

ESRC National Centre for

Research
RMethods



Sounding out: Using music elicitation in qualitative research

Nicola Allett

Morgan Centre, University of Manchester

March 2010

ESRC National Centre for Research Methods

NCRM Working Paper Series

04/10

Realities

Part of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods



Working Paper #14

Sounding Out: Using music elicitation in qualitative research

Nicola Allett

Morgan Centre, University of Manchester

March 2010

Realities, Sociology, Arthur Lewis Building, University of Manchester,

Manchester M13 9PL

+44 (0) 161 275 0265

realities@manchester.ac.uk

www.manchester.ac.uk/realities

Author contact details

Nicola Allett
Morgan Centre,
Sociology,
Arthur Lewis Building,
University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL

nicola.allett@manchester.ac.uk

Abstract

Drawing on various media for elicitation within qualitative social research may generate thick and rich descriptions and discussion. This article introduces music as a valuable research tool and argues that music can serve to elicit data in relation to areas, topics, and feelings that typically remain unspoken or that are difficult to uncover in a conventional qualitative interview. The article considers the existing use of music methods and presents the potential benefits of using music and, in particular, music elicitation for qualitative research. It then presents a practical example of music elicitation in use, through considering a piece of research conducted with Extreme Metal fans. In doing so, the article addresses key considerations and methodological issues that may arise from using the method.

Keywords: music elicitation, qualitative interviews, group research, memory, feeling.

Introduction

Music is an under exploited resource in social science research; yet it could be used in innovative ways to benefit methodology. This article considers the use of music as an elicitation method. Drawing on my experience of using music elicitation in group interviews to research fans' investments in and attachments to Extreme Metal music and subculture, I consider the particular benefits of using the method and some associated methodological issues that arose. In this article, I want to suggest that the music listening experience has valuable use as a means to elicit responses from research respondents. Music has associated feelings (DeNora, 2000), memories and experiences (Anderson, 2004; Keightley, 2009). By using music elicitation within the qualitative interview setting one may gain access to the feelings or sensory experiences of the respondent and his/her affective memories. I suggest, therefore, that music elicitation offers a route to gather data that remains largely unspoken in the conventional qualitative interview. This could be data about a range of topics and experiences that are not only about music, but also such things as relationships, everyday and personal life and social memory.

Music is present in our daily lives and, for many people, music is linked to personal taste, leisure choices and identity. Music actively features in people's lives as music fans and is passively experienced in shops, via advertisements or media as consumers. Our connections, responses and uses of music are highly individual and personalized. We all have a favourite song or piece of music and our reasons are likely to be varied and dynamic. We may value the virtuosity of the musicians, the lyrical excellence of the song-smith, the memories that music conjures up, or the way it makes us feel (both in relation to its affect on our bodies and our brains). Music may also disrupt everyday life in a negative way. Many of us would recognise the feeling of discomfort music creates when it invades our personal space or when it is perceived as unfamiliar noise. These variations of taste, reactions and feelings in our everyday and connected experiences of music indicate that music has a significant presence in our lives. Music could, therefore, be a useful resource within qualitative methodologies to explore many aspects of people's lives.

'Music elicitation', in this article, refers to the integration of the music listening experience into research interviews to draw out or trigger memory, affective experience and descriptive in-depth discussion. This article will explore music as a resource for elicitation, and introduce and evaluate a practical use of music elicitation. In so doing, I hope to generate interest in a method that is a valuable and innovative addition to qualitative methodologies and, furthermore, create discussion amongst researchers using music elicitation methods.

Elicitation Methods

Music elicitation can be associated with other existing elicitation methods because it attempts to enrich research data and provide triggers and stimuli for discussion through the use of a medium. Elicitation methods are routes to gain contributions that would usually be difficult to achieve and explore areas/themes that may only receive partial or muted response in the qualitative interview. Such methods are often trying to gain accounts of experience, memories, emotions and the meanings that respondents place on the elicitation material.

Although there could be a wealth of possible elicitation materials, the majority of literature on elicitation methods has focused upon visual forms. Both photo elicitation and graphic elicitation involve the use or creation of an image as stimuli to gather data. These methods have particular advantages related to the use of the visual medium. For instance, the photograph is perceived as a powerful aid in discussions (Mizen, 2005) with the potential to elicit many-layered responses, unexpected revelations, or show aspects of identity that might otherwise have remained hidden (Banks, 2001; Croghan et al., 2008). Loizos (2000: 98) claims that the photograph has particular qualities that draw out memories and stories of experience:

Images are resonant with submerged memories, and can help focus interviewees, free up their memories, and create a piece of 'shared business' in which the researcher and the interviewee can talk together, perhaps in a more relaxed manner than without such stimulus.

