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# Music and well-being: a transformative consumer research perspective

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## ABSTRACT

While much is known about the therapeutic qualities of music, less is understood about its impact on well-being from a holistic perspective. To address this limitation, this study examines how music is used as a resource to manage all aspects of well-being: physical, mental, intellectual and social. Adopting a transformative consumer research perspective, the researchers partnered with community organisations and participants in the design of the research. This study explores experiences of older adults (60–81) and adolescent teenagers (15–17) in Ireland over a seven-month period, using interviews, participant observation of intergenerational music workshops, and participant music diaries to explore this phenomenon. Findings place emphasis on the role of intergenerational social well-being in addition to the role of music in pain management, structuring the everyday, providing purpose, confronting death/uncertainty, and the management of identity formation/loss. Suggestions for social policy and future research are also explored.

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Transformative consumer research; well-being; music consumption; participatory research; intergenerational research

## Introduction: a transformational consumer research approach

This paper explores how music is used as a resource for holistic well-being. Adopting a transformative consumer research (TCR) perspective (Mick et al., 2012), this research is framed by a ‘fundamental problem or opportunity, and that strive to respect, uphold, and improve life in relation to the myriad conditions, demands, potentialities, and effects of consumption’ (Mick, 2006, p. 2). The TCR perspective is based on core principles that specifically concern the development of insights that contribute to our understanding of well-being and the act of improving the well-being of participants in the carrying out of research.

This particular study adopts a TCR perspective where the primary purpose is to develop insights that contribute to the greater well-being of two age groups – adolescent teenagers (ATs) and older adults (OAs) – and where research design is participatory-driven. The research participants are active collaborators at every stage of the data collection process. We partner with both age groups and key community stakeholders (schools, age-friendly and non-profit arts organisations). The research collects data via participant observation

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of a series of intergenerational music workshops, interviews and analysis of music diaries developed in partnership with the participants. Following the work of Mick et al. (2012) this research also generates experiences of well-being within the execution of the study. Consequently, we place emphasis on the different ways in which the participants reflect on their music consumption and its relationship with well-being, as well as how such learnings from reflections can potentially be put into practice.

Music presents an interesting context in which to employ the TCR perspective. There is an increasing focus in research on the potential therapeutic benefits of music (see Ansdell, 2014; DeNora, 2013) yet, there is an absence of TCR studies that draw from the potential of music and other arts-based consumer practices as meaningful intervention or even as methodological practice. Music is intertwined into the everyday, and despite not being the foreground of focus, it is influential in organising social relationships, moods, experiences and a sense of self (DeNora, 2000). The expanding choice and mobility afforded by music streaming technologies has permeated music to an even greater extent in contemporary life (see Sinclair et al., 2019). Exploring such engagement with music can reveal much about the individual and related social dynamics and such knowledge can potentially contribute towards the development of programmes and practices that facilitate increased well-being.

Drawing on the social-ecological framework of music and well-being developed by Ansdell (2014) and DeNora (2013), we build on their work contextually by concentrating in particular on the everyday use of music as a resource for well-being in the community; this approach goes beyond DeNora's and Ansdell's focus on the therapeutic impact of music in residential care facilities, and for individuals with mental health issues. The findings take a holistic approach, focusing on the different aspects of well-being (physical, mental, intellectual, and social) that the participants gain from music when dealing with physical pain, mental discomfort, death and loss, identity transition and future uncertainty and how these types of well-being overlap in relation to music as a resource. Furthermore, the findings place emphasis on the social aspects of well-being through an exploration of the intergenerational dynamics that are articulated through music by both age groups (ATs and OAs).

### ***Music and well-being***

Research on the relationship between music and well-being has mostly focused on its therapeutic use for the elderly (referred to here as 'older adults') from a physical perspective in terms of pain control and palliative care (Hilliard, 2003; Krout, 2001), and for cognitive well-being in terms of its role in assisting those with memory-related diseases (see Koger et al., 1999). Evolving consumer-centred music technologies (e.g. iPods, streaming services) have allowed for easier access, increased choice and greater mobility in consumption. This has facilitated more personalised and potentially more affective forms of treatment in this regard. For example, Wagner et al. (2016) document the use of personalised playlists for increasing the responsiveness and improving the mood of patients with dementia.

Gary Ansdell, a proponent of music therapy for all ages, particularly in mental health, is critical of the 'neuromania' that has simplified our understanding of how music impacts health and well-being (Ansdell, 2014). Both Ansdell (2014) and DeNora (2013) are wary of

the tropes around music as all powerful and healing. They suggest this overlooks the complexity of music, framing it as a 'simple stimulus, an adjunct, tool or application for medical ends' (Ansdell, 2014, p. 6). Research on music consumption, particularly in advertising or retail contexts, has also had a tendency to over-simplify its 'affects' on individuals, portraying it in rather instrumental terms. The use of 'muzak' in the manipulation of consumer behaviour (see Bradshaw et al., 2005) is an extension of the social control trope that has featured in studies that measure the impact of music on, for example, the factory floor (Jones & Schumacher, 1992) and in learning and education (e.g. Kraus & Chandrasekaran, 2010). The focus for such studies is on the intellectual aspects of well-being and how music improves the efficiency of a given task or skill.

