Is Music Really My Best Friend? Reflections of Two Maturing Women on One's Relationship With Music

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This text provides a unique perspective on the ways young people engage with music by reflecting on one woman's relationship with music, both as a teenager and into her younger adulthood. Most explorations of this topic seek similarities between the experiences of many people using interview or survey data as the basis for identifying patterns. Whilst the theories and results of these investigations are extremely interesting, they often do not match with any one individual's experience and can begin to portray simplistic notions where actually there is richness and complexity. In addition, there is a tendency towards describing music as either reliably positive or overwhelmingly dangerous, rather than acknowledging that music might have both positive and negative affordances, and that people appropriate these in different ways at different times.

This text has been co-authored by a middle-aged music therapist (Katrina) and a young woman (Kelly) who had participated in music therapy during her adolescence. We engaged in dialogue via instant messaging and posting in Facebook; through face-to-face interviews that privileged Kelly's contribution but were undoubtedly dialogic; and through the creation of a narrative text that Katrina drafted and that Kelly edited and contributed additional viewpoints. After the first in-depth interview, Katrina analysed her extensive notes and constructed a number of themes that she then considered in relation to a set of risk and protective factors identified around the same time based on a systematic review of the literature (McFerran, Garrido & Saarikallio, under review). Kelly read the drafted article about risk and protective factors and then engaged in a second dialogue about her reaction to that idea and the emergent themes proposed by Katrina. A more specific set of risk and protective factors were then developed based on Kelly's responses. This progression is narrated between Table 1 and Table 2 below. The result is dual-voiced narrative that weaves

the general and the specific, and that potentially reminds us that music and people are complex systems that relate over time in both predictable and unexpected ways.

Background

Young people often describe their relationship with music in their everyday lives as tremendously significant. This is reflected in the amount of time spent listening to music and over the past decade researchers have consistently reported average music consumption rates of around 2.5 hours per day (North, 2000; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). It is interesting to note that there has been little change in the time commitment reported by young people even taking into account the digital revolution. However the nature of music listening has changed radically since it now occurs as one part of a web of media multi-tasking and social networking (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011) within which access to music is almost unlimited and capacity for choice and diversity is assumed. One result of this change is that young people no longer report feeling obliged to share similar music preferences to their friends as previously suggested (Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 1999). It seems likely that they are more exposed to what friends are discovering through social networking updates, but are nonetheless just as likely to share tastes with parents and family members (Miranda & Claes, 2009). Another, as yet unproven implication, is that the use of music for emotion regulation has increased, and this belief has resulted in a burgeoning interest by researchers, as well as governments that fund these researchers (McFerran, 2010b; Miranda & Gaudreau, 2011; Saarikallio & Erkkila, 2007).

There appears to be two distinct positions that underpin investigations of the relationship between young people and music to date. On the right are those concerned with the influence that music has *on* young people. This stance assumes that music is the more powerful force in the relationship (perhaps a reflection of the belief that adults are more powerful than young people), and that young people may be unable to stop the music from influencing their notions of identity (i.e. gender, sexuality) or their emotions (i.e. mood, behavioural expression). On the left are those focused on the ways young people appropriate music for their own desires. This stance is underpinned by a belief in the health potentials of music, and where consumers are empowered in their appropriation of these affordances. The aim of this text is to explore the subtle ground between these dualities through a discussion of one woman's relationship with music during her youth and into adulthood. By avoiding generalisations, we hope to illustrate how complex and variable an individual's relationship with music can be and

to use this as the basis for considering how young people might be encouraged to be increasingly conscious of their own unique ways of relating to, through and with, music.

Kelly says:

Now days, at the age of twenty-eight, I can look back on the relationship I have had with music and reflect with a sense of bitter-sweetness on a kaleidoscope of songs that have been the soundtrack of my life. From my earliest childhood memories of my mother singing to me; to screaming out lyrics as I sat on the freezer helping my dad wash the dishes; to my parents divorce where music provided a point of stability between different homes helping me to sleep at night; music has always been a strong presence. I have a song for every trauma, joy and heartbreak.

I began learning the drums at ten years of age and attended a local high school where music was central to the curriculum and where I could actively participate in a concert band. This provided an instant peer group as well as the opportunity to pick up a guitar and teach myself how to play it. The one part of my life most often devoid of music was the time I would spend in the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne where I was regularly admitted for a 'tune up' for my Cystic Fibrosis (CF)[1]. That would change however, on the day that Kat came bouncing in to the ward to find me picking on a guitar that had been donated to the hospital by a deceased friend of mine. Over the next twelve months, we wrote and performed a song together as well as playing it with other CF patients and recording it to CD.

