Never mind the generation gap?

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/volume/3758>

DOI: 10.4000/volume.3758

ISSN: 1950-568X

Publisher

Association Mélanie Seteun

Printed version

Date of publication: 30 December 2013

Number of pages: 229-247

ISBN: 978-2-913169-34-0

ISSN: 1634-5495

Electronic reference

Helen Elizabeth Davies, "Never mind the generation gap? ", *Volume !* [Online], 10 : 1 | 2013, Online since 30 December 2015, connection on 24 August 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/volume/3758> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/volume.3758>

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

Music Listening in the Everyday Lives of Young Teenage Girls and Their Parents

par

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Abstract: The role of music listening in relationships between children and their parents is relatively under-researched, yet its significance emerged strongly from doctoral research investigating music in the everyday lives of young teenage girls. This mainly ethnographic research, undertaken in Merseyside, UK during 2003-2008, focused on activities such as acquiring, exchanging, listening to and performing music, as well as the musical preferences of the participants, their families and friends. This paper argues that access to technologies and spaces is just as likely as, and sometimes more likely than, music taste to form the basis of negotiations over power and control between young teenage girls and their parents in relation to music listening and identity in everyday life.

Keywords: *everyday life – family– identity – listening – peer-to-peer/filessharing – technologies – youth*

Résumé : Le rôle de l'écoute musicale dans les rapports entre enfants et parents est relativement mal défriché par la recherche, et pourtant, plusieurs recherches doctorales récentes traitant de la musique dans la vie quotidienne de jeunes adolescentes ont souligné son importance. Ce travail de nature essentiellement ethnographique, élaboré à Merseyside (Grande-Bretagne) entre 2003 et 2008, se concentra sur des activités telles que l'acquisition, l'échange, l'écoute et la pratique de la musique, ainsi que sur les préférences musicales des participantes, de leurs familles et amis. Cet article défend l'idée que l'accès aux technologies et aux espaces joue un rôle tout aussi important – si ce n'est plus – que le goût musical dans les négociations quotidiennes entre adolescentes et parents autour des questions de pouvoir, de contrôle, d'écoute musical et d'identité.

Mots-clés : *vie quotidienne - famille - identité - écoute - peer-to-peer/filessharing - technologies - jeunesse*

The significance of music listening in relationships between young teenage girls and their parents emerged strongly from my doctoral research although, in popular music studies, this area of music listening is relatively under-researched:

“Little is written about the domestic struggle and negotiation over popular music between members of the family. While nearly all of us can remember conflict with our parents over our choice of music, the literature is nearly mum on this subject.” (Valdivia with Bettivia, 1999: 430)

Valdivia's focus here is on music taste. This paper argues, however, that access to technologies and spaces are just as likely as, and sometimes more likely than, music taste to form the basis of negotiations over power and control between young teenage girls and their parents in relation to music listening in everyday life.

Undertaken in Merseyside, UK during 2003-2008, my research investigated music in the everyday lives of girls aged between twelve and fourteen. Rather than a study of a single social group or environment however, the research involved a range of different participants and environments. Using primarily ethnographic research methods, my research focused on eliciting information relating to everyday music practices: acquiring, exchanging, listening to and performing music, as well as the musical preferences of the participants, their families and friends. The discussion in this paper is based on data gathered from participant observation research with my daughter and her friends (2003-2006) and schools-based small group discussion research (2007-2008). The par-

ticipants and methods are described briefly below, with pseudonyms used for the schools and all participants, with the exception of my daughter Ruth whose anonymity, because of her relationship with me, cannot be maintained.

The initial phase of my research focused on music in the everyday lives of Ruth and her two closest friends Fran and Amy, when they were aged between twelve and fourteen. All three girls are white British, with parents indigenous to the Merseyside area. Each of the girls was the only child living at home, Ruth with me, and Fran and Amy each with both of their parents. Ruth and Amy both lived in small terraced houses and Fran in a small flat, all in a suburb of South Liverpool. Participant observation requires immersion over a length of time in the culture of a group in order to learn how they live their lives and their beliefs about themselves. As the mother of a girl in a closely-knit small friendship group, I was immersed, to a certain extent, in their culture. In their everyday lives, young teenage girls are not only involved with each other, and so I was privileged to share many of their spaces and experiences. Inevitably, however, the cultural differences between adults and children meant there were boundaries I could not cross, as much of the interaction that bonds friends together takes place in a private space that, rightly, cannot be penetrated.