However, it is important not to view music consumption in such passive and static terms. In more sociologically-influenced contemporary media studies literature (See Bennett, 1999), production/consumption is viewed as something that is engaged with, fluid, negotiated and that can then ultimately be incorporated or resisted. Consequently, the influence of music is more complicated than its direct impact on body and mind and performative contexts such as learning, working or consumer behaviour. Music plays an important social role, whether it is through promoting or engaging in issues such as environmental sustainability (Sharpe, 2008), poverty and famine (Davis, 2007), challenging the status quo on issues such as gender or racial inequality (Street et al., 2008), and/or as a symbol of class resistance/social change (Hall & Jefferson, 1976). Furthermore, it is used by individuals and groups as an identity resource from which they can make sense of one's self, community or nationality (Frith, 1996). These studies speak broadly to the myriad of ways that music consumption contributes to societal and individual aspects of well-being, without 'well-being' itself featuring as the context or purpose of such research. The emphasis on well-being in research on music consumption has primarily been the domain of music therapy studies. Therefore, there is an opportunity to look at well-being in a more holistic way.

Ansdell (2014) argues that the instrumental framing of music therapy is symptomatic of a widespread simplification of 'well-being' as a concept in general. The meaning of 'well-being' has become distorted over time, through commercial narratives that place emphasis on the distribution of products/services with quick fixes and miracle cures. Consequently, it has come to be associated as a predominantly physical health issue. Our understanding of 'well-being' has moved away from its Aristotelian origins where greater emphasis was placed on its connection with 'eudaimonia', or 'happiness', a nuanced understanding of the balance required in all aspects of life, from health, to our surroundings and the people we surround ourselves with. Furthermore, well-being should not be considered as something that just exists in the present, it needs to be linked to 'past history, ongoing identity and future transcendence' (Ansdell, 2014, p. 297).

DeNora (2013) is critical of the commercially-driven personalised medical complex that treats health and well-being from an exclusively biological perspective. It is important to clarify that DeNora is in no way downplaying the significance of the physicality of health conditions. This is obviously of paramount importance. She is advocating a social-ecological approach in that 'we need to consider more holistically the person in context of the environment, culture, social practices and others' (DeNora, 2013, p. 135). This is particularly relevant when we consider the use of music as a therapeutic resource. Music is a complex and dynamic medium 'that, like health/illness, takes shape in relation to other

things' (DeNora, 2013, p. 136). It surrounds us, and is intrinsically linked to an individual's cognitive and physical aspects of well-being through its engagement with for example, emotion and memory as a technology of the self. However, Ansdell and DeNora both argue that music never operates exclusively at the individual level. When one engages with music, one connects with, for example, cultural practice, collective public memory and material objects. It is an active engagement that because of its rhythmic properties can align individuals in shared time.

Ansdell (2014), drawing from musicology, writes about the shared space and time that musicians experience in performance. This creates a group intersubjectivity that is fundamentally different to how individuals usually communicate in a group, where each individual member has to wait his/her turn to speak, less they distort each other's communication. With music, individuals can communicate and share experiences at many more different and complex levels, strengthening social bonds as a result. DeNora (2013) draws from the concept of an 'asylum' to describe how individuals use music as an escape from pain (emphasis on mental health in her study) but also a space in which one can express creativity in order to facilitate well-being and to face pain. 'Asylum', in this case, is not just a physical building but a conceptual space that speaks to 'anytime/anyplace of health promotion and maintenance' (DeNora, 2013, p. 136). In short, both DeNora and Ansdell are advocating for a more communal approach through focusing on the social ecology of music consumption, a social distribution of illness and health. This is the understanding of well-being that we adopt in this research.

DeNora's and Ansdell's work in reference to this approach has predominantly focused on OAs in residential care or individuals with specific health issues (mostly mental health) from a contextual perspective. Research on music and OAs' well-being also tends to focus on those in residential care as opposed to the elderly in the community (Hays & Minichiello, 2005). DeNora's and Ansdell's communal approach is instructive for exploring relationships between different groups and the role of music as a resource for social aspects of well-being, in the case of this study intergenerational dynamics. Although music is important for every age group, North et al. (2000) argue that it is particularly significant for ATs. Arnett (1996) cites its prominence in the socialisation process and documents how teenagers use music to cope with anxieties that manifest with uncertainty during adolescence. Nuttall (2009) describes the crucial role that music plays in youth identity formation. It is used to manage the symbolic self, develop confidence and skills, and is an important source of social capital for creating distinctions between peers at a young age (Nuttall, 2009). There is a risk that analysis of two different age groups will lead to a simplistic dichotomy of old ways/new ways of being, especially considering the significant change in music technologies between generations.

The generational divide and relationships in this context is, of course, worthy of analysis. Connell (2012), for example, argues that older generations are more social in their music use, placing emphasis on the importance of dance halls and engagement with music in a more public fashion. Contrastingly, new music technologies place emphasis on the individualised aspect of music consumption (e.g. the use of headphones) and young adults are traditionally early adopters of such technologies. Furthermore, it can be argued that music is no longer as important to young people because of the increasing number of competing 'lifestyle' products aimed at them. Such competition has only increased with evolving digital technologies which no longer place emphasis on music as a primary

activity of consumption in its own right (see Sinclair et al., 2019). Exploring such issues with a well-being lens can be informative and helpful for developing meaningful interventions that support both age groups. With a view to generating an understanding of individual and collective social aspects of well-being, we draw on the concepts developed by both DeNora and Ansdell, focusing in particular on the relationship between music and well-being for ATs and OAs in the community and the role that music plays in fostering an intergenerational relationship between the age groups.