Shortly after this, at the age of sixteen, my perspective on life changed, and so did my relationship with music. In one year my health worsened, my long-term relationship ended and emerging along with repressed memories of childhood trauma came strong symptoms of depression. I increasingly turned to music for comfort and continued to express my identity through the music I chose; now emphasising preferences that were outside the mainstream and that addressed the existential questions I felt confronted by. As I moved from school to university I turned to religion for answers and it made sense that it would be the musical context of The Salvation Army that would hold my attention. There I began training to be a youth worker. My theories about the ability of music to shape emotion would begin to develop as I played in church bands with music that was deliberately used to engage the congregation in

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[1] Cystic Fibrosis (CF) is a hereditary disease whose symptoms usually appear shortly after birth. They include faulty digestion, breathing difficulties and respiratory infections due to mucus accumulation, and excessive loss of salt in sweat. In the past, cystic fibrosis was almost always fatal in childhood, but treatment is now so improved that patients commonly live into their 20s and beyond—from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/sr-sr/biotech/about-apropos/gloss-eng.php#c

significant experiences of worship. I was plagued by the thought that in providing music for worship, musicians hold some level of power to influence the emotions of those listening. I questioned whether this detracts from the authenticity of the experience and whether musicians are sufficiently reflexive in taking this responsibility seriously. When my work with the Salvation Army became untenable, my active participation in music making diminished and at the most challenging times of my life in my mid-20s, I relied less on music and more on other self-soothing strategies. I was formally diagnosed with anxiety and depression and began to require mental health support as well as increasingly frequent physical health admissions to hospital.

Recently I have established a long-term relationship with a lovely man who also has Cystic Fibrosis and together we are grappling with the very real possibility that our lives may be shortened as a result of our diagnoses. With this relationship has come a renewed hope that there is a way out of the negative patterns of depression and towards a future where I can fit in and make a contribution to society. I have, however, become acutely aware that ultimately I am the only person who can find that answer. This has led me to question the ways in which music may contribute to my mood, thoughts and beliefs. Has my relationship to music always been as protective as I had previously thought or have there been times when I have used it negatively to dwell on past pain or inflate my depressive symptoms? Do other people do this too? Is there value in identifying ways in which music therapy and therapy in general can encourage others to reflect on the multifaceted relationship that they have with music? These are the questions that Katrina and I have reunited to discuss and were my motivation to participate in writing this text.

Katrina says:

The notion of risk and protective factors associated with music (introduced by Miranda, Gaudreau, Debrosse, Morizot, & Kirmayer, 2012) has been chosen as a framework for this text because it avoids dichotomising healthy and unhealthy ways of musicking[2]. We do not subscribe to the view that music has a good or bad influence, and nor do we see ourselves as consistently conscious of the ways that we respond to music. The perspective adopted in this text is that musicking is a power-filled trans-action that we seek to understand better by contemplating the unique possibilities

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[2] The term musicking was introduced into music studies by Christopher Small (1998) and is useful because it encapsulates the range of possibilities for music making that includes listening, playing, composing, performing, and other ways of participating such as being in the audience, or being backstage, or being in a musical relationship but not necessarily making music on this day. It refers to the act of doing music as a verb, rather than the use of music as a noun.

that occur in each individual context, but which might illuminate some dimensions that are similar to other people. A systematic review (McFerran, Garrido, & Sarrikallio, under review) that focused on the generalisations made in the literature about helpful and harmful dimensions of the ways young people engage with music identified a number of properties of musical engagement that could be seen on four continua from risky to protective, as depicted in Table 1.