The small discussion group research took place in three secondary schools during 2007 and 2008. The ‘Mixed Comp’ school was a multi-faith, community school of around 900 students, situated just south of the city centre in an area of relatively high economic deprivation. Most students were

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

white British, with about one fifth black British and a tenth from East Africa and Asia. Most students had very low attainment on entry, forty-five students were at an early stage of English language acquisition and about one-third of the students had special educational needs (Ofsted, 2003: i). Three girls took part in the discussions at this school: Lianna, Tallulah and Alisha, all aged twelve. Lianna is white British and an only child, and Tallulah and Alisha were both of mixed heritage and from large families. The girls were clearly good friends with each other both in and outside of school. Each of the girls seemed equally keen to get away from the challenges and irritations of the school curriculum and participate in the discussions, which took place during the school day in a small room off a busy corridor. The single sex Church of England “Girls’ High” school was a similar size but had a different profile, with most pupils entering the school with broadly average primary school results, the number of pupils with special educational needs below average, around 10% of the pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, and no pupils at an early stage of learning English (Ofsted, 2004: 1). I met with two girls after school in a large sixth form common room. Emma was twelve years old and white British and Charlotte was thirteen and white, although she indicated an Irish heritage through descriptions of her family’s music tastes and practices. Emma and Charlotte were best friends and spent most of their time together both in and outside of school. The “Catholic High”, a mixed school in a socially and economically deprived metropolitan borough about six miles northeast of central Liverpool, was

“a larger than average secondary school” (Ofsted, 2008), with almost all pupils of white British heritage, and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities above average (*Ibid.*). The sessions took place during lunchtime in the office of the deputy head teacher. The four girls who participated, Bethany, Lucy, Rachel and Olivia, were aged twelve or thirteen, and all white British, although Olivia, like Charlotte, mentioned music that suggested Irish heritage. Of these four girls, it seemed that Lucy, Bethany and Olivia were the more economically privileged, whereas Rachel, from a single parent family, and with more siblings, was less so. The use of group discussions with small groups of friends in their school environments adheres closely to the “planned discussion group” method. According to O’Reilly (2005), this method typically involves a small, naturally occurring group of people who already know each other, and is conducted in a setting with which the participants are familiar, with the researcher more likely to learn from spontaneous interaction, rather than controlling or directing the discussion (O’Reilly, 2005: 135). I attended each school between three and five times, and the discussions lasted between forty and ninety minutes. All the discussions were recorded and transcribed.

As Felski (1999) points out, “Everyday life is the most self-evident, yet the most puzzling of ideas” (Felski, 1999: 15). Del Negro and Berger (2004) argue against essentialist interpretations of the term, suggesting instead that what constitutes everyday life depends on how it is interpreted within particular conditions created by a convergence of contextual, ideological and economic

factors. In the context of this paper, therefore, 'everyday life' is understood to involve personal experience, direct social relationships, and the ordinary experiences and routines of life. My representation of music in the everyday lives of the girls in my research comprises my own observations and their accounts of their musical practices and activities in their homes, cars and schools. Consequently, the representation of everyday life in this paper is a construct, created by both myself and the girls at the interface between my observations, enquiries and interpretations, and their activities, responses and explanations.

Music listening in the everyday lives of the young girls in my research was not limited to the audible. Music video has been integral to the consumption of popular music since the rise of MTV in the 1980s and, as Sexton observes, "digital technologies increase the importance of the music video" (2010: 99). It is normative for music listening, then, to involve the eyes as well as the ears. This paper, however, uses the term "music listening" to signify music consumption in a broad sense, as investigating the distinctions and relationships between the auditory and visual levels of music is beyond its scope. Further, due to the time span of my research and the pace of development of the technologies used in music listening, the account of everyday music listening in this paper is necessarily historical.

The discussion in this paper is premised on the notion that identities are socially constructed, maintained and negotiated; and music, as "social practice and process" (Cohen, 1993: 123), plays an important role in this identity work. Social

relationships, then, are fundamental to the ways music is used and understood, and the personal and familiar relationships the girls in my research had with the people in their everyday lives played a central role in their experiences of music. Within their families, although relationships with siblings were significant for some of the girls, the relationships they had with their parents (and, in one case, grandparent) seemed to be the most important with regard to the role of music. In the liminal phase of young teenagerhood, the influence of friends and peers becomes increasingly important, and separation and independence from parents begins; yet material reliance upon them is inevitable. My research found that parents facilitated their daughters' music experiences in numerous ways, providing technologies with which they could access and listen to music, and spaces in which to do this: taking their daughters to concerts and paying for music lessons and musical instruments. As well as this, their music preferences were probably the first to which the girls were exposed. The role of music in negotiations of relationships with parents, therefore, was significant for these girls in early teenagerhood as they undertook crucial identity work. Born argues for the importance of an awareness of the "multiple musical identifications or subject positions to which individuals are susceptible as producers and consumers", because otherwise:

"we cannot address the potential disjunctures and conflicts between individual and collective musical identities, the way that cultural expectations and norms, or dominant musical discourses, may be in tension with individual identities and may exert powerful pressures of musical subjectification." (2000: 32)

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

While this statement clearly has a broad socio-cultural application, ‘cultural expectations and norms’ also prevail at the micro-level of family life. Many of the girls used strategies involving music-related behaviours and tastes to negotiate an individual identity relative to that of their parents and the collective family, and music listening practices were central among these.

My research, for mainly pragmatic methodological reasons that are not discussed here, focuses on girls. While gender is clearly a crucial identity factor, Nayak and Kehily (2008) rightly argue that studies of gender need to take account of both femininities and masculinities, as gender is a relational concept. Therefore, rather than analysing the everyday music listening experiences of girls from a specifically gendered perspective, this paper instead offers an account of their experience, as a contribution to work aiming to redress the perceived “gender imbalance characteristic of cultural studies of music and everyday life” (DeNora, 2000: 48).