## Method

The aim of this study is to explore how OAs and ATs use music as a resource for well-being. Data was collected for the research between November 2018 and May 2019. The researchers employed a participatory research design (Mick et al., 2012) in which they partnered with an Age-Friendly University (AFU) community group that assisted with the recruitment and design of the research project. The AFU is part of a wider global network of age-friendly organisations within universities. The group we worked with has over 2,000 members that take part in educational and leisure activities throughout the year. The researchers also partnered with two local secondary schools and a non-profit organisation dedicated to teaching groups of different ages how to write creatively. This organisation helped deliver songwriting workshops for the participants. Multiple qualitative research methods were employed that placed an emphasis on not only capturing how the participants engaged with music in their everyday lives, but also in their consumption and production of music. The methods employed here were designed to understand how music 'functions as a resource for meaning construction and for the structuring and organisation of social settings' (DeNora, 2004, p. 46) as well as facilitating an understanding for the participants of the role of music in their well-being. Data collection was divided into two parts.

### *Phase 1: intergenerational music project*

Gubrium and Holstein (2000) argue that the best way to learn about old age is to ask the old themselves. The same principle applies to ATs. Teenagers between middle and late adolescence (aged 15–17) and OAs (aged 60–81) are the subject of this research as they are particularly underrepresented in accounts of everyday music consumption (see Bennett, 2006; Weijters et al., 2014), and are also suitable age samples for exploring themes concerning well-being. These age groups are under-represented for a reason. They are more difficult to recruit and create more complex and time-consuming methodological challenges regarding research ethics as a consequence of the implied 'vulnerability' associated with their age. The AFU community group was approached to assist with research recruitment and design. Drawing on the experience of the group, the authors developed an intergenerational music project that would take place over the course of a month. Fourteen OAs and eight ATs in transition year<sup>1</sup> from two secondary schools located in Dublin City were recruited. The only other criteria were that they had an interest in music. Further details of the sample can be found in Table 1. Informed consent and assent forms were circulated to all participants/guardians to inform about the purpose of the research and their role in it. Participants were assured that they could

**Table 1.** Research participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Employment/education status	Participation
Bobby	75–81	M	Retired. Volunteers in retirement homes	First and second phase
Paul	60–65	M	Works part-time as radio DJ	First phase
Eve	60–65	F	Retired	First and second phase
Ann	70–75	F	Retired	First and second phase
Yvonne	65–70	F	Retired	First phase
Jim	60–65	M	Retired. Writes part-time	First phase
Peadar	70–75	M	Retired.	First and second phase
Caoimhe	60–65	F	Works part-time in retail	First and second phase
Billy	65–70	M	Retired	First and second phase
Timmy	75–81	M	Retired	First phase
Molly	65–70	F	Retired	First phase
George	65–70	M	Retired	First phase
Anthony	65–70	M	Retired	First phase
Jane	65–70	F	Retired	First phase
Kevin	15–17	M	Transition year student	First and second phase
Ian	15–17	M	Transition year student	First and second phase
Chris	15–17	M	Transition year student	First and second phase
Gary	15–17	M	Transition year student	Second phase
Gerry	15–17	M	Transition year student	First and second phase
Ryan	15–17	M	Transition year student	Second phase
Gemma	15–17	F	Transition year student	First phase
Grainne	15–17	F	Transition year student	First phase
Clara	15–17	F	Transition year student	First phase
Orla	15–17	f	Transition year student	First phase

withdraw at any time during the research. Comprehensive ethical guidelines for the research were formulated with the input of the schools and the AFU community group. They were approved by the lead author's University Ethics Committee.

The first phase of the project took place two hours a week over the course of four weeks. The workshops required no expertise in music and they were designed to allow both age groups to share and learn from their respective experiences of music and to consider its use as a resource for various aspects of well-being. Each workshop focused on a particular theme (e.g. technology, music in everyday life). However, the participants were given the opportunity to raise their own discussion topics and frequently consulted with both the researchers and the AFU organisers about the direction of the workshops and particular issues they would like to learn more about or skillsets that they would like to develop to facilitate intellectual aspects of well-being. In such instances the researchers empowered the participants to assist with such requests. For example, an OA participant wanted to learn how to use Spotify and so the authors encouraged the AT participants to assist him. In another example, an AT wanted to know more about traditional Irish music, so an older participant was encouraged to share the knowledge he had in this regard.

The authors moderated each of the workshops and shared the duty of recording field notes as part of the overall participant observation. Participants of all ages worked together on a series of tasks (e.g. 'show and tell', the mapping of each other's life through music), games (music quizzes) and discussion topics (e.g. stereotypes, function of music) in each workshop. The output from these group activities served as a valuable medium of data but importantly contributed to the participants learning more about the role of music as a resource for well-being. The group activities also helped create a strong bond between all of those taking part that lasted throughout the overall data collection process. Strom and Strom (2015) argue that the advancement of information technologies

has created more siloed and age-segregated communication practices amongst adolescent teenagers and older adults. They emphasise the importance of intergenerational reciprocal learning for cultural evolution and preservation as well as overall social well-being. This is reflected through the methods we employed. Intergenerational reciprocal learning, according to Twenge (2013), can help encourage OAs to share feelings and experiences with younger people (i.e. mental well-being), broaden the social development of adolescents (i.e. social well-being) and equip them with intergenerational communication skills for the work place (i.e. intellectual well-being).