Risk Factor Dimension	Property	Protective Factor Dimension
Alienation	**Interpersonal**	Connectedness
Worsened	**Mood**	Improved
Maladaptive	**Coping**	Adaptive
Pressure	**Competence**	Achievement

Table 1: *Risk and Protective Factors of Musical Engagement from Literature*

One problem in constructing risk and protective factors in relation to musicking is the likelihood that risk factors will be understood as bad, and protective factors as good. This is not the intention, since some degree of avoidance may be useful as a coping strategy, or alternately, over-connectedness to music may be a sign of dependence. Constant positive mood may indicate a lack of capacity for discrimination, and performance pressure can lead to performances of the highest quality. However, Katrina's research to date shows that vulnerable young people are more likely to depend on music to make them feel better rather than seeing themselves as empowered in appropriating the affordances of music. This may explain why a range of studies show that vulnerable young people are more likely to participate in repetitive forms of musicking that are socially alienating, or result in negative moods, or is used to avoid issues or incorporates a high degree of pressure (McFerran and Saarikallio, under review). A critical point is that it is likely the combination of risk factors that are present repetitively and over time that is problematic, since most people relate to these ways of engaging with music at different times. In the following narrative we illustrate dimensions that are both risky and protective at different times and explore this complexity in relation to Kelly's unique personal experience, both in her life and in music therapy.

Interpersonal Dimensions of Engaging with Music

Kelly says:

On reflection I recall many times in my life when I have engaged with music in solitude. I would listen through head phones in school to block out the world around me, or to keep focus, and I particularly remember the many times as a teenager when I would lock myself away with my guitar playing for extended periods, sometimes jumping around like a rock star and others crying over the mis-shaped chords of some pop song. Although this included a tendency towards isolation this was combined with a fulfilling sense of relief, control and positive creativity.

Katrina says:

Although technically, making music alone in your room is located at the 'alienation' end of the spectrum, most musicians would argue that the active nature of this pursuit has protective properties. Support for this position comes from contemporary understandings of happiness in positive psychology, with advocates who refer to this kind of behaviour as 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Csikszentmihalyi's elaborations of this notion explain why a seemingly alienating activity might be considered protective. Kelly's experience of guitar playing requires concentration, and "deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 49). This is described as experiencing a sense of control over one's actions, where self-concern is momentarily lost and perception of time is altered. Seligman (2011) advocates for frequent participation in these kinds of engaged activities, theorising that accumulation of these moments will lead to flourishing by building up stores of psychological and emotional capital.

Whilst it is easy to accept this kind of rationale for the benefits of learning an instrument, it is interesting to note that the same kind of argument can be used for music listening. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) dedicates a number of pages to describing conscious and attentive music listening as flow activity (pp. 109-111), although he ultimately states that "even greater rewards are open to those that learn music" (p. 111). Closer examination of the core features of flow distinguish instrumental practice as being more closely related to enjoyment whereas listening is commonly associated with the more temporary experience of pleasure. The idea that enjoyment is generated when undertaking a task that has clear goals and immediate feedback is critical in this distinction, and importantly, activities are more likely to induce flow if they

are challenging but achievable, involving a merging of action and awareness (p. 53). Playing an instrument is more clearly aligned with flow than music listening, but in both cases, positive psychology scholars see spending time alone engaging in musicking as protective rather than risky. The critical distinction from their perspective is conscious attention to task.

Kelly says:

My experience of listening and playing are quite different. Playing is about creativity and self-expression whereas listening is more in my mind, either through singing along with lyrics that are meaningful or just having music on in the background to help me focus on other stuff. When I play it's more about discovery—I might play the drums because I'm feeling mad, or the piano because I'm feeling sad. It introduces something new into the situation. Listening is different. It reinforces my emotions and I try to find songs that suit what I'm feeling. I often feel lonely when listening to music because the artist understands me better than anyone I actually know. When I make music it's like there is something else inside me, the creative impulse connects me to something bigger.

Growing up I often felt that I didn't quite fit in with any of the different groups of people I would hang out with. I think this is partly because of my personality. I found it hard to see significance in the daily grind of life, preferring to think more analytically and discuss 'deeper' topics such as philosophy or politics. It also felt significant that I was not as sick as most of my CF friends and I often felt like I wasn't sick enough to fully fit in with that group, but I wasn't well enough to really fit in with my school friends either. The beauty of being a musician was that I got to play with people of all ages and backgrounds. I could play sax with the school and community concert bands or drums for rock bands with members of each year level. It really did open the world up to me and keep me from being too isolated.

