IN DIALOGUE:
TWO MUSIC PSYCHOLOGY SCHOLARS DISCUSS LISTENING PRACTICES

Amanda E. Krause and Steven C. Brown

We – Dr Amanda Krause and Dr Steven Brown – are social psychology researchers interested in how and why people listen to and engage with music. For this piece, we engaged in a reflective dialogue on our own listening practices against the backdrop of our research expertise on everyday listening practices. Our conversation was guided by the following key questions:

- What are your research interests and where did they come from?
- Can you tell me about how playlists feature in your listening practices?
- What do you think about the future of your music engagement?

Full transcript and audio recording of conversation available here.

We recorded our conversation, which took place in January 2022, and present an edited version as the starting point to this piece. We encourage readers to listen to the dialogue prior to reading the remainder of our piece, which is a critical reflection on some of the key points raised in our dialogue around everyday music listening, preferences and formats, the blurring of the lines between consumption and production and the future of music listening.

Everyday music listening

As both we and other researchers have written, the ubiquitous nature of music in everyday life means that it is important to understand it through scholarship (Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham, 2007). Both of us continue to be, as Amanda states, 'keen on looking at the everyday interactions that we have with music'.

Indeed, music is well integrated into people's personal and social lives (Krause and Hargreaves, 2013; O'Hara and Brown 2006).[1] Digital technologies, and portable, digital listening devices in particular, have had great consequences on broadening how, when, and where people engage with music (Heye and Lamont 2010; Juslin et al. 2008; Krause and North 2016; Sloboda et al. 2009). This is certainly the case for both of us:

Steven: Playlists are something I think we'll come back to, but that's an actual – you know that's a creative thing that you're doing – it's not just listening to music or hearing it, you're actually creating and doing things. And that interests me as well, so it's more of a pastime, a kind of thing that people do I think there's ways that people can have fun with music, if you like, now.

It is interesting that we both (re -) developed listening practices in relation to mobile listening devices. The impact of the digital revolution – and mobile listening technologies in particular – on our own listening practices likely mirrors that of many others: we have collections that include multiple formats (e.g., CDs, records, and MP3s). Both of us grew our music collections via purchasing physical CDs and using peer-to-peer sharing. We amassed vast collections of albums that we then wanted to engage with digitally. Even though Steven defines himself as a 'complete album guy', playlists are a 'huge thing' for his listening practice: 'the last thing I had done before I started to talk to you was work on a playlist and I will be doing it tomorrow, and I'll be thinking about in bed tonight'. We are not the only ones who have turned to playlist listening: 2016 statistics estimated that playlists accounted for nearly one third of people's listening (Savage 2016) illustrating how common a practice playlist listening is.

iPod classics afforded the opportunity to easily carry with us vast libraries of music. Yet, certain circumstances (e.g., Amanda's computer hard drive crashing and the theft of an iPod classic) led to us adapting our listening practices and using mobile devices with lesser storage capacity:

Steven: It really goes back to when I had an iPod that had 200 gigabytes and it was stolen and then I got one that was only 20 gigabytes so I couldn't fit all the songs that I had in my library. So I had to create playlists so that I had the ones I wanted to hear on the move. They had to serve a very specific function. And then, on the back of that, I just got in the habit of making playlists for fun.

If the goal of making a playlist is to meaningfully reduce a large volume of music into a smaller one, then, as Steven says, some parameters help to accomplish this. In conversation, he outlined the rules he sets for himself when making playlists of single artists (see QR code below), limiting content to the equivalent of a 2 CD compilation (so 40 songs maximum) and having to tweak the 'best of' playlist when new music is released. For Steven, 'it's usually less about making a playlist or to actually then listen to it, it's more the fun of just kind of forcing myself to listen to entire back catalogues of artists and really explore their albums'. As Amanda reflected, the focus, interestingly, is on the *process* rather than the end *product*.

