eight centimeters wide that produces a powerful sound. It was small enough to fit in his pocket; connected to his iPhone, it allowed him to share his playlist with his friends anytime he wanted to. The 'Music Angel' is one of the many technological advances that, together with MP3players, iPods, smartphones, and so on, increase the availability of music to all.

Adolescents are, more than most, up to date on all of these innovations, and many young people are surrounded by music in their daily activities. Music exists in young people's lives "like the air they breathe", writes Swedish music researcher Carin Öblad (Öblad, 2000, p. 41),¹ and music can, in many ways, be described as a 'soundtrack' to life in general (Ruud 1997). At the same time, research indicates that a large number of today's adolescents struggles with physical or mental health issues. In 2009 The Norwegian Institute of Public Health reported that 15 – 20 % of Norwegian child and adolescents under the age of eighteen suffers from mental health issues that affect their daily activities (Mathiesen 2009). A nationwide survey conducted by the Department of Health Promotion and Development in Bergen in 2005 showed that more than one in six boys and almost one in three girls in their first year of upper secondary school reported having at least one mental or bodily health complaint daily (Samdal et al., 2009). This means that, in a class of twenty-five, around six pupils struggle with regular ailments of some sort.

There are a variety of explanations for this high numbers, but most frequently the causes are connected to non-material threats to health, such as a lack of fellowship, faith,

¹ All quotes from sources other than English are translated by the author.

meaning and hope (Fugelli, 1998). The years of one's youth can be a time of vulnerability, and it is therefore particularly important that young people have positive emotional experiences—that is, feel a sense of belonging with others and see a greater coherence and meaning in life. Research shows that musical activity has the capacity to contribute in this regard. It can regulate states of mind; it can bring about climaxes in life, as well as positive experiences of achievement; it can reduce stress (DeNora, 2000; Ruud, 2005; Skånland, 2012). Music can also contribute to creating strong and robust memories that ground one's existence in values that supply meaning in turn (Ruud, 2006).

Of course, 'youth' does not constitute a homogeneous group. The adolescents of today grow up in a range of circumstances, and factors such as material wealth, gender, ethnicity, residence and social class contribute to the divisions among them (Krange & Øia, 2005, p. 19). In addition to these factors, each young person is a unique individual who meets adolescence with different innate and cultivated resources. If one insists on 'youth' as a general category, however, Australian youth researchers Wyn and White suggest that "youth is most productively conceptualized as a *social process* in which the meaning and experience of becoming adult is mediated" (1997, p. 4). Developmental psychologist Stephen Tetzchner describes the development of identity as the very core of this transformation from child to adult (2001, p. 591). The development of identity can thus be described as adolescence's great project.

In this text, I will look more closely at the connections between young people's use of music, on the one hand, and their health, on the other. The fact that the development of identity is inextricably bound up with being young makes also this theme relevant for the discussion. This text's empirical material encompasses the narratives of three young people concerning how they experience music as a health-promoting resource in their daily lives. The narratives were recorded as part of my ongoing PhD project and will be presented here in relation to the following question: How do today's adolescents experience that active use of music impacts upon their health? The purpose of the text, then, is to focus on young people's own accounts of their use of music as a resource to affect their health and quality of life. In order to clarify the theoretical framework that will guide further discussion, I will, by way of introduction, look more closely at the terms *music*, *health* and *identity*.

Music

Modern technology has made it easy to listen to music. Internet sources such as Spotify, WiMP and iTunes offer legal and occasionally free access to a huge library of music. A relevant question in this context is this: can one define any of this music as 'health-promoting'? Research in the psychology of music has, in recent years, dealt with this question by focusing on how people respond physiologically to different types of music.² Results have indicated that music with a slow tempo, stepwise melodies and few dissonances appears to have a soothing and relaxing effect, while music characterised by fast rhythms, big melodic leaps and harsh dissonances appears to be stimulating and energising. Common to these surveys is the fact that they all focus on how musical structures — the sounding elements of music themselves — can affect performers and listeners.

Establishing such context-free features of musical content is a worthwhile and important contribution to discussions about music and health, but it runs the risk of being myopic. Even Ruud (2011) emphasises that a musical experience never occurs in isolation but always as part of a wider context. In this way there may also be content-related or semantic aspects beyond the musical sounds themselves that become the source of moods and states related to health. The experience of musical meaning, then, is determined by the sounding material, the person who performs or listens to it, and the context within which it is encountered: "In other words the *music*, the *person* and the *situation* work together in a mutually dependent relationship where it is impossible to take away any of the individual components without changing the meaning" (Ruud, 2006, p. 20). As an alternative to looking for answers inside the music itself, Ruud suggests that researchers adopt a broader perspective with regard to music's relevance as a health resource. He, for example, incorporates into this discussion "the interplay between musical structures, the associations music inspires, and the person's individual listening history — together with the cognitive and contextual framework for the interpretation of meaning which occurs in one's meeting with music" (Ruud, 2011, p. 15).³

Tia DeNora (2000) also distances herself from the position that music can support one particular interpretation over another, because the same music does not work in the same way on everybody. At the same time, she maintains that one should not see music as an empty semiotic space either. Instead, music bears with it certain

² For a more extensive overview, see Bonde (2009, pp. 67–70).