Katrina says:

The construct of adolescent's musical identities has been examined by music psychology scholars who suggest that musicianship can be dangerous as well as protective. A surprisingly high number of young musicians were found to experience bullying, particularly when their instrument was not considered gender appropriate (O'Neill, 1997). However, it is more common for musicians to bond together and exclude non-musicians from groups, an attitude which is reflected in much of the study of music psychology, where musicianship is assumed to mean elite musicianship based on a

particular kind of musical training. Whether bonding is through shared agreement in music preferences (Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2002), or through playing in a concert band together, shared musical identities have been suggested to enhance connectedness (Frith, 1981). At a more biological level, the act of making music together with others has been found to trigger the release of neurochemicals such as oxytocin (Levitin, 2008) which promote bonding, and are released in other intimate acts such as breast feeding and intimate sexual encounters. Therefore the connections that happen between musicians that play together also have a neurobiological basis, and the real life experience of these bonding chemicals can be seen in Kelly's teenage years. It is worth noting that although connectedness has long been lauded as a protective factor for youth (Resnick, et al., 1997), there is no doubt that peer relationships are complex and multifaceted (Brown, 2004) and that closeness can also lead to vulnerability if the relationship does not last, or becomes unhealthy, a position that is rarely documented in the academic literature.

Kelly says:

Towards the end of my school years, my childhood sweetheart and I broke up and it ended badly. Like many teenage girls experiencing their first heartbreak, I turned to music for comfort. I had it playing in the background for the majority of the day, awake or asleep and yet I played instruments considerably less. This coincided with a number of my CF friends passing away and led me to a pretty dark place that really signified the start of my depression. A pattern began to emerge in my music listening habits where I would seek out music that had a pain to it and spoke to the deeply existential questions that I was asking. I related to these musical idols and admired the artistic contribution they had made (not surprisingly many of them met untimely deaths). It was a real example of the ways in which music had both a positive and inspiring yet also a destructive more negative element.

Even as I sit with Katrina reflecting on our sessions together I can see that this was reflected in our song creation. There was a duality in taking what began as a morbid sounding guitar riff that I had created in my bedroom and, along with one of my CF friends, converting it into a song that we played communally. It turned out to be a very positive experience. Yet there is still a tinge of sadness as I remember this beautiful time because it would also be one of the last times I would see that friend (he passed away shortly after). They are still very precious memories and I occasionally listen to the track to relive them.

Lyrics
For the rainbow we will stretch across the earth,
Because we know that there has to be a reason why a life is ending.
Some never complaining, must we all find the end?
Try all our lives to avoid, the destiny that has become renowned to so many
of us.[3]

Katrina says:

When Kelly first agreed to music with me on the ward, we began in groups that empha-sised fun and connectedness through playing songs together that were selected from a songbook. Our work together took a more individualised focus after Kelly described a guitar riff she had been working on for some months. I suggested putting words to the riff and creating a song, and Kelly produced her private journal as a source of material. She identified a poem that spoke cryptically of the kinds of existential dilemmas related to dying that are regularly confronted by young people with chronic illness. Another young man participated in the song writing across a number of sessions, contributing a drum-beat on a middle-eastern doumbek. Kelly's existing musical capacity was clearly a resource that was not only drawn out to inform the direction of therapy, but which was seemed to be what motivated Kelly to attend music therapy in the first place (Aigen, 2005, p. 92; Rolvsjord, 2010, p. 193). Our relationship developed through a mutual enjoyment of musicking together, and I also worked consciously to encourage Kelly to express her feelings and experiences through song writing and to have that witnessed by others as a way of strengthening her identity during a challenging time. It seemed that the group work, performances and recording that resulted did achieve these goals. In addition, the meta-analyses of outcomes in the field of psychotherapy (Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2007) suggest that the quality of the relationship between us is one important indicator of the effectiveness of therapy, and the strong rapport we developed provided further confirmation that the process had been helpful and even protective.

Kelly says:

During the interview process, I played our song on my computer, and located the original journal where my lyrics are still written. I actually played the song to my family once, which I was kind of shocked about, since we're not a very emotional family and it is pretty unusual that I would share something so personal with them. They didn't analyse

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[3]   Lyrics © Kelly Baird

the lyrics too much, but they did enjoy it and I caught them singing the hook a few times around the house.

Katrina says:

A careful consideration of the audience for songs created in music therapy has been noted in the literature (McFerran, 2010a, p. 241) since there are a number of risks associated with sharing the material created in therapy. In this case however, music was the one thing that Kelly chose to share with her family, and although she feels the existential meaning of the words were lost on them, they did respond positively. Given the potential value of parental support during adolescence (Epstein, 2007), this can be understood as further strengthening Kelly's interpersonal support network. Kelly also noted that the song is still significant to her, and that she had only recently shared it with her long-term partner. The life of the song (Aasgaard, 2000) continues to impact interpersonal relationships to this day, and we both enjoyed listening to it together once more, singing along and reflecting on the power of the lyrics and guitar riff, despite it's rough edges.