In-depth interviews were conducted with the OAs and separate group interviews for the male and female ATs took place immediately after the workshops were completed. Participants kept a diary of their music use throughout the process of the first phase of workshops (see Harvey, 1990). This offered participants who were less forthcoming to share their experience in the public space, the opportunity to reflect on their use of music in their everyday lives in a more detailed and introspective way. The younger participants tended to keep their entries short and to the point whereas the older participants tended to elaborate more on thoughts and experiences that were not necessarily directly related to their music use. Overall, 270 separate diary entries were recorded in total. All data collected and reproduced here has been anonymised.

### ***Phase 2: song-writing project***

Mick et al. (2012) argue that for truly collaborative research, partners 'must exert significant influence on the research itself and gain beneficial learning experiences ...' (p. 16). Following the first phase of workshops, the authors and the AFU consulted with the participants about the future of the group. There was a desire amongst them to keep the group active and to develop something together creatively. A non-profit organisation was brought in to teach the group about songwriting and ultimately to assist with the development of a song that would be performed at a University cultural event. The authors helped organise the five songwriting workshops but took more of an observational role in the process, leaving the moderation to the professional team.

The number of participants reduced from the first phase of data collection to a total of twelve (see Table 1). The reduction in numbers was as a consequence of school timetabling for the female ATs. Many of the participants could not play an instrument or had no previous experience of writing a song. Experience or expertise was not important and this was stressed from the beginning of the project. Everyone found a role, whether that be playing an instrument, clapping hands, singing or suggesting lyrics.

Most of the contributions in terms of lyrics or thematic ideas came from the participants sharing experiences of their own lives. Procter (2006) observes that the act of making music liberates participants to construct their own stories. Daykin et al. (2017) suggests that rather than it being about 'empowering participants with new skills or competencies, or reinforcing problematic identities, music-making can therefore generate meaning, knowledge and relationships within specific contexts' (p. 943). The creative process served as a projective technique from which the participants could reflect on their lives and the hopes and fears they had for the future. This is revealed in the lyrics of the song but also in the actual process of developing the journey of the protagonist in the song and the suggested paths they have taken or may take in the future. The creative

space allowed them to express feelings in a way that would perhaps be difficult to achieve in a traditional interview setting. Importantly, such creative expressions were potentially generative for the participants as they were able to build confidence from their new-found skills and experience the sense of empowerment that comes with creative output. Importantly, collaborative creativity and the associated social aspects of well-being have also been found to increase individual aspects of well-being as they satisfy psychological and social needs in terms of social connections and the achievements of shared goals (see Burnard & Dragovic, 2014). This also allowed for learning opportunities in which the participants could be reminded of the benefits of music as a resource for well-being.

The authors reviewed all data collected from participant observation field notes, interview transcripts, diaries and the materials created by the participants in the two phases of the workshops. The data was coded using an inductive approach (see Spiggle, 1994) that identified key themes that were based on specific aspects of well-being located in the literature, with an emphasis on DeNora's and Ansdell's work (e.g. physical, mental and social), in addition to gaps identified in such literature (e.g. focus on the relationship between the everyday and well-being) and the early stages of data collection (e.g. loss and well-being). The results of the coding process are discussed in the findings section.

## Findings

The findings are structured as follows. First we describe the different ways that participants use music to enhance well-being and how they overlap. We place particular attention on how the participants use music to provide structure and order in everyday life. This is particularly relevant for OAs and ATs that are preparing or are experiencing significant change in their everyday lives (e.g. emerging adulthood, retirement). Then, we expand the focus beyond the individual and their set of personal circumstances to explore the role that music plays in generating social aspects of well-being at age-group and intergenerational levels.

### *Physical and mental aspects of well-being*

Extant studies on the therapeutic benefits of music have primarily focused on OA's in residential care in terms of pain control, palliative care (e.g. Hilliard, 2003; Krout, 2001) and in particular memory-related diseases (e.g. Koger et al., 1999; Wagner et al., 2016). We document how OA's in the community use music as a resource to manage pain (physical and mental) in their everyday lives, not focusing on any particular disease or ailment. The instrumental function of music as a pain reliever is evident. For example, Molly (OA), in a diary entry, recalls a three-hour dental session:

Music was really good and took my mind somewhat off the very uncomfortable dental work. I heard a lot of songs in the 3 hours which I haven't heard for some time. A few I remember and enjoyed singing in my mind.

One such song was The Eagles song 'Desperado' which Molly changed the lyrics of in her head to help manage the pain she was experiencing. Ann (OA) explains how music has directly helped with bereavement in a diary entry:

I couldn't find the words to write a letter of sympathy until I heard a Josh Groban song on the radio. The sense of not believing that this friend had passed on was beautifully captured in the words "who can say for certain maybe you're still here. I feel you all around me, your memories so clear" ... very comforting piece of music. Out of it brought a sense of calm, sadness.