³ Ruud can thus be said to adopt a constructivist perspective (Bonde, 2009, pp. 16–17), which claims that the understanding of musical meaning occurs in the meeting between music and the individual in a particular context or setting.

affordances (2000, pp. 39ff) that offer its listeners various possibilities for action. Music's melodic nature, harmony and dynamic construction afford almost anything, in fact, from bodily, physical activity to intellectual stimulation to emotional swings. But, like Ruud, DeNora emphasises that what music offers or facilitates is dependent on the person who uses it, and on the context within which it is used.

DeNora also emphasises that music is not a stimulus to which the individual is exposed but a resource that one actively chooses to exploit. As a key term in relation to this particular interaction, DeNora uses the word *agency*:

Music is in dynamic relation with social life, helping to invoke, stabilize and change the parameters of agency, collective and individual. By the term 'agency' here, I mean feeling, perception, cognition and consciousness, identity, energy, perceived situation and scene, embodied conduct and comportment. (DeNora, 2000, p. 20)

If one takes as a point of departure the notion that music affords individuals with different possibilities for action, we are then able to discuss music as a resource for facilitating the creation of meaning in everyday life. I also draw upon this perspective in looking at how young people experience music as a health-promoting resource. I choose not to view music exclusively as an objective and structural phenomenon, and I will not concentrate on its inherent qualities as such. In short, I am less concerned with *what* music adolescents listen to than with *how* they use music, and how they experience *musical meaning* and *sense*. Following Christopher Small (1998), I hold that music is something we take an active role in — that is, something we do. I will likewise adopt Small's term *musicking* as a verbal form of the word that incorporates all of the activities connected to a music event.

Though *musicking* is thus a rather sprawling notion, Small limits himself to the activities related to a live musical performance. In today's society, on the other hand, most of an individual's musical activity takes place through playback media such as the radio, the CD player and the MP3 player. Swedish musicologist Lars Lilliestam (2009) therefore finds Small's application of his term insufficient and argues that the term should in fact encompass all daily activities related to both playing and listening to music, including talking about music, 'having music stuck inside one's head' and indulging in one's music-related memories (2009, p. 24).

When we use music, ultimately, something happens to us, both physically and mentally. In this text I address the ways in which adolescents believe that musical activity can impact their health. Before examining the empirical material, I will therefore clarify what I understand the term 'health' to mean.

Health

A text that focuses on young people's experience of music as a health resource must also wrestle with a definition of the term 'health'. Just half a century ago, health was defined by doctors working within the biomedical disease model as simply *the absence of disease* (Espnes & Smedslund, 2001, p. 32). Since then, however, 'health' has continually been revisited and at present extends far beyond the continuum of ill/not ill.⁴ Already in 1948, the World Health Organisation promoted the following definition of the term 'health': "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (ibid.). While this definition embraces more aspects of the human being and recognises health to be an interplay among biological, psychological and social factors, it still sees health as a given condition and puts limitations upon who can attain it.

When addressing health in relation to music and musical practice, I have moved away from the biomedical tradition and from measureable and positivist access to health. Instead, I will adopt what English health psychologist Peter Duncan (2007) calls an *interpretative* or *hermeneutic* approach to health as something dynamic that can be both influenced and actively promoted. Along these lines, Swedish philosopher Lennard Nordenfelt likewise primarily sees health as an *experience of wellbeing* and an *ability to act*, and he pinpoints the close connection between these aspects and the physical and social context of the subject. A person who is not able to realise his or her vital goals, according to Nordenfelt, can be afflicted by poor health (1991, p. 83). Nordenfelt also distinguishes deliberately between 'disease' and 'health', in the sense that a person who is objectively defined as ill can still, to some extent, be considered healthy, as long as the illness does not affect the person's ability to realise his/her vital goals in life.

In Norway, in addition, Peter F. Hjort's definition of health comes up frequently: "Health is to have sufficient energy to meet the demands of everyday life" (1994, p. 95). Hjort thus sees health as a resource that encompasses the experience of functioning well and a sense of achievement. Ruud also emphasises this aspect when he observes that health is not only the absence of disease but also "a reserve, a strength, and a resistance to combat disease" (2001, p. 12). Ruud sees health, within an interpretative tradition, to be an experience, and good health as equivalent to experiencing wellbeing and meaning in life. It is both a resource and a means through which to attain life goals (Ruud, 2011). Health as a category of experience is about "a subjective interpretation of our relation to the world, i.e. to ourselves (and our body), to other persons and to

⁴ See Blaxter (2004) and Mæland (2009) for a detailed overview.

our existential being” (ibid., p. 18). This interpretative perspective upon health will be applied to the following discussion of young people’s use of music in the context of their health.

Identity

‘Identity’ is an academic/psychological term that has been integrated into everyday language in recent years. Norwegian sociologist Olve Krange defines it as “a concept that holds together two quite distinctive dimensions. On one level it means identification with something collective, cultural or social. On the other it denotes a sense of *self* and a sense of *continuity* within that self” (2001, p. 45). The fact that the development of identity has both individual and social aspects has long been accepted in development psychology (Erikson, 1968; Mead, 1934). This duality is further underlined by Tetzchner, who claims that “identity is about the individual’s experience of their place in a larger context” (2001, p. 590).

In recent years, researchers have been concerned with the roles of art and culture in the development of identity. According to British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991), art and culture can provide access to strong and emotional experiences that define, develop and change the self. Giddens also considers the term *reflection* to be crucial when discussing identity, in reference to the human ability to reflect upon our own existence. One might say that the human being is born ‘in loose bits’—the newborn has a very limited ability to perceive itself as an individual, an *I* or a *self*. But as we get older, our consciousness and our understanding of our own self increases, and the ‘loose bits’ are brought together within a more unified sense of being connected—that is, an experience of being the same person over time and in different settings.