Engaging with Music to Manage Mood

Kelly asks:

In reflecting on the ways I use music and the mood management issues I have had, I have begun to question whether uses of music make me feel better or worse. Have my strategies been helpful or harmful to me?

Katrina says:

The possibility that young people may use music to negatively influence their mood has also been raised in a small-scale pilot study in Australia (McFerran, O'Grady, Sawyer, & Grocke, 2007), that has received considerable media attention[4] suggesting

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4   i.e. http://www.metalsucks.net/2011/11/09/just-a-lot-of-noise-about-nothing-dr-katrina-mcferran-responds-to-justin-foleys-response-to-her-study-on-teens-music-and-depression/ and http://www.metalinsider.net/guest-blog/exclusive-dr-katrina-mcferran-responds-to-reaction-towards-her-study-on-music-and-mood and http://ylex.yle.fi/uutiset/popuutiset/metallimusiikki-voi-pilata-elaman-vaittaa-tuore-tutkimus

that this concept has some kind of traction. In response to a survey completed by 111 older adolescents, between 60-69% of participants described improvements in their mood when listening to music whilst feeling relaxed or happy. When the initial mood was sad or angry, only 40-45% of the young people described improvements. It is noteworthy that positive improvements were even less commonly reported by the sub-group who were identified as being at high-risk of psychological distress (according to the Kessler 10 measure (Kessler, et al., 2005)). In addition, the 19 teenagers scoring in the high-risk category for depression were most likely to report feeling worse after music listening, with four young people feeling worse when they were sad or angry, and three feeling worse when starting out stressed. Young people do not tend to report these kinds of negative outcomes when asked to describe the relationship between music and health however, and a small-scale study of an equivalent but smaller sample of eight Finnish adolescents (Saarikallio & Erkkila, 2007) showed the opposite perception. These young people described the importance of music as being intrinsically related to enjoyment and positive experiences, with mood control and mood improvement being central to their music experiences. This type of positive self-reporting has also been noted in Norwegian studies of adults (Skånland, 2011) and youth (Beckmann, this volume). This assumption of positive outcomes dominates the literature, and is reflected in results of a systematic review where no negative consequences of engaging with music were reported in qualitative studies (McFerran, Garrido & Saarakallio, under review).

Kelly says:

Sometimes music is like an escape for me and it feels like a life-saver, and other times it's a way of making my mood even darker. It's easier to talk about the positive side and how good music is at blocking everything out. Sometimes in my worst moments putting on a CD is the only way I can try and stay sane. But sometimes I consider that when I make a choice to listen to music that reflects and intensifies my dark mood there is something ultimately self indulgent in it, a sort of wallowing in self-pity. I wonder if choosing more inherently positive music would result in me feeling somewhat better, although I struggle to pick that style with the same degree of intentionality. I almost feel like it is cheating, as though I would be avoiding the complexity and depth of the emotional experience rather than facing it. Sometimes it feels like taking a drug when I use music, where there is a danger of just getting stuck in a place where I only end up feeling worse.

Katrina says:

The perception that music evokes authentic emotional experience at all is actually a point of debate within the field of music perception, with emotivists and cognitivists disagreeing about whether people actually experience the emotions they perceive in the music when listening. This question becomes more interesting still when considered in relation to depression. Australian scholar, Sandra Garrido, has focussed on the ways that depressed people ruminate with sad music (Garrido & Schubert, 2012). She describes the involuntary bias that people with clinical depression have towards negative stimulation, and theorises that this may lead to a diminished ability to dissociate from the feelings of sadness that are evoked from the music, where non-ruminators may be able to appreciate the sadness without experiencing it.

Kelly says:

When I am in a darker mood I definitely find myself drawn towards negativity in my choice of music and movies, etc. When I surround myself with these things I genuinely experience the emotion inherent in the art rather then just observing them. This is true in listening/watching as well as playing. For instance, when I used to drum at church, I knew that playing a triplet-based drum fill at the same time as a key change would encourage the congregation to experience a stronger level of emotion. Even though I was aware that I was intentionally manipulating that sense of emotion in the congregations, I would still genuinely experience it myself along with the congregation.