It is not just the mental anguish that comes with encountering death more regularly the older you become, but the ongoing identity struggle that is at the heart of ageing. Ann (OA) draws strength from the musical 'Cats' when she considers feelings of alienation that come with old age:

Older people can be shunned by society and perhaps even judged by appearance. Some older people I know often refer to not being seen anymore and rejected for being old. In some ways it can be a two-way street – yes you are getting on in age but even though you age and lose what you used to be, you still retain the memories of better times and this is reflected in the words of the song. Memory, all alone in the moonlight, I can smile happy your days. I can dream of the old days.

Schau et al.'s (2009) study outlines the significant amount of identity work that retirees engage in. The research celebrates the myriad of consumption activities, music playing a particularly important role, that have revitalised OAs as they have 'the time to engage in identity work in a way not possible since their adolescence' (Schau et al., 2009, p. 273). The identity struggle of age transition is not just the problem of those in retirement age. It is also, as Schau et al. indicate in the previous quote, highly visible in adolescence as they are dealing with emerging adulthood and associated issues (see Arnett, 1996; Nuttall, 2009). The role of music in communicating transition was particularly evident in the group song writing workshops. The song-writing process placed emphasis on the importance of structure on which to build a coherent story and to create a sound that had an identity and a message that had substance. Consequently, addressing the need for a coherent structure, and with little guidance on a specific theme, the male ATs placed thematic emphasis on their emerging adulthood. Here, the song is a coming-of-age tale. The song entitled 'Mis(placed) Stranger' has lyrics such as 'lost in a space that is unknown', 'the kid I was, is all these people know/ they can't see how much I've grown' that draw out and communicate these feelings in the creative space of the workshops. Listening to music or actively contributing to its creation can provide a cathartic energy (see Sinclair & Dolan, 2015) which helps the participants identify and communicate feelings about the transitional state they are experiencing.

The songwriting workshop coordinator placed emphasis on developing 'specificity' in the process as a way in which to connect to a wider audience. The finished product of the song expresses many universal themes. Furthermore, the actual act of discussing or searching for specificity within the thematic context allowed for the researchers to gain insight from the participants when they workshoped potential lyrics that were specific to their own lives; specifically, thoughts concerning emerging adulthood. The participants related to each other through discussion of the lyrics and also provided a basis for the researcher to probe on specific details that were relevant to the key themes of the study. The act of talking about the songwriting process and connecting it to their own lives also offered somewhat of a roadmap in which the participants could reflect on how creating

music or even thinking about the creative act can help with the mental aspects of their well-being.

### *Music and routine: structuring well-being*

DeNora's (2013) extension of the traditional understanding of the term 'asylum' as a physical space to that of a conceptual space is instructive here. It encompasses a broader understanding of music's therapeutic properties that moves beyond the immediate emotively cathartic, restorative and instrumental qualities, percolating into the 'anytime/anyplace of health promotion and maintenance' (DeNora, 2013, p. 136). It guides us on how to investigate the everyday. The participants use music in the everyday mundane spaces, outside of the ritualistic spaces on which research usually focuses. This type of consumption plays a more understated role in managing well-being in that it provides structure and order. This occurs both in the foreground and background of everyday life. For the ATs, involvement in music at both performative and leisure levels is typically quite time intensive. For example, Orla (AT), in a diary entry, shares a weekly schedule that involves managing musical and choir rehearsals in addition to the responsibilities of a busy school timetable that includes music lessons. For some of the recently retired OAs (e.g. Jim and Bobby), music has moved from primarily being a hobby to a central part of how they structure their days. In Jim's case, it is writing a book about Irish musician 'Big Tom', and for Bobby it is playing music in nursing homes and at regular open mic sessions.

Music does not have to be the specific contextual focus of the day in order to help structure it (DeNora, 2000). It also acts as the background for organising routine everyday activities (Sinclair et al., 2019). This could be something as simple as turning the radio on in the morning or listening to a playlist on the commute to school/work. Kevin (AT), like most of the AT participants, uses Spotify to construct playlists to manage different moods, spaces and tasks throughout the day.

I have two playlists. One in the morning and one at night. The one in the morning is to get me prepared for the day ahead and the other (mellow) is to help me relax and fall asleep.

Music is often embedded into the routine of our everyday lives which can help facilitate well-being across different aspects. This is particularly relevant when there are significant changes to the routine. This can often be a concern for retirees (see Pepin & Deutscher, 2011). Recently retired OA participants in this study identify the changing role of music in the everyday routine in their diary entries. Often these are only subtle changes that reflect transformations in terms of how time is spent each day. Yvonne (OA), for example, writes about having more time to herself in the mornings. However, something as simple as music, even in the background, is one activity or task amongst many, that can help build a routine. In this case classical music has become a part of the morning routine for Yvonne as it is 'restful and calming. Brings a sense of order'. This may seem trivial but it is indicative of a new slower-paced structure in adapting to the retirement transition and speaks to the reflective position of music within it. It is an example of the importance of examining music's overall role in the everyday when considering well-being, rather than just the direct impact of music on physical and mental well-being. Active reflection through the music diaries led to discussion between the participants in the workshops about such shared experiences, raised questions and even resulted in some guidance, for

example, about how technologies such as music streaming could be used to bring more music into their lives.

The emphasis on music's role in the everyday routine may speak to a more nuanced understanding of music and well-being but the findings reported thus far still present somewhat of an individualised account. In the next section, we broaden our analysis, considering, as DeNora (2013) argues, how both music and individual well-being take shape in the context of other people collectively and other things.