Ruud (1997) also connects identity to how the self reflects upon itself in different settings, and he believes that identity is constructed through our narratives about ourselves. Since these narratives can include musical experiences, music too can have a central role in the development of identity. Ruud cautions that identity does not solely concern seeking continuity retrospectively through life, however; it must also be understood in relation to what we identify ourselves *with* (2011, p. 16). Our musical preferences and activities are thus part of our musical identity, which informs, in turn, how we perceive and place ourselves in the social landscape.

In the above text, I have mentioned health as an experience, a subjective interpretation of our relationship to ourselves, to other people and to our existential being.

When identity is constructed within the individuals' narratives about themselves, it is thus also meaningful to bring in health as a part of our identity project.

Method

This article is based upon empirical data gathered in connection with my ongoing PhD project, which examines adolescents' daily use of music and impressions of its affect upon their quality of life and — in a broad sense — their health. This explorative study is based upon eighteen qualitative interviews with young people between the ages of sixteen and nineteen, who were recruited from upper secondary schools and from the Department of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Care (ABUP) at Sørlandet Hospital (South Norway).⁵ The interviews can be described as 'semi-structured' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 47). I have analysed the interviews using the method known as *systematic text condensation*, as modified by Kirsti Malterud (2003, p. 99), which was inspired by Giorgi's phenomenological method.

During the interviews, I invited the young people to tell stories that might elaborate on the themes in question, generating empirical material of a narrative character. Given the sheer quantity of the data for the PhDproject, I will focus on only three of the eighteen interviews here, analysing those that were particularly relevant to the present anthology's themes. The young people in question have been given fictitious names: Ida (age seventeen), Benjamin (age sixteen) and Fredrik (age seventeen). All three are patients at the Department of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Care at Sørlandet Hospital.

Based on my analysis, I have chosen to present the empirical material in the following three categories: music as an individual resource, music as a social resource and music as an existential resource.

⁵ I was myself present in the upper secondary school classes to explain the project. Those who found this to be of interest contacted me afterwards. At ABUP, the therapists provided the information about the project. The young people there contacted me via email or phone (SMS).

Music as an Individual Resource

In this section, I will focus on the daily use of music by adolescents on an *intrapsychic* level. As I mentioned earlier, adolescence is a tough period with demands linked to both intrinsic and extrinsic changes. This inner world is marked by the reorganisation of emotions, cognition and behavioural patterns, and this outer world sees young people struggle to develop competence and skills that are suited to their new stage of development. These demands often produce emotional unrest and a feeling of a lack of control in life (Sundet, 2000). During my conversations with these young people, it emerged that music could, in different ways, function as a resource amid this emotional uncertainty. Music's connection to feelings and emotional conditions is hardly a new discovery; several studies claim that the most common motive behind listening to music is precisely to affect one's feelings (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001; Laiho, 2004; Saarikallio & Erikkilä, 2007). In the preface to their *Handbook of Music and Emotion*, Juslin and Sloboda elaborate: "Listeners use music to change emotions, to release emotions, to match their current emotion, to enjoy or comfort themselves, or to relieve stress" (2010, p. 3).

Ida's morning ritual

Ida's morning ritual illustrates how music regulates emotions. In recent years, Ida has struggled with anxiety and depression and sometimes has a hard time getting out of bed and starting the day:

Sometimes, when I wake, I have a really bad morning and can't really face going to school. So then I listen to music that makes that feeling worse. I feel that if I'm sad or depressed, I just can't pretend I'm happy with happy music. That's just wrong. So then I listen to music that just makes the feeling worse. . . . But every now and again, I'm in a kind of neutral mood where I can decide if I'm going to be fed up or not. Then I listen to music that gives me . . . a bit of, you know, power.

Every morning, then, Ida wakes up, sees how she is feeling, and chooses her music accordingly. If she feels down, she uses music to strengthen those emotions and accepts, more or less, that it is going to be a bad day:

I get a bit resigned. I go to school and then just stuff the rest of the day.

In more promising moods, however, Ida finds that music can change her mood for the better, providing the ‘power’ that in turn gives her the energy to get through the day. Ida describes music as a necessity — something that ‘fixes the emotions’. She therefore has an extensive listening library, and she is very conscious of which songs fit her various states of mind:

I have both an iPod and an MP3 player so that I have space for all the music. So if, for example, I don’t have the Dum Dum Boys on the iPod, then I’ve got them on the MP3 player. If I were going to try to put all my feelings and states of mind on an iPod, there wouldn’t be space . . . My choice of music is never random. I never manage to not have an MP3 player in my backpack, for example. There are some bags where you can put it inside and have the ‘ear things’ on the outside. That just doesn’t work. I always have to have it in my pocket so that I can change songs.