With this practice, Steven uses his playlist-making pastime to continue to engage with his favourite artists. In re-designing compilations of artists, he finds new and different ways to experience his music collection. This might be described as a way of keeping a familiar collection of music fresh or avoiding 'over-listening'. Another way that listeners can avoid 'over-

David Byrne – single artist playlist example

listening' is via shuffle (Batt-Rawden and DeNora 2005). Shuffle, the evolution of a mixtape, randomly orders the presentation of a set of songs (be it an album, a playlist, or an entire catalogue); again, in altering the order of songs, it may be a way to keep one's collection fresh.

Amanda's use of shuffle with her playlists, developed following one of her research studies, is interesting to consider. Amanda describes herself "as a collector" (with a preference for having her favourite artists' entire catalogues), but with such an amassed collection, she also wants to listen to *all* of her collection:

> Amanda: It stemmed from the first research project I did in my master's - that one about iTunes - because… I asked them "how big is your collection, how many songs?" and, at that time, iTunes … would also tell you how many of the songs you had listened to. And so, when I realized that for myself, I had this massive amount of music, but I hadn't listened to all of it, I started to want to make sure that I had heard everything that I had. And so, shuffle actually became my way of trying to just introduce to myself more of the music that I had.

Amanda framed her listening via shuffle and was 'okay with shuffle and I was okay, because I was trying to introduce myself to more of my collection, of that randomness behind it'.

While not everyone might be open to the randomness and uncertainty in one's listening that shuffle creates, Amanda enjoys hearing elements of her collection juxtaposed against each other. In this way, she's open to the unknown. Leong et al. (2005) have written about this as serendipity. While often regarded as the result of luck or chance, serendipity in music listening can result in rediscovering emotions and memories attached to songs and even the reframing of a song having taken it 'out of its original context [which can] create a satisfying and fulfilling experience in a new situation or context' (Leong et al. 2005: 2).

Blurring the lines of consumption and production

Our use of playlists and shuffle allow us to engage with our collections in new ways. In addition to experiencing serendipity or avoiding 'over-listening' and altering one's familiarity with their collection, we see how interacting with one's music digitally allows listeners to take control of their listening.[2] Digital listening technologies allow listeners to shape their listening experience. With our interactions, we see clearly how, as Krause and Hargreaves (2013: 532; see also Kibby 2009) stated, 'a music collection can be seen as both an archive and participatory practice'.

The use of listening technologies to actively engage in listening practices touches on how music *consumption* and *production* behaviours are blurred (Ebare 2004; O'Hara and Brown 2006); see also North et al. 2004; Hargreaves, Miell, and MacDonald 2002).[3] For example, listening practices like creating playlists and remixes blur boundaries between consumer and producer. Music listening can be thought of not only as active, but also as creative and as an act of making. As Steven notes with playlists, 'it's not just listening to music or hearing it, you're actually creating and doing things'.

Here, our discussion links to a wider one concerning what music practices and behaviours are considered to be 'musical' and definitions of 'musicians' and 'musicianship'. We both noted this to be directly influenced by our engagement in, and knowledge of, wider musical research:

Steven: I do consider making a playlist to be, at the *bare minimum,* a form of musical creativity but arguably a form of *music making*… I'm not going to say it's you know on a par with some virtuoso pianist but … it's something that I do consider to be of interest as an evolving sort of practice that involves some level of creativity, thought, and attention and I don't think I would consider it in those terms, or speak of it in those terms, had I not done real reading and research of my own, and really thought about it in a different way.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Steven embarked on a project to create music using samples from his mp3 collection. Under the moniker Prism Snitch, he isolated short sections of songs using rudimental software and rearranged them based on tempo and key to create songs that brought together disparate styles. Influenced by key releases by the likes of Four Tet and DJ Shadow, the process at times felt like painting by numbers as the software did a lot of heavy lifting in terms of facilitating which samples might work well together. His process, which is like remixing, is a legitimate music making practice. However, it is a practice that is not traditionally considered as music making.