### ***Intergenerational dynamics: social aspects of well-being***

Bobby (OA) brought in a guitar for show-and-tell but seems reluctant to talk about it. He looks like he is trying to covertly hide it. He is last to go after a number of OAs and ATs show off old Walkmans, first albums, vinyl collections and obscure musical instruments. Every item tells a story about its owner, not just their music taste, but their age, their personality and the moments in their life. It is early in only the second workshop but each object/story helps create a bond between the participants, a sense that this is a safe place to share their experience through music. Bobby is still somewhat reluctant. Paul (OA) apologises to the 'kids' for describing Bobby as 'shit-hot' on the guitar. This gets a laugh and a round of applause as Bobby makes a motion to get ready to play. He introduces the song, explains that they had nothing to do in the 'old days' but sit around and have a sing-song. 'Poverty was rampant but strangely every house had a piano'. Peadar (OA) nods approvingly, asking the ATs beside him if 'young people still have sing-songs.' The question is never answered as Bobby begins the song about a struggling musician and his relationship with his daughter. This cues silence. Everyone is infatuated with his performance, smiling at each other, laughing and for some OAs, emotional. A phone starts ringing during the song but nobody even bats an eyelid. A couple of the OAs start humming along and eventually they join in on the chorus. He receives a big round of applause at the end and we take a break. Over tea and coffee, some of the other OAs share their memories of previous performances of that song while Gerry (AT) searches for it on Spotify to show Bobby and the others the different versions they were talking about. (Fieldnotes, workshop 2)

At its most basic level, playing and talking about music is an enjoyable experience and the sociality of such experiences enhances the sense of well-being (Bennett, 1999). The participants spoke fondly of the relationships they developed over the series of workshops, and it was evident in observation how music facilitated such connections, empowering both old and young in creative ways and to learn more about music as a resource for well-being. The question is how does music create this social aesthetic between both participants of similar ages/experiences and the different generations. In this section we focus on this question placing emphasis on how the participants use music to co-construct a shared sense of time and space that connects to both people and material objects.

### ***Music as time machine for well-being***

Research suggests that music helps memory and aids cognitive aspects of well-being (Belfi et al., 2016; Dassa, 2018). The participants use music to construct a biographical sense of self that gives structure to their memories and experiences and provides a sense of well-being in a number of interconnected ways, particularly for their mental well-being. Jim (OA), in interview, connects his love for the Irish country musician 'Big Tom' with his

own life. 'I could tell you exactly where I was when I heard such-and-such a song for the first time and what I was doing'. Eve (OA), during a workshop exercise, links each milestone in her life to a particular type of musician or music item she associates with that period in her life. For example, she allies her teenage years with David Bowie and David Cassidy and work/getting married with a time in her life where she had her 'own choice, own money freedom, own record player, volume (loud) and all shared before going out'. Similarly, the ATs link music to different points in their lives. For example, Gerry (AT), in workshop, remembers when he started 'to listen to music', at the age of 12, communicating an increasing maturity. Gemma (AT), in an interview, draws on music she listened to when she was younger as a means of showing personal growth:

I think like in first year I would only listen to 'indie' [independent music] artists and now when I hear it, I just cringe. I would listen to it because it was cool. Not that I mind listening to the music but I didn't like the person I was then and when I hear the music I think of the person I was back then.

Although TAs have less time to draw on than the OAs, they still look back on memories of music and reflect on their feelings as a means of strengthening and legitimising a more contemporary individual and social identity. The workshops allow them the space in which to do this and to learn more about themselves and their well-being in the process. However, the OAs look back with a greater sense of nostalgia at past identities, a nostalgia that is at times tinged with an element of sadness at what has been lost. It is important to acknowledge that nostalgia is a mixed emotion. Newman et al. (2020) have shown in their experimental analysis that emotions are 'predominantly positive when nostalgic memories are generated on request, it seems predominantly negative when nostalgia is experienced in the course of everyday life' (Newman et al., 2020, p. 325). This perhaps illustrates the importance of interventions, such as the workshops, in drawing out not only requested memories through music but also the potential significance of new music technologies that provide instant access to particular music memories. Music almost acts as a time machine for the OAs, as the memory of certain songs or artists allows them to channel experiences in their present life. The role of contemporary music streaming technologies in helping draw out such feelings is described by Bobby (OA) in a diary entry:

I was listening to the radio and I heard a song I needed to text Paul about to find it again. I found it on YouTube and it brought me back to childhood in Portmarnock in the 1940s where I spent my time in my granny's house, and cousins arrived on Sundays and we gathered and chatted and played 'house' [Bingo]. Happy days – different world.

Ansdeell (2014, p. 297) writes that we should not focus exclusively on the present when considering the relationship between music and well-being. We must link it to 'past history, ongoing identity and future transcendence'. Music helps the OAs to travel back in time to draw from places, objects and relationships. However, it also transports them into the future in a way that can ease anxiety. As a consequence of their age, they not only have to deal with the loss of loved ones more frequently, but contemplate their own mortality and what lies beyond. It is evident that music is a great source of comfort and hope for the OAs. This is particularly evident in diary entries which frequently refer to the use of music at funerals and how their consumption of music provokes thoughts of their

own mortality. First Molly and then Ann write about the same song 'You will never walk alone' in separate diary entries.