Music and the “generation gap”

In the popular imagination, the role of music in relationships between parents and children is often characterised in terms of a generation gap. In one of the few scholarly considerations of this topic, Valdivia worries about:

“the potentially distancing generation gap which might occur over the ... terrain of popular music between my daughter and me ... How do we share a home without constant struggle?” (Valdivia with Bettivia, 1999: 429)

Sharing domestic space with maturing offspring seems to lead almost inevitably to musical disagreements. These conflicts result not only from the fact that the music may be mutually disagreeable but also from physical proximity – the necessity of sharing spaces in which to listen to music. The idea of generations having distinct cultures, however, is, as Straw points out, “a rather recent one, a product of two long-term developments” (2001, 66). The first of these was the profound social change resulting from ‘the decline of agricultural life and the mass migration of people to cities’ in the nineteenth century. For the first time, schools were organised into classes consisting of people of the same age, prompting the development of “an ever-increasing sense of generational identification, the belief that one’s cultural experiences are shared most intensely with others of one’s age”. As Straw points out, this “intra-generational solidarity” was strengthened further, by “new, mostly electronic, media like radio and the cinema”, ensuring that ‘our collective movement through the lifecycle is interwoven with the turnover of songs, movies, books and historical events’ (*Ibid.*).

The concept of youth culture, developed in the 1950s, incorporated the assumption that teenagers, fuelled by increased post-war economic autonomy to express “their own distinct values and separate ideals”, were “involved in some form of revolt against their elders” (Shuker, 2002: 195), with controversial music styles both expressing and inspiring the rebellion. However, as Goodwin observed in the late 1980s, the development of digital technologies has forced a change in “our ideas about generation”. From back catalogue reissues

on CD, to the use of sampling to “deconstruct old texts”, the linearity of the unfolding sequence of cultural experiences, ensuring our life soundtrack is similar only to that of our contemporaries, has been disrupted: “It isn’t just that pop’s audience has grown older ... The essential change is that ‘older’ music has become contemporary for audiences of *all* ages.” (Goodwin, 1990: 259) Compared with the children of parents whose music tastes were shaped by pre-rock sounds, then, the music taste of children today is, arguably, closer to that of their parents. While inter-generational music preferences undoubtedly still differ, the biggest gap is in relation not to music taste, but rather to the ways in which music is acquired, shared, consumed and displayed using new technologies; “intra-generational solidarity” (Straw, 2001: 66) is compounded by a technological rather than a musical revolution.

Technologies for listening to music

Music listening in the everyday lives of the girls who participated in my research was enabled by a wide range of technologies, including personal and laptop computers connected to the internet, radio/CD players, televisions and DVD players, mobile phones, and personal music players. The provision and situating of technologies was a significant way in which parents and other family members both facilitated and controlled the girls’ music listening. For example, Ruth’s personal computer, situated in her bedroom, connected to an amplifier and loudspeakers, was the main site of her music listening and acquisition. Her

friends Fran and Amy both used a computer connected to the internet for music listening, but these were situated, at their parents’ behest, in the less private space of the family living room. Of the girls from the Catholic High school, Bethany was relatively privileged, having a television and DVD player in her bedroom, and her own laptop that she used to listen to music downloaded from the internet. In contrast, although she had a CD player in her bedroom, Rachel’s laptop was broken, because her younger sister had dropped it in the bath, and so she did not have an iPod, because her mum thought there was no point as she had no computer.

The girls’ access to resources for music listening, however, was not limited to those their parents provided. During the time span of the field research for this study, from 2003 to 2008, it is arguable that the girls’ dependency upon parents for access to music was declining, as, through their use of new technologies, they were increasingly able to acquire music in ways that bypassed the need for economic capital. During my schools-based research in 2007, the most prevalent practice among the girls was the sharing of music via Bluetooth on their mobile phones. In line with the practicalities of their daily routines, personal music was used to accompany journeys to and from school, to create spatial boundaries in school breaks, and to relieve boredom in lessons. The multifunctionality of the mobile phone clearly enhanced its convenience and importance for the girls during the school day. Lianna, Tallulah and Alisha all agreed that the phone was better than an MP3 player, because, as Alisha explained, “you

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

can ring people on your phone and listen to your music and take pictures". Emma and Charlotte frequently bluetoothed songs, both to each other and to other friends, and Rachel, Bethany, Lucy and Olivia kept each other's music collections up to date by bluetoothing songs on a daily basis, as Rachel explained:

"Well every time a new song comes out, if like Bethany's got it on her phone and I like it I go 'Bethany send us that' and then Lucy'll want and then Olivia'll want it. And then Olivia'll get a new song and it gets passed round, and so everyone will end up with it by the end of the day."

As long as they were provided with the minimum requirement, a mobile phone, which all of them were, and access to the internet, which all of them except for Rachel had, acquisition through peer-to-peer filesharing and bluetoothing enabled them to listen to music and build music collections independently of parental resources.