The photograph has particular benefits because the visual image may depict particular moments, places or people that aid memory and because it allows respondents to 'show' rather than 'tell' aspects of their lives. The use of non-photo visual stimuli such as diagrams, drawings/pictures, and collage within the qualitative interview also has associated advantages. Crilly et al., (2006) argue that the production of diagrams fuels discussion and may improve interviewer/interviewee communication and, may encourage contributions that are relatively inaccessible by other means. Likewise, Bagnoli (2009) claims that her use of collage, drawings, relational maps and timelines, to elicit data during interviews with children and youths, encouraged her interviewees to think differently about issues.

Elicitation methods are not only confined to using visual stimuli. Using objects as elicitation materials within interviews may also enhance the data gained. Objects may hold memories and particular meaning in people's lives or represent elements of everyday life and identity. The object can also be picked up, touched/held, and viewed by the interviewee and interviewer. It therefore gives a sensory experience that may also enrich the interview. Objects, such as the personal things displayed in our homes, may help express our identities, aspects of our everyday lives, or remind us of eras and events in our lives (Miller, 2008).

These examples show that the characteristics of the material used to elicit have considerable impact on the research data. Elicitation methods tend to use representational forms that are mainly visual and sometimes tactile. Music elicitation, however, introduces the auditory experience as a means to elicit data. Although music may exist as a material form, such as a CD, music is not a stationary object but a composition that is experienced in process through the act of listening. In undertaking music elicitation, the distinct characteristics of music will, therefore, impact on the kind of data that emerges. Like photos, certain pieces of music may have particular attached stories and represent aspects of the respondents' identities; but the act of listening also adds another dimension; introducing a particular form of affective and sensory experience into the qualitative interview.

Music in social research methodology has had limited exploration, often being perceived as a form of alternative research data. For example, Bauer (2000) argues that music and sound can be collected during the research process to be treated as forms of social data for analysis. In arts-based method approaches to social research, music is data produced by respondents (Daykin, 2008; Leavy, 2008). Such research perceives music to be a powerful tool of expression. However, this approach presents the researcher with the problem of interpretation because it is difficult to exploit music's meanings for research purposes (Daykin, 2008: 124). It also relies on the capabilities of respondents to produce music and express their thoughts or feelings using musical form. In contrast to these approaches, music elicitation does not involve placing music as data but, rather, uses music as a means to draw out data about experiences, memories and feelings.

Music elicitation methodologies have been used by researchers in the social sciences but have not appeared to be discussed methodologically. The use of varied forms of music elicitation methods have only been referred to briefly in papers focused upon theoretical findings. Keightley (2009) mentions that her research used photos and music to stimulate dialogue with participants about their memories and mnemonic activities and Hesmondhalgh (2007) alludes to

using music in an interview context to explore music fans' judgments of good and bad music. Additionally, in researching the sensual, emotional and everyday experiences of music, Anderson (2004; 2005) notes he used music listening exercises in which his respondents' music was played, listened to and talked about in order to understand the practices of memory and how music is used, heard and judged. One existing methodological account of a music elicitation method is Snyder's (1993) article on his use of 'auditory elicitation'. Snyder used music listening to gain information about the associations people made between specific pieces of music and sport. This involved his respondents writing subjective meanings they associated with the interviewer's musical selections as they were played, in order to elicit the meanings and emotions they placed onto music. Such a structure is similar to audience reception methodologies that use media such as soaps or music videos in interviews, focus groups and experiments to observe how meaning is made out of reception. In undertaking a music elicitation approach, researchers may gain information about audience reception (how music is interpreted by listeners), but I would like to suggest that the method could also be utilised to uncover the distinct relationships surrounding music's consumption and, more broadly, respondents' memories and experiences that are relevant to investigating topics surrounding personal life.

Music and its Elicitation Qualities

Music is an under-explored resource for social research, yet could be exploited to benefit qualitative methodologies. The characteristics of music make it a valuable resource for qualitative research. This is because of the relational nature of music listening and the particular links music has with our feelings and memory, which I will now explore.

Listening to recorded music has particular characteristics that make it a unique elicitation device. The temporal nature of the music listening experience means that one's experience will not remain the same throughout because a song moves and changes with the unfolding of time. The listening practice is linked to the expectations and sensations of pitch, tone, rhythm and melody and the process of experiencing the unknown structure or anticipating the sounds and words of the familiar song. Moreover, because music is temporal, the listening encounter may involve the transportation of the listener into the atmospheres of the music. Music elicitation, therefore, involves engaging with the senses. The auditory experience is distinctive from other senses because sound has relational qualities:

[S]ound is essentially non-spatial in character, or rather sound engulfs the spatial thus problematizing the relation between subject and object. Sound inhabits the subject just as the subject might be said to inhabit sound, whereas vision, in contrast to sound, represents distance, the singular, the objectifying.

(Bull, 2001: 180)

As well as engulfing the listener and space, music-listening involves a relationship between the aural senses, bodily sensation, affective experience and the intellectual element of making sense of what is happening, deciding taste, i.e. 'do I like this?' and making judgment. These music judgment practices, according to Anderson (2005), are not only distinctions of taste but are also

bound up with feelings and emotions. Listening to music involves the relation between listener and sound, time and their surroundings. Music could change the 'tone', 'feel' or 'mood' of the research interaction. As a result, this could change the nature of the relationship between researcher and researched, making it more informal and giving intense shared experience. Using music elicitation, introduces a relational and sensory experience into the qualitative interview. Consequently, music elicitation can be a means to engage respondents, provide a trigger for discussion, and offer access to a commentary on how music is experienced in the moment.