Molly: The service gave me great hope that I will meet my loved ones who have left this world. And as I have had a number of bereavements recently, it was particularly suitable.

Ann: In some ways to me it is a silent motivation to carry on in the hope that things will improve even when things go wrong in life and that hope will ensure that we don't walk alone.

For the ATs, music is used to help articulate anticipation (excitement and concern) for the future (i.e. early adulthood) and the impatience they have for that time to come. Here, the ATs reflect on such similar experiences collectively in the creative workshop through song lyrics. They lead the way in co-constructing lyrics such as 'this kid unknown needs to spread his wings/needs to try different things, time to roll the dice/take a chance on life' and the chorus 'gotta go somewhere/ gotta go right now/gotta go somewhere'. This socially constructed envisioning of the near future brings comfort to the ATs as they are both sharing and navigating their concerns at the same time through the creation of music, linking the social well-being aspects of the music to aspects of mental well-being. Furthermore, the emphasis on the collaborative aspect of the creativity is important here as that has been shown to increase individual sense of well-being (see Burnard & Dragovic, 2014) in that it satisfies basic psychological needs of relatedness (the shared experiences articulated through the music) and competence (the creation of a song and achievement of a shared goal). In short, intellectual and social aspects of well-being are interconnected through the collective creative workshops.

### *Sharing old and new ways of (well-) being*

The OAs use the discussion and creation of music in a similar way to the ATs but their focus is on co-articulating the past. This bonds the OAs together but such discussions within the workshops were also used to inform and connect with the younger generation of ATs. For example, Eve draws nostalgic gasps and knowing nods from the OA members of the workshop group when describing old record markets in Dublin that she saved money to shop in every weekend. She uses her purchase of the 'War of the Worlds' soundtrack to inform the ATs about the anxiety and tension that this record captured pre-World War II and how it symbolised the fear and paranoia of the Cold War era in which she lived. The OAs provide history lessons concerning for example, Irish censorship through their love of Elvis ('the pelvis') as teenagers, and political and sexual revolution through their experiences of the music of The Beatles and David Bowie.

It is not just a broad social history that is shared through the lens of the music heroes of their youth but, also, a historical sense of place. The OA men in particular shared stories of old traditional Irish music pubs and dance halls that help shape a sense of what the city of Dublin looked like in the 1950s and 1960s and the experiences of living there at the time. Although references to such leisure experiences reflect a much simpler and poorer time to grow up in comparison to the contemporary society experienced by the ATs, there is a clear sense of joy and pride in sharing these memories with the ATs. Contemporary streaming and information technologies aided such communication. For example, Billy (OA) showed a couple of the male ATs old Irish traditional songs on Spotify and Paul (OA)

talked about how he grew up in a similar part of the city as some famous local musicians. The ATs were then able to search and share images of what the city looked like and places that were mentioned by the OAs to contribute further to the conversation. It is not just the OAs who took comfort in talking about 'old ways of being'. The ATs used their own knowledge of music history to develop a bond with the OAs. They talk fondly about using music as a way of connecting with their own elderly relatives. Orla (AT), in an interview, shares a memory of her grandfather:

When I was little I had this recorder you could record music on and I remember singing along to my Grandad playing the accordion and I listened to it only a few weeks ago actually. And I sound so small and so tiny. But there were a lot of memories in that little recording and I can go back [to listen to that] any time I want.

The ATs talked about 'older' music regularly with the OAs which strengthened the relationship between the two generations. They share a sense of nostalgia with the OAs for a time they have never experienced. Clara (AT) describes, in interview, the workshop where we asked participants to bring in musical items that are important to them:

It's really quite interesting. People were bringing in records, tapes, Walkman. I was like one of the young ones who brought in records and I was like, here is my first concert ticket and I also brought in Simple Minds and Bowie. I do have a record player and multiple CD players and DVD players lying all over the house – we never get rid of them. We have an old gramophone in the attic.

A social aesthetic is generated through the discussion and handling of the music object. In this particular instance, the OAs spent a lot of time complimenting Clara and pouring over her collection of records with her. In fact, they are surprised by the interest that some of the ATs have in the material objects of 'their' generation of music. Here, they place emphasis on the social benefits of consuming music in this way, speaking to Connell's (2012) assertion that older generations are more social in music consumption. They express concern for how music is engaged with by younger generations. They view the use of new music technologies (emphasis on headphones) as 'anti-social'. Peadar (OA), asks the ATs several times if 'young people still have sing-songs'.

In contrast, the ATs talk about the importance of using earphones to 'de-stress' by temporarily withdrawing from the pressures of everyday life, speaking to their mental well-being. A mood-boosting playlist is just a touch of a button (see Sinclair et al., 2019) from transmitting through those very earphones. Although, many of the OAs remain sceptical about some of the contemporary forms of consumption, mediums like Spotify were demystified to a degree and potentially offer new routes from which the OAs can access music that draws them to feelings, objects, moments in time and meaningful relationships that ultimately increase their sense of well-being. This demonstrates the importance of interventions like this that bring the different age groups together. At the same time, by interacting with the OAs in this format, the ATs benefited from being introduced to 'other' (older) music, alternative mediums of consumption and importantly ways of thinking about and placing such music in the context of their broader surroundings, the relationships in their life and their individual well-being.