Domestic spaces for listening to music

Similar to their diminishing need for parentally provided technologies, the prevalence of the girls' use of portable personal media players suggests the need for spaces in which to listen to music aloud was also decreasing. Nonetheless, domestic sites were central to the girls' negotiations of their relationships with their parents using music. The categorisation of the car as a domestic space, Bull explains, 'has a long anecdotal history in cultural theory', based on an understanding of "the automobile as metaphor for the dominant West-

ern values of individualism and private property" (2003: 358). As Sibley points out, both the family home and car are domestic spaces in which "the use of space and time" are under the control of parents, and children attempt to "carve out" their own spaces and times, potentially leading to considerable conflict (1995: 129). In order to understand children's experiences of "home", Sibley identifies the need to focus on "power relations, the way power is expressed in family interactions and played out in the spaces of home" (*Ibid.*: 130). Music, as DeNora notes, can play a significant role in this, as "control over music in social settings is a source of social power ... there are occasions when music is perceived as something to be resisted" (2000: 20). Valdivia anticipated a "constant struggle" over popular music within the domestic terrain, as her daughter's autonomy increased with her growing maturity and their music tastes and practices diverged (Valdivia with Bettavia, 1999: 429). As Frith observes:

"If music empowers people, if it is a means of articulating physical and cultural and ideological identity by occupying sonic territory, then it can only do so at the expense of other people's use of that territory, other people's sense of identity. Musical empowerment for one group of people – teenagers, say – may mean musical disempowerment for another group, grown-ups." (2004)

The ways in which music listening is used to construct boundaries and claim spaces is closely involved with negotiations of the "potential disjunctures and conflicts" (Born, 2000: 32) between self and social identities within families. For the girls in my research, the car and home were two key environments in which such negotiations took place.

Music listening in the car

Since the development of the car radio by Motorola in 1930 (Motorola Solutions Inc., 2012), music has played an integral role in the driving experience. The massive market in car audio conflicts with various studies warning drivers of the dangers of listening to distractingly loud and/or fast music (e.g. Brodsky, 2001; Dalton, *et al.*, 2007). The experience of moving forward at speed, viewing the outside world receding on all sides from the insularity of the enclosed private space, takes on an intense aesthetic quality when accompanied by music. Unlike the home however, where it is often easier for music listeners to find separate spaces to indulge their individual tastes, the car is a single space in which family members are enclosed together. Control of the interior environment of the car lies in the hands of the drivers, as “car drivers control the social mix in their car just like homeowners control those visiting their home” (Urry, 1999: 16-17 cited in Bull, 2003: 359). Unless occupants create individuated listening experiences by using personal music players, the music played on the car stereo is the music everyone hears, whether they like it or not. Despite the twofold power of the adult as both driver and parent, however, the importance of music listening to the girls in this study engendered a number of strategies through which they negotiated control of the car soundscape. From incorporation of the adult driver’s music taste, to complete disregard for it, there was a range of subtle concessions and direct challenges that constituted a power struggle over the sounds that filled the shared family car,

reflecting the extent to which self and social identities merged or conflicted.

Sometimes the music listened to in the family car was controlled completely by parents. When Bethany travelled in the family car with her dad, for example, they listened only to bands he liked or to his choice of radio station:

B: My dad plays Beautiful South, Simply Red, The Housemartins.

H: So when you’re in the car with your dad do you always listen to the music he likes?

B: Yeah, or we have Smooth FM on the radio or whatever.

H: Do you ever put on any of your stuff in the car?

B: No.”

Similarly, the music in Charlotte’s family car was chosen by her parents. Her mum controlled the radio station, and the family’s favourite type of music, Irish folk, was played on CD:

C: My mum only lets us put Smooth Radio on in the car. We’re not allowed to put Juice on or anything.

H: What kind of thing do they play on Juice?

C: It’s all sort of club music.

H: So your mum doesn’t like that then?

C: No, we’re only allowed one channel, and if there isn’t that then there’s Irish CDs as well in the car. It can be a bit annoying when you hear it all the time.”

Clearly, for Emma and Charlotte, their favourite type of music, the club music played on Juice FM, would have been their preferred listening in Charlotte’s family car. The music played in the car was “annoying” both because it was played so frequently, and because it was enforced listening. Emma and Charlotte often chose to listen to

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

Irish music when they were together at Charlotte's house; however, it was annoying in the car precisely because it was not their choice.

For Rachel too the choice of music played in her uncle's car was a source of irritation:

R: I normally get lifts off my uncle and he plays all the like, I've forgot what it's called, the violin players and the orchestra.

H: Like classical stuff?

R: Yeah that's the word I was looking for, classical.

H: What do you think of that then?

R: It's nice and, it cools, calms you down and makes like you feel dead light, but it's just ... horrible."