For Ida, music has become a crucial part of her morning ritual, and she says that she struggles to imagine a morning without it. Ida’s morning ritual helps her to be more conscious of her emotions, and of how she can deal with them; for her, music is a resource for developing an emotional consciousness as well as the ability to experience and express her emotions. Ruud connects this consciousness and knowledge to our ‘vitality’, which helps us to “see the nuances in emotions, to be conscious of the intensities of experiences and expressions, and to have precise and reflected terms about emotions” (2001, p. 44). Ruud also refers to the psychologist Jon Monsen, who describes ‘vitality’ as a combination of impulsiveness and reflection that characterises “a positive and mutual relationship between how a person is *feeling emotionally* and what he *does with his feelings, experience-wise and expressively*” (Monsen, 1991, p. 150, emphasis in the original). If this relationship becomes unbalanced — if we encounter a situation where we suppress our feelings or fail to cope with our own emotional experience — we can also lose the ability to *have* personal experiences. But if we are able to let ourselves be affected emotionally, and to reflect upon our feelings, we form a better basis for a strong and more resistant ‘self’. Ruud thus sees vitality as an important premise for health (2001, p. 44). Ida’s morning ritual represents a means of living ‘with vitality’, because, through music, she evokes her desired emotions and then adapts to and reflects upon what she is feeling. In the end, she clarifies her relationship with herself. Even if she knows in advance whether she will likely feel good or bad, the music makes her, as she puts it, “more prepared for the day”.

Another important aspect of Ida’s story is her use of music as a conscious resource in her emotional regulation. Emotion regulation refers to “the processes by which

individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (Gross, 1999, p. 557). According to American psychologist Daniel Stern, emotional interaction is especially important during youth, because cognitive and emotional development takes place via the interaction with one’s surroundings. While parents, to a large extent, regulate the child’s emotional condition during babyhood and childhood, adolescents are expected to acquire the competence and ability to regulate their emotions themselves (Wrangsjö, 1993; Sundet, 2000). The fact that Ida uses music as a resource in her emotional regulation thus constitutes active participation in her own developmental process.

A story about betrayal

Benjamin describes his music tastes as a mix of hard rock, punk and metal. He is also the bass player in a band. For a long time, he has struggled with aggression problems, and the story below shows how music became a resource for him as he dealt with the disappointment and anger he felt when his girlfriend betrayed him:

It is the kind of song that is against one of their [the band members’] ex-girlfriends, who has been unfaithful. And they say that ‘If you ever show your face here again . . . I will rip your face apart and feed it to the dogs’. That song made me think about the kind of person I used to date, who did something I didn’t like—she cheated on me at a party, you know. And then I just thought that ‘Uuuh! [roars with a hoarse voice] So . . . It just turned out that way . . . I just thought that that song just completes everything. I think I listened to it like twelve times in the course of an evening . . . No, more than that. There were so many angry thoughts! It was like . . . I was kind of dreaming that I battered her and I was completely furious.

This story, of course, is also about emotional regulation in general—about working through a painful and difficult event. A term that is often used in connection with emotional regulation is ‘coping’ (Tetzchner, 2001, p. 387). One of the most important aspects of health seems to be one’s ability to assume responsibility for one’s own life and actions (Ruud, 2001, p. 47). When we are young, this health aspect is especially apparent, because adolescents confront it for the first time as they learn to take responsibility for themselves. In youth psychology, then, the term ‘coping’ refers in particular to the repertoire of action, emotion and thought responses that young people draw upon to deal with problematic situations in their daily lives (Frydenberg, 1997). For Benjamin, music becomes a resource for taking control of his anger.

The story above is not an extreme case, in fact, but rather Benjamin's usual method of regulating his anger. When he is upset, he generally likes to listen to 'hard' music.

I like the fact that it [the music] is tight . . . That it kind of comes as beats [beats his palm on the table]. I am not a violent person, but I like that it comes as beats.

When linking health and music, we can draw upon an *empowerment* philosophy that emphasises self-activity and coping through a mobilisation of one's inherent strength. Empowerment can be described as the process that is necessary to strengthen and activate a human being's own strength to get to know their own problems, and attain the necessary resources to handle everyday life (NOU 18:1998, p. 274). Finnish researcher Suvi Laiho points out that music is one of the (few) things that today's young people feel they can effectively control. Chosen music can give the impression of control, at least, over an uncertain situation, and give us a feeling of 'being somebody' (Laiho, 2004). Benjamin's use of music above evokes just such an empowerment philosophy.

Fredrik's story about how he processed his resentment toward his stepfather reflects a similar mobilisation of inherent strength:

"But when I heard that music . . . the hatred kind of disappeared"

After my father and mother got divorced, my mother found another man almost immediately. And he was one of those control freaks, or a psychopath, you might say. And he was one of those who watched over the family. And I had to be a Christian and had to go to church almost every Sunday. I was forced to go every public holiday, anyway. I was pretty annoyed by that. I resisted him and said that hell does not exist, and things like that. And I was later told that my mother was punished for that—the fact that I had said that. There were so many incidences that I didn't know about then . . . that he beat her and such things. So then he started pressuring me more to be a Christian, and I felt very pressured and felt a growing hate towards that. But when they divorced for good, my mother came home crying and told me absolutely everything that had happened. Everything he had done, and such. And the hatred I felt then, when my mother was crying and told me all that, that hatred, it was, it was a dangerous hatred. I could have easily killed a person. I could have easily killed him, if he had been there. And I

went round the whole summer feeling this huge hatred. I wasn't myself at all that summer. But at the end of it, I found a music video, by Dimu Borgir . . . and the first ten seconds, I was like . . . Well, what is this? . . . But when they started burning the Christian cross, I felt that all the hate I had . . . I felt that there was something I recognised. Someone who had it like I had it. When the music started, I kind of felt that it was my way of saying how much I hated my stepfather and what he represented. So when I listened to it more, I became so keen on it, because it explained so much of my hatred. I found more songs by Dimu Borgir, and the more I listened to it, I felt that I became another person. That I could stand up for myself and show how much I hated him. If I hadn't listened to it, then . . . I don't know what would have happened, but I know that it wouldn't have been good. Because the hatred I had then, it's not possible to describe it. It is impossible to explain. But after I started listening to that music, then all the hatred kind of disappeared. Of course I still have some hatred in me, but not in the same way.