## Discussion

Drawing from a TCR perspective, this study outlines how physical, mental, intellectual and social aspects of well-being are interrelated as part of a more holistic conception of well-being, and are supported through music as a resource for both ATs and OAs. The workshop interventions in this study encouraged intellectual aspects of well-being through the thematic emphasis placed on participatory education for different aspects of music engagement (e.g. technology, functions of music, genre) and through creative song-writing. The intellectual well-being generated, fostered a sense of social well-being in that the workshops encouraged the participants to collaborate in a meaningful way that led to genuine empathy and understanding for the different generational experiences of the respective groups.

The request by both age groups for more workshops than were initially planned in the research design is indicative of the mental and social benefit (e.g. alleviating loneliness, managing disaffection) of not only providing music resources for the young and old but the advantages of bringing the two groups together to learn from each other, encourage cultural evolution and preservation and connect meaningfully (see Strom & Strom, 2015; Twenge, 2013). Bringing together different age groups in such a way should be considered in future social policy and more long-term interventions related to learning about well-being. Furthermore, the intergenerational structure of the research can be helpful for future TCR in articulating the role of other consumption activities (e.g. film, sport) that are as pervasive as music in everyday life.

Although the findings support previous research (e.g. Hilliard, 2003; Krout, 2001) regarding the important role of music for well-being, both mentally (emphasis on cognitive disease) and physically, this research does not prioritise any specific ailment, focusing instead on the holistic use of music in the everyday lives of the participants. This focus extends the typical lens of music therapy studies beyond the emphasis on OAs in residential care or individuals with specific health issues to OAs and ATs in the community. This builds contextually from Ansdell's (2014) and DeNora's (2013) social-ecological framing of well-being, outlining the various ways in which music is used by the participants to connect to memories, objects, places, relationships and ultimately each other. These connections facilitate well-being at the various interrelated levels stated, but the emphasis on the social and intergenerational dynamics is particularly novel for research in this area in terms of building a holistic perspective. The importance of TCR interventions such as the music song-writing workshops and the development of different community stakeholder relationships cannot be underestimated.

This paper makes a contextual contribution to extant TCR studies by demonstrating both the methodological impact of using music as tool in which to articulate well-being, and through demonstrating the relationship between the consumption of music and enhanced well-being at both individual and social levels. Using music as a contextual lens helped empower the participants in both research design and in drawing positive experiences from the collaborative research process. It provided a sense of purpose and facilitated learning, space for creative expression and meaningful sociability. Significantly, adopting a TCR approach helped to place emphasis on generating well-being and taught participants about music and well-being in the

execution of the data collection process. It guided the participants by placing emphasis on the importance of reflecting on their music consumption and its relationship with well-being. However, future studies are required to understand how successfully the participants incorporated such learnings into their everyday lives post-workshop interventions. The question is how we can use what we learned in this study to enhance the different aspects of well-being identified. This is particularly important when we consider the global demographic shift towards an ageing society. According to the United Nations (2019) one in six people will be over 65 by 2050. That is almost double what it is now (9% of the population), with estimates that the number of persons over 80 will triple by 2050. Further to the additional strain that this will place on health services, there will be inevitable social issues with many of this age group entering retirement and experiencing the potential psychological issues that come with that. We advocate for a holistic approach that is led by local communities. A blueprint for the development of such programmes needs to be established that uses the experiences of those in organisations such as the AFU and in the arts community. The use of educational and creative music workshops is clearly beneficial to the well-being of both age groups but a holistic approach requires methods/interventions that go beyond the artificial settings of such workshops.

From a research perspective, a longitudinal period of data collection that draws insights on how music is used as a resource is needed. For example, there is a generational shift in the medium of consumption. Evolving music technologies were a source of learning in the workshops but also proved to be useful in framing the everyday experiences of both age groups as evidenced in the diary and interview data. As expected the younger age group predominantly listened to music via contemporary streaming applications and other mediums that provide an almost infinite choice of music and a freedom of mobility when listening. Although, most of the OA sample accessed music via radio, vinyl or CD, there is evidence of an increasing adoption of more contemporary digital mediums, particularly YouTube. This changes the dynamics of music consumption and provides more scope for researchers to gain insight into the everyday music experiences of both age groups. Further, it can theoretically benefit both groups if they have increased access to music that they can use as a resource for well-being.

Does this mean that social policy should encourage initiatives that educate older adults to use new music consumption technologies? Recent research on streaming (see Sinclair et al., 2019) suggests that increased choice and mobility potentially lessens the emotional tension and hence enjoyment that comes with music consumption. There are also privacy and surveillance issues that come with using music streaming technologies (see Drott, 2018) that can potentially decrease the well-being of groups that are vulnerable. This indicates that regardless, OAs in particular need to be educated about music technologies, both the good and bad aspects. Enhancing funding for local community initiatives, like the intergenerational workshops employed in this research is a good place to start. However, further research which examines how these groups use such technologies and the impact on well-being over a longer time period is required to tease out how to maximise their potential to increase well-being.

## Note

1. Transition year is a specialised year that sits between a junior and senior cycle of state examinations at second level in Ireland. This year places emphasis on extra-curricular activities such as drama and music, life-skills (e.g. cooking), and the social and vocational development of young people.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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