Similarly, Amanda's research has reinforced, for her, the notion that the 'long standing distinctions and definitions [of musical practices] are completely, if not gone, blurred'. Encompassed in considerations of what behaviours may or may not count as musicianship is also a belief that even the definition of 'musicians' and 'non-musicians' is fraught. For Amanda, this discussion is important because the implications concern continued music engagement. On that topic, she and her colleagues (Krause et al., 2020) found that people's assumptions of *what music participation is* and *what being a music participant is or should be* underlie their continued participation in musical activities.[4] Thus, given the impact on life-long and life-wide musical engagement, it is important that we broaden the definitions of being musical, music making, and musicianship to incorporate everyday, digital forms of music listening and engagement. We both hope to see continued discussion and research around the notions of musicianship in light of popular, technologically mediated musical activities.

Looking to the future

While we're on the topic of the use of devices and formats, we know that music technologies continue to evolve – and it will be vital for research on music behaviours to continue to address these technological developments (Krause and Hargreaves 2013). Therefore, we believe it is important to focus on how psychological concepts and theories help us understand everyday music engagement – to be able to continue to understand people's music listening behaviours from a psychological, rather than descriptive, standpoint (Krause and North 2016). Indeed, as Steven mentioned, one of the real assets of our work is our use of psychological theories. Amanda further contextualises how the psychological underpinning of our findings keeps work concerning technologies relevant:

Amanda: Because we do talk about technology and obviously technology is changing, and this idea of being out of date or old fashioned, but I think that's also why I really like that we've taken a psychological approach to trying to understand people's behaviours. Because … if we extrapolate up, and we think about psychological ownership or the idea of selection and control, we might be putting that in the context of a playlist or the idea of selection and control, we might be putting that in the context of a playlist or streaming or shuffle or whatever it is, but I think it's - well it's tied to that it's also not. So that I'm hopeful that the research that we are doing and have done is still relevant to understanding people

and their behaviours even if it's not somebody playing a record or using an iPod or whatever meta, future technology VR thing is [dominant at the time].

As we wrote in our book chapter published in 2018, 'the implications of having unlimited and immediate access to music is an enticing research question' (Krause and Brown 2018: 98); it's one we're still fascinated with and will continue to consider into the future.

Additionally, while on the topic of considering what the future might hold, consideration of COVID-19 arose. Research has shown how music listening time has typically increased during the pandemic (Cabedo-Mas et al. 2021; Carlson et al., 2021; Fink et al. 2021). This increase may be related to people using music listening as a coping mechanism – indeed, research shows that people listen to music to cope with stress, regulate mood and emotions, and connect with others during the ongoing pandemic (Cabedo-Mas et al. 2021; Fink et al. 2021; Granot et al. 2021; Henry et al. 2021; Ribeiro et al. 2021; Vidas et al. 2021).[5] As scholars have pointed out (e.g., Krause 2020; Schäfer and Eerola 2020; Schäfer et al. 2020), listening to music can act as a social surrogate, reducing loneliness by providing feelings of comfort and company for listeners.[6]

COVID-19 also disrupted the live music industry (Florida and Seman 2020; Gu et al. 2021; Taylor et al. 2020), prompting many musicians and organisations to offer online content to engage audiences. (Live)streamed performances raise interesting questions around listening experiences, especially concerning 'live' music performance experiences.[7] Our own research has indicated that listening to live music is unique – 'being there' to experience something 'special' is a primary motivator for attending live concerts (e.g., Brown and Knox 2017).[8,9] Moreover, the focus on (live)streamed opportunities elevate discussions around disability and access as well as ethics and climate change.[10, 11]

We find these questions exciting to consider moving forward. They also point to an important consideration that we would like to end on: working out what makes people unique or special via the prism of musical preferences could and should encompass more features of musical listening than the music chosen. In our dialogue, Steven noted that some people have reconsidered their usage of streaming services given catalogue changes and artist payment practices. In this way, we see how individuals communicate with the wider world via their musical preferences in more and more nuanced ways (e.g., listening technology use can reflect ethical stances). Therefore, musical experiences and preferences now have as much to do with the mediums used to listen to music - and the functions that they serve - than the actual music selected itself.