Here music becomes a way to channel hate, and the video makes the experience even more profound. The music and images together communicate feelings that Fredrik recognises, and he feels understood. Since then, Fredrik has used Dimu Borgir and other metal bands to calm down when he is angry. He generally struggles with aggression problems but feels that music has a soothing effect:

Black metal or death metal, they make me be less angry. Because I used to have a history of anger problems before then. But when I was introduced to black metal, my anger kind of disappeared. It got smaller and smaller the more I listened to it. So if I, for example, am angry now, I usually put on black metal, because it calms me down.

Along with emotional regulation, this narrative also talks about how music helps Fredrik stand up for himself. Among a range of possible stress factors, threats against one's self-esteem are quite prominent during adolescence (Laiho, 2004). According to Erikson (1968), we go through eight phases of social crisis in our lifetimes, each of which influences our individual and social development. Youth is the phase during which one's most important task is 'to define oneself', and its crisis derives from the development of identity: the identification with one's parents, who used to be very important, no longer feels sufficient to adolescents as they develop their roles and find their own way in a broader social context. As they prepare for adulthood, adolescents must pursue other sources of knowledge and inspiration. For Fredrik,

the music experience contributes to this development, especially in counterpoint to the challenges presented by his stepfather, both before and after his departure. As Fredrik says, “The more I listened to it, I felt that I became another person. That I could stand up for myself”.

To conclude this section on music as an individual resource, I will return now to Ida.

Ida’s recovery

Elsewhere in her interview, Ida talks about moving into a shelter together with her mother and her brother. The stay was the result of threats from her mother’s boyfriend.

Well, when we lived in the women’s refuge, all the feelings I had then . . . Everything was new, and I also listened to a certain kind of music too, and it is a little strange to listen to it now. I associate it a lot with that [the time at the shelter]. I was kind of listening to music that was sort of moodless . . . that didn’t challenge me. And I also listened to this kind of sad music, which made me feel better. I sort of felt the song had rays of hope in it.

Ida goes on to describe how, after a while, she was able to challenge herself more with music that evoked several emotions.

When we moved from the crisis centre . . . there was no happy ending because Mum . . . We ended up there because Mum was going out with a man who was violent and so on. And then she started seeing him again, that is why we moved from there, so that she could see him again. Because we’re not allowed to live there if she is seeing the man who did that to her. So then I went back into music, in a way. If there is a timeline in music, where this is happy and this is sad [draws a line with her hands], then I went back again.

In her research concerning the meaning of music in everyday life, DeNora found that her informants had strong opinions about what they ‘needed’ to hear in different situations (2000, p. 49). DeNora calls this a musical self-regulation and musical self-care. She also introduces the term ‘technology of self’ (pp. 46ff) to describe music’s ability to help us feel, think and socialise. Ida’s story illustrates how music becomes a technology of self in the process of recovery after a dramatic incident. By knowing what kind of music she wants to take on, Ida assumes control of the situation and her

handling of it. When the situation worsens because the family must break with their surrounding support system, Ida reverts and starts the process anew.

The above examples demonstrate some of the ways in which music can be a resource at the individual level. In what follows, I will examine how music can be a social resource — that is, how young people use music as a resource for belonging and delimitation in relation to their peers, and as a bargaining tool in the development of identity.

Music as a Social Resource

One of the most important projects of adolescence is our disengagement from our parents and our development into independent individuals with the personal resources to take care of ourselves. Norwegian sociologist Ivar Frønes describes a two-sided socialisation process that is concerned with both a social process and an individual formation (2006, p. 26). Furthermore, he describes the socialisation process as an interaction through which the norms and rules of society are transferred to the individual even as the individual establishes a realisation of his/her own value and identity and, in this way, affects society in turn. Norwegian educator Christian Beck describes this duality in the socialisation process with the terms *adaptation* and *testing* (1990, pp. 45-48). The adaptation process is defined as the young person's quest for closeness, care, acceptance and belonging, and Beck believes the main responsibility for the success of this process rests with the family and other societal institutions. Testing, on the other hand, is defined as the means through which the young person develops his/her own identity and unique 'I'. Testing often takes place outside the home, and Beck points to schoolyards and street corners as likely contexts. Ruud believes that music use constitutes an important resource in this socialisation process (2001, p. 50)—through discussing music, exchanging sound files and identifying with or disparaging certain artists, adolescents learn something about values and social positions. Ruud points to a *decentralisation* that increases personal reflection and equips adolescents to survive in a bigger social arena.

All three interviewees told different stories about music as a social resource. Benjamin recalls meeting someone he now describes as one of his best friends.

“Yeah, Green Day”

The friendship up at Toten, that also happened through music. It was similar bands and Nirvana/Green Day in their day. It was in the year 2007 or 2008, when ‘Nettby’ [a website] existed, a long time ago . . . before it was closed down, that is. And then there was a guy who just suddenly wrote, like, “Wow, Green Day”, and I was like, “Yes, yeah, yeah, Green Day”, you know, and then we just started talking in a way, and a contact arose between us. I have visited him up there several times.

Through an interest in the same music, Benjamin is able to start a friendship that has since grown strong. Because of the geographical distance between them, the boys correspond through email and different chat programs, and they have met up several times to go to concerts together.