Her ambivalence towards the classical music her uncle played in the car suggests confusion. She seemed to enjoy the sensations it evoked, and described them in a precise and insightful way; however, she concluded with a rejection of the music. In our discussions, Rachel placed a lot of value on her knowledge of music, contributing music information to the discussions to a striking extent. Her discomfort with classical music, despite its pleasurable affects, perhaps resulted from her unfamiliarity with and lack of understanding of the style of music, as well as her lack of control over the car soundscape.

In contrast to these adult-controlled listening experiences, some of the girls offered other accounts of negotiating music listening in the car. Ruth enjoyed drives with Amy as Amy's mum had a car with a CD player, and allowed the girls to play the music of their choice at high volume. Ruth's memories of these experiences remain among the most powerful of her friendship with

Amy. Lianna, who spent a lot of time being cared for by her nan, described how she controlled music listening in her nan's car:

H: So when you listen to it in the car, do you listen to the music you want to play?

L: Yeah.

H: And your nan doesn't mind you putting your music on?

L: I just put it on anyway.

H: Does she like it?

L: I just put it on anyway."

Lianna's insistence that she played her own music "anyway", whether her nan liked it or not, suggests that her nan conceded control of the music played in the car to Lianna, or at least that Lianna interpreted it that way. It seemed important to Lianna, not only that she played her own music, but also that her nan's opinion of it was irrelevant. If Lianna perceived the car as a place where control of the music is something to be fought over, she represented herself as having won this battle before it had even begun.

Although the car is a domestic space, it is, unlike the home, a semi-private space: "both one to look out from and to be looked into ... simultaneously private and public." (Bull, 2003: 367) Playing one's music of choice when travelling in the car is empowering not only as a means of confirming and expressing self identity by "occupying sonic territory" (Frith, 2004) within the space of the car, but also as a way of displaying self identity to the passing world by occupying the sonic space surrounding the car. The potency of this experience is the key both to Ruth's vivid positive memories of

travelling with Amy and to Lianna's insistence on commanding the sonic environment of her nan's car. Charlotte's dissatisfaction with the repetitive playing of Irish music in the family car, despite sometimes choosing to play it at home, perhaps resulted from a desire to experience this music in private rather than in public. As Born observes:

"rather than musical subjectivity being fixed and unitary, several musical "identities" may inhabit the same individual. These are expressed in different musical tastes and practices, some of them in tension with each other or in contradiction with other parts of the self." (2000: 33)

Charlotte's preferred public musical identity was that expressed by club music rather than Irish folk, and the experience of travelling with music brought the disjuncture between her family/collective musical identity and her self identity into focus.

Listening to music in the car is not only important when travelling, as Tallulah and Alisha explained:

T: Yeah, when I'm bored me and my mate just go and sit in the car and play music.

H: Why don't you just listen to it in the house?

T: Cos it's quiet.

A: Cos it's not as much fun in the house as it is when you're in the car.

H: Why is that?

T: Cos it's quiet when you're with your mates on your own listening to music.

A: And you can lock the doors in the car but if you lock the doors in the house then your mum or your dad can't get in.

T: And if they're hovering downstairs then we don't have to hear it like when we're listening to music upstairs."

The car was a space away from parents and siblings, yet safely annexed to the home, where the girls could play their own music in a quiet enclosed environment. Alisha's description of it being more 'fun' than the house captures the thrill of occupying exclusively a space that is usually under adult control. Tallulah mentioned twice that she listened to music in the car with her friends, and it is perhaps unlikely that she would have done this on her own. As well as offering an escape from the distractions or boredom of the home, the car was a place to be seen and heard listening to music, and there was undoubtedly an element of display in this practice.

Music listening in the home

It seems important for young teenage girls to have a place in which to spend time alone or with friends listening to music. The bedroom occupies a position of mythical importance in accounts of female youth cultures (McRobbie and Garber, 1991; Baker, 2001, 2004; Bloustein, 2003), although more recent research identifies the bedroom as an important space for both boys and girls (e.g. Lincoln, 2004, 2005), and music plays a central role in the activities that take place there:

"Teenagers play music in their bedrooms. For them the bedroom, which throughout their teenage years is a site of multiple cultural and social articulations and expressions, is often the first space in which they are able to exert some control, be creative and make that space their own." (Lincoln, 2005, 400)

For Tallulah and Alisha, however, the enclosed security of the car parked outside the house was

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

perhaps the most private available space to which they could withdraw from the noise and activity of the family home. Although neither of them explicitly revealed it, taking account of the number of siblings these girls had (five and four respectively), and the socio-economic deprivation of the area in which they lived, it is unlikely that either of them enjoyed the luxury of a bedroom of her own. As Sibley (1995) points out:

“Having one’s own space is important in developing autonomy and this distinguishes the middle-class child who is part of a small family from one with many siblings or living in poverty.” (Sibley, 1995, 133)

Rachel similarly shared a bedroom with her younger sister, a situation that sometimes caused conflict when Rachel wanted the space to herself. The rest of the girls in my research, however, as they were an only child or only daughter, did have a bedroom of their own. This did not mean, however, that they used this space exclusively, or even mostly, for listening to music, either alone or with friends. The size of the room seemed to be a factor, but more importantly, the technology in the room was greatly influential on the amount of time spent and type of activities undertaken in the bedroom.