Dr Amanda Krause, a Lecturer (Psychology) at James Cook University (Australia) is interested in the social and applied psychology of music. Her research examines everyday music interactions, with an emphasis on the role of different listening technologies and how everyday music experiences influence well-being.

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Dr Steven Caldwell Brown completed a PhD in the psychology of music in 2015 and adapted his thesis on music piracy into the co-edited text 'Digital Piracy: A Global, Multidisciplinary Account' in 2018. His research concerns the cultural and commercial implications of music piracy on contemporary music listening practices.

@MusicPsychGuy

Endnotes

1. Technology has greatly impacted how people listen to music (Avdeeff 2012; North, et al. 2004; Sloboda, et al. 2009) such that any notion of music consumption is now deeply entwined with changes to music listening technologies (Molteni and Ordanini 2003).

2. People are not passive listeners, but rather music listeners are active consumers (Krause, et al., 2015; Sloboda, et al. 2009).

3. While there used to be a music production hierarchy that assigned the greatest amount of power to a composer, a subordinate middle-tiered role to the performer, and placed listeners as passive recipients of music (Cook 1998), technology has broken down this hierarchy. Digital music promotes interactivity between music, device, and listener (Kibby 2009) – and we argue, then, that this outdated production hierarchy no longer exists.

4. Such assumptions interact with narrow views reinforced by music education programs that focus heavily on polishing performances and pupil achievement (Klinedinst 1991; Myers 2008) rather than on providing people with skills and information (Kuntz, 2011; Myers 2008) to engage in music in a variety of ways outside of (and beyond) a traditional, Western music education program.

5. Notably, it seems there is something about music – as opposed to media in general – because one of Amanda's studies indicated that across six time points, university students' 'life satisfaction was positively associated with music listening and negatively associated with watching TV/videos/movies' (Krause et al. 2021: 1).

6. The COVID-19 related findings on music listening align with other work on the benefits of listening to music for well-being (e.g., Krause et al. 2018). Because so many people enjoy listening to music (Schäfer et al. 2013) and because music is widely available, it is important that researchers continue to examine how music listening technologies can be beneficial in supporting well-being. Indeed, 'future social psychological research is well placed to consider the full capacity of music as a public health intervention' (Krause and Brown 2018: 98).

7. Amanda has collaborated with Michelle Phillips to begin to explore what 'liveness' is and what the similarities and differences in attending a face-to-face performance and (live)streamed performance may be. Their preliminary data suggests that concepts of 'liveness' include factors linked to people's attendance motivations, as well as ideas around the atmosphere, sense of immersion, and sensory experiences (Phillips and Krause 2022).

8. Our collaborative research has used Uses and Gratifications theory to explain why individuals make use of different listening formats and technologies (Brown and Krause 2020; Krause and Brown 2021) as well as why people choose to engage in music piracy (Brown and Krause 2017). We identified eight uses and gratifications that underpin people's format use: discovery, functional utility, usability and intention to use, flexibility, playback diversity, connection, social norms, and value for money (Krause and Brown 2021). In our cases, we favour the flexibility that digital, mobile devices provide; others, however, will seek out other formats for a range of reasons.

9. Importantly, the social and emotional elements of attending a live performance are not noted about listening to music via recorded formats (Brown and Krause 2020; Krause and Brown 2021).

10. See, e.g., contributions and discussion from 'Session 1a: Live music on the internet' at the 2022 Internet Musicking conference (available at https://www.internetmusicking.com/).

11. A 2022 report from the UK suggests that 'music fans are more engaged with environmental issues than the general public. This includes being more likely to care about climate change and place a higher priority on tackling climate change in general and within the music industry. …Many

music fans are prepared to change their consumption habits to support more sustainable products and practices' (Shaw et al 2022: 2).

Contributorship

SCB and AEK collaboratively developed the idea for the piece drawing on shared conversations regarding their personal experiences, their previous research collaborations, and broader published literature. AEK recorded and edited the conversation with SCB and led the drafting of the written manuscript. SCB contributed to revising the manuscript and both authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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