Music’s facilitation of social relations is recognised by several researchers (Zillmann & Gan, 1997; Balsnes, 2009; Laiho, 2004). Listening to music with friends, playing or singing in a band, choir or group, or attending a concert together all provide good opportunities for bonding. Laiho observes, “Through these collective emotional experiences one can feel deep involvement and connection to others” (Laiho, 2004, p. 52). For adolescents, after all, good friends and social viability are among the most important criteria for judging experiences of one’s health and quality of life. In turn, many youths who consult the school health service have social and relational problems (Langaard, 2006). According to Ruud (1997), musical preferences can influence this social interaction: by endorsing certain musical genres and distancing ourselves from others, we express a host of attitudes and values that indirectly resonate in the larger social field (1997, p. 105). I will explore this in greater detail below, but first I would like to present Ida’s story of her musical development.

Ida’s musical development

Way back in the beginning, I listened to ‘Absolute Music’ kinds of mix CDs, and then I started really getting into Michael Jackson, and then I switched to liking Genesis, and then it exploded to liking everything really, because then I found out about . . . well, the rock genre. And then I became very tough during lower secondary school, so I listened a lot to this ‘industrial metal thing’. I was a little angry then. And then I started listening to a lot of ‘old hippie music’. Yeah, and then I understood that there is a lot of good music and one isn’t, what should I say, stupid if one listens to music that sort of gets

you to have a good feeling. Like . . . well, Joni Mitchell, for example — she is good at that. It is very, like, sensitive, in a way.

In the narrative, we find Ida progressing from ‘Absolute Music’,⁶ Michael Jackson and Genesis to a range of different musical alternatives chosen to accompany or otherwise attend to her moods. While Ida lets her feelings decide what she should listen to, she is aware of the social consequences of her music choices as well, noting that one need not be “stupid if one listens to music that sorts of gets you to get a good feeling”.

I previously framed identity as a process that encompasses both the individual *and* the individual’s community. The importance of the social community for the development of identity is also central to British social psychologist Henry Tajfel’s theory of social identity. According to Tajfel (1981), one’s social identity derives from a conscious, value-based and emotionally based connection to a group. The theory of social identity is based on a social categorisation in turn based on the assumption that all individuals are members of social groups. Larger such groups might be defined by, for example, ethnicity or gender (in which the individual is placed automatically), and smaller such groups would include adolescent peer groups, where the individual usually must earn the right to membership. Social categorisation occurs when we make a place for ourselves in the social system by defining ourselves as members of one group but not another. By organising our social surroundings in this way, we promote our self-confidence and social identity (Frønes, 2006, p. 247).

Music’s impact upon the negotiation of these interpersonal relations and contribution to the social categorisation of the individual become most obvious when we are young — the types of music that we like contribute to defining the social group that we belong to (Tarrant, North & Hargreaves, 2002). Later in her narrative, Ida uses music to directly characterise her ‘country Daddy’, ‘Dum Dum Boys Mummy’ and ‘girlfriend who lives in a musical’. Based on her personal musical preferences, she places herself in a value system that in turn distances her from certain categories but aligns her with others. Thus music helps her define herself within a larger social setting. In the next narrative, we encounter a different perspective upon the same phenomenon.

Musical demarcation and belonging

Again, peer relationships are not merely expressed by the music that adolescents *like* but also by the music that they do *not* like (Tarrant, North & Hargreaves, 2002). As part of a

⁶ ‘Absolute Music’ is a series of chart-topper collections of current pop songs produced by the collective label EVA Records in Sweden since November 1986. Early in the 1990s, the series was also introduced in Norway and Denmark (see http://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_Music).

group that listens to a specific genre, they must dismiss other genres in order to maintain their cohesion. On the other hand, such allegiances can seem overly exclusive to people who are not part of the group. Below, Fredrik says that he was bullied because he listened to music that was not accepted by others.

If I didn't have music, I would not have been myself at all. That is, in a way, what has made me who I am . . . what has formed me more than anything else. Music made me think more for myself. I wasn't afraid of being different. I would rather be different than be normal. I don't like to be normal, because that is way too normal for me. So [it was] the music that made me special, because I used to be bullied a lot, especially during lower secondary school . . . for what I used to listen to. I got quite angry about that, but in the end it made me mostly proud, because I dared to be different. Young people now don't dare to be. There are not many who dare to be different from all others. They are afraid of what others will think of them, how they look and what type of music they listen to. They have to listen to one type of music because everyone else listens to it. I don't feel that pressure. I am proud of being who I am, and that is only because of the music.

Though his experience was a negative one, Fredrik can look back to lower secondary school as a time when he dared to stand up for himself. Interestingly, though my research material includes many examples of settings in which common musical preferences create fellowship and belonging, I also have strikingly abundant examples of the opposite as well. Often young people reported that they did *not* like the same music as their friends but instead had 'their own music' and 'their own musical taste'. This, I believe, is connected to the fact that some young people do not want to be part of the group, and that there is a certain status to being exclusive. This is a trend which, in accordance with recent youth research, maintains "... that modern Norwegian youth is defined by a feeling of freedom and uniqueness. Young people seem to be concerned with the fact that they are individuals, that they decide for themselves, and that they do not allow themselves to be influenced" (Krange & Øia, 2007, p. 230). For Fredrik, this becomes obvious when he emphasises that he would rather "be different than normal".

I have now given examples of the ways in which young people experience music as a resource on both an individual and a social level. In what follows, I will discuss whether music can also affect health on a more abstract level, and in this respect be considered an existential resource.