As previously discussed, the girls were largely dependent upon their parents, not only for the technologies they used for music listening, but also for the spaces in which to listen. Parents were also able to exert control over which technologies were situated in which domestic spaces. Despite the normalising effects of its prevalence, the debate surrounding the provision of televisions in children’s bedrooms continues (e.g. Ross,

2009). This particular anxiety has been superseded, however, by graver concerns about the siting of computers in children’s bedrooms, from their role in the further fragmentation of family life, to the dangers of unsupervised online activities. More than any other technology, it has been argued, the “provision of computing facilities in children’s bedrooms has the potential to change family life and thus contemporary meanings of home” (Holloway and Valentine, 2001, 570). Computers were central to the music acquisition and consumption practices of many of the girls in this study, and their position in the home was significant. Ruth’s computer was in her bedroom and she spent as much time as she possibly could in her bedroom using her computer. All the music she listened to was stored on her computer hard drive, including music files downloaded from the Internet, and albums uploaded from CD. Sharing a home with Ruth, I was able to observe how much of her free time was spent constructing websites devoted to her passionate interest in anime, communicating with friends online, and writing stories and poems which she sent to various online writers’ clubs. Most of these activities were carried out synchronically, accompanied by a continuous soundtrack of music. Ruth’s relationship with her computer seemed almost symbiotic, and the music that emanated from it often seemed to me to be an accurate reflection of her mood. Sometimes, in shared situations such as preparing a meal together in the kitchen, we listened to music we both liked, and most often this was the shared music that originated from Ruth.

For both Fran and Amy, the computer was similarly central to their everyday experiences and uses of music but, unlike Ruth, they used a computer that was situated in the family living room. Fran used her CD player to listen to music in her bedroom, and listened to downloaded music or online radio on the computer using headphones. Amy's bedroom audio equipment was limited to a radio/CD player, and like Fran, she consequently chose to spend most of her leisure time at home in the family living room, where she could listen to music and communicate online using the computer. Both Fran and Amy also had satellite television, and watched music channels on TV in their living rooms. For these two girls, then, unlike for Ruth, the bedroom was not the main site of their music listening activities. The convergence of communication, creativity and music consumption in a single machine determined the space in which they spent their time: either alone or with friends, they chose to be with the technology. If this necessitated sharing the space with parents, they modified their listening practices by using headphones. This was also the case for Emma, who explained:

"If there's no-one in the house then I'm ok to just listen to it out loud but sometimes if my mum's watching something or if my mum's doing work on the other computer then I'll have to wear earphones then."

The desire to play their music loud and aloud was mentioned by several girls, who had to wait until they had the house to themselves before they could indulge in this particular pleasure:

"H: So would you rather have the music playing so it fills the room then?

Tallulah: Yeah I have it on full blast when I'm tidying up when my mum's out, cos I don't like tidying up when there's anyone else in the house, cos I like my own space and time."

In contrast to Tallulah's music listening to accompany household chores, Lianna used the opportunity of time in the house alone to dance to her music: "Normally I dance in my nan's living room when my nan's at work and I'm the only one in the house." The importance of having the whole house to experience music is acknowledged by Valdivia's daughter and co-author:

"Now when nobody else is at home, I take all my CD's downstairs to the living room and I play them at high volume, really high volume. So I can feel the bass when I am lying on the couch. I usually listen to Aerosmith, Guns 'n' Roses, Smashing Pumpkins, Live, Marilyn Manson, and anything else that can be played obnoxiously loud. I also play my opera CD's really loud because that's the way opera is supposed to be. And so nobody can hear me sing." (Valdivia and Bettivia, 1999, 435)

This practice demonstrates how music listening and music taste converge in conflicts over self and social identities, as the music chosen to be played aloud in the privacy of an empty house can be music that is preferred for singing to, or dancing in Lianna's case, and can also be music that other family members particularly dislike.

Music listening and music taste

The domestic and schools discussion group research revealed in some detail the role of music taste in the relationships between the girls and their parents, suggesting the extent to which self

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

and social identities were aligned. Music played an important role in the relationship between me and Ruth. She liked some of the music I listened to, and copied some of my CDs onto her computer, incorporating particular songs into her playlists. Hearing a song of 'mine' coming from her room gave me a strange yet pleasurable jolt, like meeting a friend unexpectedly and momentarily not recognising them, as I tried to identify the familiar sounds among the unfamiliar. Of course, many of the unfamiliar sounds emanating from Ruth's room soon became familiar with repeated hearing and, if I particularly liked what I heard, I bought it on CD, and recorded it onto cassette tapes to listen to in my car. This practice emphasised the gap between our technological worlds, but despite the differences in the ways we used technology to acquire and listen to music, there were similarities between the music listening experiences we created for ourselves. Engrossed in online communication or creative activities in the private and personalised space of her bedroom, Ruth enveloped herself in her playlist cocoon; while I, focused on driving, alone in my car, immersed myself in a soundscape of the same music. Our music tastes were closely aligned, and we talked about this shared music, discussing lyrics, identifying songs and parts of songs we particularly liked, exchanging information about the bands, and we went to several concerts together.