At the age of 26, I was formally diagnosed with depression and anxiety. One of my great frustrations with my illness is the challenge of taking anti-depressents and the fact that they numb me emotionally and I lose the capacity for emotional intensity in positive or the negative directions. For the most part, when I am medicated I am unable to write or make music. Because emotional experience is so important to me, I often stop taking my medication. For me, music therapy was mostly about having a release and a safe place to express my emotions. It was great as a break in the monotony of long boring hospitalizations, but beyond that it was the space to create something and tell some of my story that I loved the most.

Katrina says:

Music therapists often rely on the emotional affordances of music as the basis of therapeutic experiences. In a qualitative investigation of music therapy group work

with bereaved adolescents, young people described letting go of emotions that had previously been bottled up through improvising on instruments, with a subsequent sense of relief (see central category labelled 'Dying to Express my Grief', McFerran (2010b, p. 22)). Similarly, an in-depth investigation of a music therapy group with young people who had abused substances identified that one value aspect of singing together in the group was the opportunity to experience emotions without running away, labelled as 'daring to feel' (McFerran, 2011, p. 260).

The value of being able to combine pleasure and emotional engagement has also been noted by other young people, with an earlier investigation of the experience of group music therapy for bereaved adolescents finding that participants valued the opportunities for fun, freedom, control which, paired with the achievement of group cohesion, made it possible for them to successfully address the emotions associated with grieving and share stories that strengthened continuing bonds with their loved ones who have died (McFerran-Skewes & Erdonmez-Grocke, 2000). It is noteworthy that these experiences of music therapy involve active and shared musical participation, in contrast to individual music listening.

Engaging with Music to Cope

Music is often appropriated by young people in their everyday lives as a strategy for coping with difficult situations. Resilience is one lens that is used to understand what sits beneath coping, however many researchers have adopted the view that resilience is an individual personality trait that can be identified and associated with positive coping, but not effectively used to predict who will cope better (Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006). A different, constructivist, perspective more helpfully highlights the transactional and multifaceted nature of resilience, emphasising how the individual negotiates between being exposed to risk and navigating their way to resources that will help them to cope (Ungar, 2005). The quality of the social network surrounding the young person is critical for coping from this perspective, and this is similarly emphasized in developmental perspectives. Most contemporary developmental theorists emphasise the importance of interacting with the external world as integral to the achievement of developmental milestones. Whether this occurs in service of cognitive development, as expressed in the increased cognitive capacity for self-analysis described by Vygotsky (Karpov, 2003), or the development of ego capacity from self interest to conforming with the beliefs of others (Kroger, 2004), the transaction between inner and outer worlds is crucial. Young people often

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describe music as 'my best friend' and may relate to either lyrics or musicians more than they do to their real-world social network. However, songs and idols do not have the same dynamic capacity for responsiveness that real people have and therefore attributing human qualities on a relatively static form may be somewhat risky.

Kelly says:

As a teenager, I identified strongly with grunge and other alternative styles of music, particularly because of the lyrics. Few of the people in my life seemed to feel the drive to reflect upon and discuss existential questions as I did and I had an analytical way of thinking that seemed to be different than most of my friends. It was in the lyrics that my idols sang that I would find a deeper, more philosophical approach to life. I strengthened my connection to my idols by learning as much as I could about their lives. I studied film clips, biographies and any media coverage they had. It felt like some artists had the same kind of tortured existence that I related to and there were times when I identified more closely with these musicians then with the majority of people in my every day life. There were downsides to these strong connections though, and over time it became clear that many of the people I admired were also troubled and often came to an untimely end. When Amy Winehouse died for example, I was shattered. I remember feeling almost personally betrayed by the media's portrayal of her as a lost cause and I felt as though I may as well give up too and despaired that nobody had successfully helped her.

Katrina says:

Roger Levesque (2010) claims that replacing real-life peers with 'parasocial' relationships can be a helpful strategy for forging identity in the adolescent context, since there are many parallels. He draws on Erikson's (1968) explanation of these figures as 'secondary attachments' that may play transitional roles during this developmental period. However Levesque also notes concerns about possible risk in this kind of identification, particularly when those doing the idolising have a history of depression and suicide attempts. A Taiwanese study (Cheng, et al., 2007) confirmed that young people who had attempted suicide in the previous year were more likely to re-attempt immediately after a celebrity idol committed suicide, and noted that overall, there was an increase in suicide attempts following public reporting of these events by the media.