Music as an Existential Resource

By way of introduction to this article, I wrote that mental health among adolescents appears to be continually worsening, and that several of the young people among my interviewees reported a poor quality of life. Through their stories, I have attempted to demonstrate that young people use music (consciously or unconsciously) in large parts of their daily lives as a positive resource. However, in my conversations with Ida, Fredrik and Benjamin, certain issues arose that did not fit a narrative as such but that nevertheless represented relevant and obvious themes. All three adolescents referred to music as something they were *dependent* on, for example — something they literally could not live without. Recall that Fredrik saw music as “what has made me into who I am”. Benjamin puts it this way:

I think that [without music] several things in my everyday life would have been missing. There would have been one thing lacking. That would probably have been completely impossible.

These kinds of statements speak to young people’s experience of music as a *prerequisite* for leading a good life, suggesting its positioning and potential as not only an individual and social resource but also an *existential* one that affects human existence in the deepest sense⁷.

This possibility brings me to the theories of medical sociologist Aron Antonovsky, the founder of *salutogenetic research*, which is concerned with how people stay healthy in spite of the great strains in their lives (2000). Antonovsky presents a model linking the different stress factors that human beings experience to their general ‘resistance resources’, which can be both internal and external and encompass ‘I strength’, biological factors like inheritance, social support, material factors such as money, cultural stability, daily activities and so forth (Antonovsky, 1979, 2006, pp. 103–122). Antonovsky finds that some human beings have a greater ability to solve ‘unsolvable’ problems than others, and he labels this innate talent a ‘sense of coherence’ (SOC), which he sees as emerging from one’s inclination to see one’s existence as *meaningful, comprehensible and manageable* (Antonovsky, 2000). Applying Antonovsky’s theory in light of the narratives presented, we might well propose that adolescents’ use of music contributes to their experience of the world as more meaningful, comprehensible and manageable. And if this is the case, music is also a resistance resource against disease.

⁷ Existential questions concern the fundamental aspects, circumstances or goals of human existence (Barbosa da Silva, 2006, p. 27).

In his recently completed PhD study of young people's perspectives on participation in social music therapeutic practice (Krüger, 2012), Krüger uses Giddens's term 'structuring resource' to describe the role of music in young people's lives.⁸ He shows how musical activities, like playing in a band, impact the development of participation possibilities and interactive relationships, that again impacts the young people's socialization and personal reflection processes. Based on the present narratives, I also see music as a structuring resource for young people's process of understanding themselves, their emotions and their social relations. Music becomes a tool for the development of identity that young people can use actively to create meaning and coherence within their existence. Furthermore, because narratives about music also become narratives about *who I am, what I feel* and *how I place myself in the social landscape*, music is experienced as crucially important, even necessary, and thus can be connected to health and the quality of life.

Conclusion

In this text, I focused on the extent to which young people's use of music can be a health-promoting resource. Based on an interpretative understanding of health as a category of experience, I found music in turn to impact the subjective interpretation of our relation to the world, to other people and to our existential being. I presented, through three adolescents' narratives concerning their music use in their daily lives, examples of the ways in which music can be used to regulate, master and influence emotions (as an individual resource) and to inform the construction of identity and socialisation (as a social resource). Finally, I discussed the fact that adolescents find music to be a necessary element in their lives and, potentially, an existential resource in this regard. The adolescents' narratives about their daily use of music, it became apparent, involve more than the music in itself. They involve music, in various situations, as a deliberate strategy for coping with a host of challenges. Thanks to music's multifaceted individual, social, and existential application, I concluded that music — as used by adolescents, at least — ought to be viewed as a resource in their experience and cultivation of health.

Technological developments continue to make access to music increasingly straightforward, and musical activity will impact young people's lives for the foreseeable future. In this sense, we have only scratched the surface of this topic, which demands further exploration along the lines presented here.

⁸ The term was developed by Giddens (1979) and revised by Lave (1988) and Wenger (1998).