Amy's parents, similar in age to me, both had well-defined musical preferences. Her mum liked 1980s new romantic music and her dad liked rock, particularly 1990s grunge. Both her parents played their music in the house, and Amy

was familiar with it. Before leaving junior school, Amy enjoyed chart music by pop groups such as S Club 7 and Steps, and female pop/rock artists Pink and Avril Lavigne, and her mum listened to this music with her enthusiastically. At the start of the research, however, as Amy became more interested in rock, her music taste became more aligned with that of her dad. Railton (2001) observes that "The pleasures of 'pop' are something we must learn to grow out of" (Railton, 2001, 330) and Amy certainly seemed to see her evolving music taste as a progression away from pop, as she told me, "I used to be a different person, but then I liked rock and I became a different person. But I think I like rock because I thought, 'OK, move along'."

Both Emma and Charlotte talked in a mostly positive way about their families and their music taste. Emma seemed to have a well-ordered home life, and was supported by her parents in a range of activities, such as attending a Christian youth club, swimming and going to the gym. Although she did not mention her dad's music taste, the music her mum played had a strong influence on her, leading her to like a lot of older music:

E: I like the Bee Gees and Queen and the Beatles and stuff.

H: Where do you hear all this sort of music then?

E: Well my mum's got loads and loads of records upstairs and like they've never been touched or anything and she's got like the Monkees and the Beatles and stuff so I've heard a lot from her, and she has like the CDs and stuff like that, so I've just got to hear it and like it."

She appreciated the broader perspective and wider musical knowledge this gave her:

"H: Are you quite glad then that you've been able to listen to that older music as well?

E: Yeah cos like you've got more knowledge of music cos you don't just know about modern day music you can connect to stuff from other years."

Further, she and Charlotte agreed that older music is often better than contemporary music, and they both had strong opinions about what makes older music better:

"E: I think I prefer the music from before, like back in the years because they played with just instruments and, I'm not being mean, but they actually could sing because some people now, they're singers and they've got loads of technology to make them sound really good haven't they?

C: Like Madonna.

E: Yeah. But if they sing live they're not that good. But people like Queen and the Monkees and that, they really did have talent. But some people don't now, they just use all these weird voices and it makes them sound really good but when they play live they're rubbish.

C: Or sometimes they mime when they're live don't they?

E: And back ages ago they didn't mime, they actually sang.

C: And they played all their instruments and stuff, now it's just done by computer, computerised music."

The belief expressed in this exchange that, unlike modern day music, older music involves authentic performances given by genuinely talented artists, could easily have been borrowed directly from the girls' parents, along with the old records. However, Emma did not enjoy all the older music her mum played: it still had to fit with her desire for upbeat lively music, and she drew the line at Cliff

Richard: "Mum sometimes plays stuff like Cliff Richard and stuff, and I'm not really into the slow-ish songs, like I really like quite a fast beat."

Charlotte's identification with the Irish music played by her family at home was clear, despite her misgivings about the repeated playing of it in the family car. She had been with her dad to see The Dubliners perform, and often chose to play Irish music when Emma came to her house:

"H: So do you put that music on when Emma comes round or is it just playing in the house anyway when you're around?

Ch: Sometimes it is but sometimes I put it on myself."

Of the four girls who participated in the discussions at the Catholic High school, Bethany was the most unreservedly positive about both her family life and her parents' music taste. Her home life seemed comfortable and close and she reported spending most of the weekend with her family, not seeing her school friends at all. As discussed earlier, she enjoyed the music played in the family car, which was usually her dad's choice. Indeed, she grew to like it to the extent that, as Rachel pointed out, she was comfortable to engage actively with the music by singing along to it:

"B: Yeah, or we have Smooth FM on the radio or whatever. Like old songs but cos I'm used to listening to that now cos we always have it on and the same songs are on so they're good.

R: She sings to them.

H: You quite like them?

B: Yeah.

R: Do you sing along to them in the car?

B: Yeah."

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

This suggests that the frequent exposure to the songs played in the car influenced Bethany to such an extent that she had incorporated her parents' music taste into her own. Her acceptance of older music is demonstrated both by her active engagement through the practice of singing along, and, in the same way as Emma and Charlotte, by her expressed opinion that it is sometimes better than contemporary pop:

"Yeah cos my mum was born in the 70s and was like a teenager in the 80s and like she likes songs and she's got the CDs at home when she cleans up and I'm getting used to them and they get catchy and you start like singing along to them. Sometimes the music in the 80s is better than like what it is now."

The correlation between the seemingly positive relationships enjoyed by Ruth, Amy, Emma, Charlotte and Bethany with their parents, and their liking for and incorporation of their parents' music taste into their own, suggests a relatively low level of disjuncture between the girls' self identities and the social identities they shared with their parents. Rachel's representation of her relationship with her mum, and her attitude towards her mum's music taste, however, was more complex. At our first meeting, Rachel told me that her mum was a "terrible singer", and liked "terrible music" such as the Jam, Elvis and REM. The next time we met, however, her description of her mum's taste in music was more positive:

"R: My mum has got a very mixed thing cos she likes Eminem and then she likes Elvis, but then she likes REM and OMD and Spandau Ballet and like Squeeze and just all the bands from the 80s, and the 60s, but she likes more from the 80s, she likes all them.