Although identifying with morbid music and negative idols is frequently an issue of concern for parents and carers, it is important to acknowledge the transactional nature of this fascination and not leap to simplistic conclusions about causality. As

described in the Taiwanese study of celebrity suicides, the group who were most likely to copy the suicide attempt were those who had a pre-existing inclination. The situation is similar to concerned adult (over) reactions to young people's commitment to 'negative' music. This was most memorably demonstrated in the lobbying of the Parent's Music Resource Center in the US in 1985 (Scheel & Westefeld, 1999). This group fought for the use of the 'Parental Advisory' stickers on albums that they believed had offensive and explicit lyrics or content. More recently, The American Academy of Pediatrics released a policy statement on the impact of music, music lyrics and music videos on children and youth (2009) that suggests professionals should "take a stand" in relation to lyrics, since "several studies have demonstrated that preference for certain types of music could be correlated or associated with certain behaviors" (p. 1489). The inclination to misinterpret correlation for causation is critical in relation both to Kelly's experience, and the perceptions of concerned adults.

The tendency to identify with morbid lyrics and angsty idols does not create problems for young people, but it does communicate something about the lived experience of the people involved. Even Ruud (1997) describes this complex transaction as the performance of identity (1997) in order to clarify that music preferences do not simply provide a window into the soul of young people, but rather, young people appropriate music to express their identity publicly, conscious that it is being observed. This contrasts with Saarikallio and Erkkila's (2007) conclusion that young people's use of music for mood regulation is mostly sub-conscious. Keith Roe (1999) provides a third perspective by describing music as providing a mirror of self-perception, based on a panel study of more than 500 Swedish adolescents. He concluded that young people express a commitment to isolating music if they feel isolated, and found that this self-perception predicted their future success in a longitudinal analysis. In no way is the performance of identity during youth passive.

Kelly says:

I still find it hard to explain why I chose the Kurt Cobain's and Judy Garland's of the world to identify with. Although the way their lives ended seemed the obvious connection, I sense that it is more about their ability to create beautiful and impacting art almost from the pit of the pain in their stomachs. I wish that I could make a difference in the world in the ways that they did before they died. My career as a Youth Worker was an attempt to make a contribution, but the politics in that place made it impossible to really have an impact. I guess I've given up on that for now, but maybe I'll get another chance sometime.

Katrina's Conclusion

Two distinct approaches to examining the relationship between young people and music were identified at the beginning of the text. Investigators either assumed that music was the more powerful force, or alternately, that young people were in control of the ways they appropriated music. In listening closely to Kelly's story, it is not clear if one or the other of these positions is more relevant. Kelly describes the ways that music and lyrics can intensify a negative mood, but even with this consciousness, she chooses to appropriate music in this way. Her desire to seek out strong emotional experiences through music listening may result in feeling worse, but that is the reality of how she feels and her belief is that it is better than feeling nothing. It is neither one way nor the other and an arrow with tips at both ends in Figure 1 represents the relationship.

Figure 1: *The transaction of power between Kelly and music*

Kelly's descriptions of music listening and music making are distinct. Playing the guitar or the drums in the privacy of her own room has provided a form of both expression and escape, whereas playing the saxophone and drums generated social encounters through participation in bands and ensembles. Therefore music is not one-dimensional. It can be used to release emotions or intensify them at different times. It can be used to isolate oneself or to forge social networks at other times.
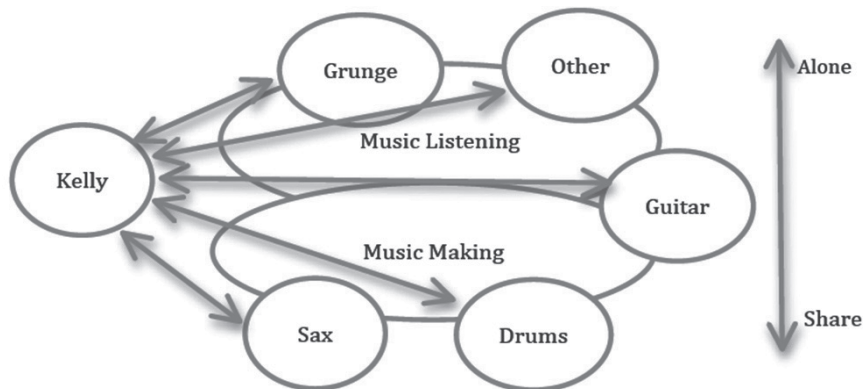
Figure 2: *Kelly's musical resources*

Because Kelly has a rich repertoire of musical competencies, the picture of what music is becomes more and more complex with each attempt to grasp it, as seen in Figure 2.