References

- Antonovsky, A. (1979). *Health, stress and coping*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Antonovsky, A. (2000). *Helbredets mysterium*. Copenhagen: Hans Reizel.
- Balsnes, A. (2009). Å lære i kor. *Belcanto som praksisfelleskap* NMH-publikasjoner 2009:7. (Doctoral dissertation, Norwegian Academy of Music.)
- Barbosa da Silva, A. (Ed.) (2006). *Etikk og menneskesyn i helsetjeneste og sosialt arbeid*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk Forlag.
- Beck, C. W. (1990). *Det organiserte vanvidd — et kritisk blikk på barns og ungdoms oppvekst i 90-åra*. Vallset: Oplandske Bokforlag.
- Bonde, L. O. (2009). *Musik og menneske. Introduksjon til musikkpsykologi*. Copenhagen: Samfundslitteratur.
- Blaxter, M. (2004). *Health*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Duncan, P. (2007). *Critical perspectives on health*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. London: W. W. Norton.
- Espnes, G. A. & Smedslund, G. (2001). *Helsepsykologi*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Frydenberg, E. (1997). *Adolescent coping: Theoretical and research perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Frønes, I. (2006). *De likeverdige*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Fugelli, P. (1998). Folkehelse—folkets helse? *Tidsskrift for Den norske lægeforening*, 118, 1421–1425. Retrieved from http://folk.uio.no/pfugelli/artikler/folkehelse_folkets.htm.
- Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory: Action, structure and contradiction in social analysis*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gross, J. J. (1999). Emotion regulation: Past, present and future. *Cognition and Emotion*, 13(5), 551–573.
- Hjort, P. F. (1994). Et spørsmål om sunnhet?—Mot et nytt helsebegrep. In P. F. Hjort (Ed.), *Helse for alle! Foredrag og artikler, 1974–93* (pp. 86–96). Utredningsrapport nr U 1 – 1994, National Institute for Public Health, Department for Community Medicine, Unit for Health Insurance.
- Juslin, P. N. & Sloboda, J. A. (2001). Psychological perspectives on music and emotion. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (Eds.), *Music and emotion: Theory and research* (pp. 71–104). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Juslin, P. N. & Sloboda, J. A. (2010). Introduction, aims, organization and terminology. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (Eds.), *Handbook of music and emotion: Theory, research, applications* (pp. 3-12). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kränge, O. (2001). Anti-foreign sentiments among youth in Oslo: A matter of social stratification or individualized identity formation. *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, 3, 43–64.
- Kränge, O., & Øya, T. (2007). *Den nye moderniteten. Ungdom, individualisering og mening* (3rd ed.). Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.
- Krüger, V. (2012). *Musikk, fortelling, fellesskap: en kvalitativ undersøkelse av ungdommers perspektiver på deltagelse i samfunnsmusikkterapeutisk praksis i barnevernsarbeid* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen).
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju* (2nd ed.). Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Laiho, S. (2004). The psychological functions of music in adolescence. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 13 (1), 47–63.
- Langaard, K. (2006). Ungdom, psykisk helse og profesjonell hjelp. *Tidsskrift for ungdomsforskning*, 6(2), 25–40.
- Lave, J. (1988). *Cognition in practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lilliestam, L. (2009). *Musikliv. Vad människor gör med musikk—och music med människor* (2nd ed.). Göteborg: Bo Ejeby Förlag.
- Malterud, K. (2003). *Kvalitative metoder i medisinsk forskning* (2nd ed.). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Mathiesen, K. S. (2009). Psykiske lidelser blant barn og unge i Norge. In A. Myklebust, A. K. Knudsen & K. S. Mathiesen, *Psykiske lidelser i Norge: Et folkehelseperspektiv. Rapport 2009:8*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Public Health
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Monsen, J. (1991). *Vitalitet, psykiske forstyrrelser og psykoterapi. Utdrag fra klinisk psykologi*. Oslo: Tano.
- Mæland, J. G. (2009). *Hva er helse?* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Nordenfelt, L. (1991). *Livskvalitet och hälsa. Teori och kritik*. Falköping: Almqvist & Wiksell Förlag.
- NOU 1998: 18. *Det er bruk for alle. Styrking av folkehelsearbeidet i kommunene*. Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Health Affairs
- Ruud, E. (1997). *Musikk og identitet*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Ruud, E. (2001). *Varme øyeblikk: Om musikk, helse og livskvalitet*. Oslo: Unipub forlag.
- Ruud, E. (2005). *Lydlandskap. Om bruk og misbruk av musikk*. Oslo: Fagbokforlaget.

- Ruud, E. (2006). Musikk gir helse. In T. Aasgaard (Ed.), *Musikk og helse*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.
- Ruud, E. (2011). Musikk, identitet og helse—hva er sammenhengen? In L. O. Bonde & K. Stensæth (Eds.), *Musikk, helse, identitet. Skriftserie fra Senter for Musikk og Helse* (pp. 13-23) NMH-Publikasjoner 2011:2. Oslo: Norwegian Academy of Music.
- Samdal, O., Leversen, I., Torshaim, T., Manger, M. S., Brunborg, G. S., & Wold, B. (2009). *Trender i helse og livsstil blant barn og unge 1985–2005. Norske resultater fra studien 'Helsevaner blant skoleelever. En WHO-undersøkelse i flere land'*. HEMIL-rapport 3:2009. Bergen: Department of Health Promotion and Development, University of Bergen.
- Skånland, M. S. (2012). *A technology of well-being: A qualitative study on the use of MP3 players as a medium for musical self-care*. NMH-Publications 2012:1. (Doctoral dissertation, Norwegian Academy of Music.)
- Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Sundet, R. (2000). Selvopplevelse og samspill som metafor for terapi med ungdom. In A. Johnsen, R. Sundet, & W. W. Torsteinsson (Eds.), *Samspill og selvopplevelse—nye veier i ressursorienterte terapier* (pp. 122-138). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Saarikallio, S. & Erkkilä, J. (2007). The role of music in adolescents' mood regulation. *Psychology of Music*, 35(1), 88–109.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Tarrant, M., North, A. C., & Hargreaves, D. J. (2002). Youth, identity and music. In R. MacDonald, D. J. Hargreaves, & D. E. Miell (Eds.), *Musical identities* (pp. 134-150). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tetzchner, S. (2001). *Utviklingspsykologi. Barne- og ungdomsalderen*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice, learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wrangsjö, B. (1993). *Ungdomsutveckling och ungdomsterapi i ljuset av Daniel Sterns självteori*. SFPH's monografiserie, 36 (pp.3-45). Stockholm: Svenska Föreningen för Psykisk Hälsovård.
- Wyn, J. & White, R. (1997). *Rethinking youth*. London: Sage Publications.
- Zillmann, D. & Gan, S. (1997). Musical taste in adolescence. In D. Hargreaves & A. North (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Music* (pp. 161-187). England: Oxford University Press.
- Öblad, C. (2000). *At använda musik: om bilen som konsertlokal* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Göteborg).