H: And what do you think of all that, do you like any of it?

R: I like Squeeze...I like the song 'Cool for cats', it's boss. My mum always puts it on while she's cleaning up so I always sing along to it upstairs cos she has it on like a hundred."

As with Bethany, Rachel's singing along to the music her mum played demonstrated her acceptance and incorporation of it into her own music taste. However, her continuing description of the domestic soundscape took on a tone of frustration and irritation as, in a reversal of the stereotypical generational roles, she complained about her mum's tendency to play her music loud:

"You're trying to sleep or something in the night and she puts it on to annoy you, or if you go to bed about six o'clock, cos normally I'm tired, and then she puts it on to wake you up and goes 'Why you're going to sleep? You'll get up about 12 o'clock and then you won't do nothing', like 'God alright'."

In contrast, Ruth's friend Fran seemed to have little in common with her parents in terms of music. Her mum enjoyed Merseybeat, the soundtrack of her own youth in 1960s Liverpool, and listened mostly to the music played on the local BBC radio station. Fran described this as "old music" and, in contrast to some of the other girls in this study, disliked it completely. Sometimes Fran's mum objected strongly to the music she listened to, for example the opening track on rapper Eminem's *Marshall Mathers LP* (2000), "Public Service Announcement 2000". While Fran was not actually prohibited from listening to the album, the numerous sexual obscenities in the lyrics of this track in particular caused her mum some consternation, and created a degree of tension between them for a while. Similarly,

Olivia depicted her relationship with her parents as mostly unsympathetic, with music being a key source of conflict:

H: So listening to music on the phone then, is this something you do in places other than in school?

O: Yeah, when I'm in the house my mum's like 'Get it off now.'

O: That 50 Cent song that was on the radio, it was boss and she turned it off."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, she expressed a mutual dislike of her mum's music taste: "When she's doing downstairs my mum, she puts all our Irish crap on and then, it's terrible." Olivia represented herself as being at odds with her parents in terms of her music listening and her music taste, and gave only hints of common ground between them. Despite her declared dislike of the music, her use of the possessive "our" in relation to the "Irish crap" her mum played, while clearly not as enthusiastic about it as Charlotte, suggested a shared sense of Irish identity represented by music.

As one of the girls astutely observed, on the *X Factor* "everyone sings an old song". For most of the girls in this study, popular music released up to fifty years before their birth was a familiar constituent of their everyday music listening. While the extent of inter-generational differences in technology use for acquiring and listening to music was no doubt significant, similarities between the music tastes of the girls and their parents were equally striking. The perception of some of them that "older music" was better in terms of musical skill and authenticity revealed a critical awareness of current pop practices, as well as a desire to align

themselves with the music tastes, and sometimes nostalgic viewpoints, of their parents. The extent to which the girls disavowed their parents' music taste, and their opinions about music, could be seen to indicate the degree to which they endeavoured to establish a self identity distinct from the social identity they shared with their parents.

Conclusion

Although based on a small sample, my research into the role of music listening in relationships between young teenage girls and their parents reveals interesting details of and shifts in everyday music practices. Unlike the stereotypical generation gap characterised by conflicts over music taste, my research suggests that music taste was not the primary site of conflict. Instead, negotiations over access to and ownership of technologies for acquiring, sharing and listening to music were sometimes more important in their relationships with their parents than were conflicts or debates over music taste. The girls were provided with a range of technologies for listening to music and were dependant largely on their parents for this provision. Domestic spaces in which to listen to music were important to the girls, and they negotiated access to and control over these in various ways. In the enclosed space of the family car, issues of music taste came into play as parents/carers exercised more or less control over the soundscape. Some girls used the car as an annexe to the home, listening to their music with friends in the car parked outside the house, taking control of this usually adult dominated space to occupy

Never Mind the Generation Gap?

and display themselves in a semi-private space. For others, their own bedroom was a key space in which to listen to music, but parental control over the situating of crucial technologies, specifically a computer connected to the internet, determined how much time they spent in their bedrooms listening to music. Commonly, the girls chose to be with the internet in order to communicate, play, work, and acquire and listen to music, even if this entailed sharing a space with parents.

Throughout the period of my research, the use of peer-to-peer filesharing and bluetoothing enabled increasingly widespread independent music

acquisition and sharing. Similarly, the proliferation of personal devices such as mobile phones and MP3 players obviated the need for spaces for music listening aloud, as headphone use became more prevalent and normative. In terms of the generation gap then, while differences and similarities in music taste may contribute in varying degrees to negotiations over self and social identities in relationships between young teenage girls and their parents, young people's growing technological autonomy suggests that, in their everyday music listening practices, they are becoming increasingly independent of parental control.

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Never Mind the Generation Gap?

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