Nor does a simple circle adequately represent Kelly's choices about how she engages with music. It quickly becomes apparent that she has used music to express and assert her identity; that it is associated with significant life events that are both positive and negative; it has motivated her to participate and to withdraw; she uses music to escape and to think about her life; and she manages her mood with music, both to bring herself up and to take herself down (see Figure 3). It was within this context that Kelly participated in music therapy for a short time across three hospital admissions.

Figure 3: *The ways Kelly uses music in her life*

In examining Kelly's relationship with music in context of her life, it is clear that a timeline of adverse events would highlight a number of challenges including parental divorce to chronic and mental illness. In addition, Kelly has been endowed with a number of resources, from high intelligence and creativity to social competence and good looks. These events and resources have all played out in her web of social relationships, from encounters with her mother and brother, to friends and boyfriends, to church groups and school groups and hospital groups and ultimately work places and enduring intimate relationships. The availability of resources within her social context has varied over time, sometimes for reasons under her control, and at other times beyond her control.

The literature investigating the relationship between young people and music has rarely acknowledged such complexity. Whilst some young people's lives may not be so rich in relationship to both music and life experience, taking a slightly longer term view of people's relationships with music over time and in relation would often reveal some degrees of nuance that challenge the tendency towards duality that is often underpinning the literature. For example, the systematic review mentioned earlier revealed that qualitative researchers often failed to discover any negative experiences from informant's descriptions of their relationship with music (McFerran,

Garrido, & Saarikallio, under review). On the other hand, most surveys that attempt to identify correlations between isolation and a preference for isolating music will find it, whether it is anti-social behaviour and rap music, or depression and metal music (Baker & Bor, 2008). How can both perspectives be right?

The non-dualistic notion of continua of risk and protective factors (rather than healthy and unhealthy) may still be helpful for conceptualising a young person's relationship with music. However the dialogue presented here suggests that identifying generalizable dimensions is more likely to create an inaccurate picture for most individuals. Constructing an inductively derived set of risk and protective factors may be more helpful as a way of fostering dialogue with young people about their relationship with music, and Table 2 presents a summary for Kelly.

Risk Factors		Protective Factors
Self-indulgent	**Emotion Management**	*Acknowledgment*
Intensifying	**Emotional Expression**	*Releasing*
Self-destructive	**Mood**	*Mood enhancing*
Para-social relationships with idols	**Inter-personal**	*Intimate connections with peers*
Perpetuating	**Forms of expression**	*Discovering*
Informing	**Identity**	*Conforming*
Giving up	**The future**	*Aspirations*

Table 2: *Risk and Protective Factors of Musical Engagement Identified by Kelly*

In an era where access to music is unprecedented, the value of conscious and intentional engagement with music cannot be underestimated. The potential of music to be a helpful resource during difficult times is well understood and frequently lauded. However the recognition that the affordances of music may sometimes be appropriated to reinforce negative health is less popular. This may partly be a counter-response to the Parents Music Resource Center attacks during the 1980s, when metal music in particular was targeted as dangerous for youth (see description in Bushong, 2002). However this text illustrates that a collective denial of the negative potential inherent in our relationships with music limit the service that music therapists can offer to young people in particular, since it is they who spend most time with music. Whilst many healthy young people describe music as 'my best friend' and those with mental illness frequently recount that 'music saved my life', Kelly suggests that it can also at times perpetuate negative self image and intensify a negative mood. This text argues for a balanced view of the ways that young people appropriate the affordances of music.

Kelly's Conclusions

I agreed to participate in this text because of my instinct that I have, at times in my life, used music in ways that have likely been unhelpful in aiding positive mental health or more specifically ways that have contributed to my depression. It has been a great experience to write, reflect and reunite with Katrina on this particular issue. Personally it has made me more attentive to the motives behind my choice of, and participation in music, and challenged me to fight harder against my mental illness. In a wider sense, I feel that study in this area can bring new understandings about the benefits of music to people with mood disorders. Since I am convinced that all people at times use music to deepen or prolong emotions that are both positive and negative, I feel as though by contributing to this text I have been given an opportunity to be a part of something of meaning from the 'pit of my own pain' that also has the benefit of extending understanding of how that pain can be best aided by the beauty of a healthy relationship to music.

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