Music is a unique medium for researchers to draw upon because listening to recorded music may produce, manage and reflect affective states, moods and feeling. DeNora (2000) has explored music's potential to be a resource for doing, thinking and feeling and argues that a distinct quality of music is its power to produce feeling. Music has power in creating an affective reaction that, according to Sacks (2007: xi), can be linked to the neurological connection between brains and music, with music being distinct from language and embedded deeply into the human condition:

We humans are a musical species no less than a linguistic one. This takes many different forms. All of us (with very few exceptions) can perceive music, perceive tones, timbre, pitch, intervals, melodic contours, harmony and (perhaps most elementally) rhythm. We integrate all of these and "construct" music in our minds using many different parts of the brain. And to this largely unconscious structural appreciation of music is added an often intense and profound emotional reaction to music.

Music is also consumed in personalised ways, and listening has varied effects depending on taste, mood, and situation. In exploring music use in everyday life, DeNora (2000) has highlighted that music is often used to work through moods, to get out of moods, for 'venting', and that, in effect, it is used to enhance and maintain desired states of feeling and bodily energy. In turn, she argues that music is not only used to express an internal emotional state but is a resource for 'knowing how one feels'. Our relationship with music may, therefore, be related to how we perceive it, experience it physically and emotionally, invest in it and feel attached to it. Because music has a particular connection with our emotions and feelings, and is used to reflect and manage them, music has the potential to be used by the researcher as a means to access respondents' feelings. By placing music into an interview setting one may gain an in-depth descriptive account of the affective music experience as and after it is encountered.

Photos are often used to elicit memories in qualitative research because they visually depict events, places and people. Yet music could also be a valuable resource for accessing memory. A link between recorded music and individual and collective memories is made by Keightley and Pickering (2006: 153), who claim that popular music can be considered a 'technology of memory'. Music is argued to have the power to aid 'remembering'. It could, as a result, be a valuable tool in qualitative interviews that wish to explore memory or life history. Music may 'bring to life' particular moments that until then had been evaded or forgotten. We all may have experienced a moment where we have heard music and been reminded of a particular moment/event from our past. For instance, when hearing a *Lynyrd Skynyrd* song on the radio recently I was transported to being a child in my father's car on our way to a summer holiday. I

remembered the smell of the car, the image of sitting in the back passenger seat and seeing the side of my mother's head and watching the monotony of the motorway pass by. This then led me to thinking about the events of that particular holiday, with many memories emerging that, until then, had remained hidden. My memories were, therefore, unleashed on hearing music. Music may also evoke memories or 'stories' that have been rehearsed. In his consideration of the various practices of remembering that recorded music produces, Anderson (2004) recognises that while music can produce involuntary remembering, 'the fleeting, affectively imbued memory traces that *happen*' on hearing music (9); music is also deliberately used to recollect, reminisce or recreate the content or mood of already defined memory. Music listening may give us a particular route to our memories, that can be exploited with music elicitation. Music's ability to trigger memories could mean that, if it was made present in the research field, it could aid the telling of stories about such things as places, events, people and relationships.

If we presume that music has the potential to access, reflect or evoke feelings and memories, then placing music at the centre of focus in the qualitative interview by using music elicitation could bring particular related benefits to the research. Music elicitation could aid the disclosure of feelings and gain detail on peoples' relationships with music. It could draw out respondents' music experiences, uses and associations. Furthermore, it could uncover elements of respondents lives unrelated to music such as personal experiences, memories and past feelings.

Researching Extreme Metal Fans

I have so far considered the characteristics associated with music that impact on the use of a method such as music elicitation. I now reflect on my use of music elicitation in my research with Extreme Metal music fans and consider how it can, in practice, influence the collection of data. My research involved conducting recurring qualitative 'group research'. This was based on combining semi-structured group interviews with ethnography: as well as semi-structured group interviews, the interactions and the subjective meanings of the group, prior, during and after the interview, were recorded and analysed by the researcher. The recurring research groups were interactive interviews in which my respondents sometimes led discussions and asked other members and the researcher questions. I was also involved as a participant (as Extreme Metal fan) within the research group, taking part in disclosure and group tasks. The research was structured into ten research group meetings between January 2007 and July 2007, and involved the participation of six Extreme Metal music fans. The fans were all friends who attended and organised a local monthly Extreme Metal nightclub. I drew on several qualitative methods (memory work, media elicitation and music elicitation) in order to generate, enrich and facilitate the data from the group interviews.

My research approach was influenced by the lack of discussion of people's attachments to, and relationship with, music in studies of subcultures and fandoms. In undertaking research on Extreme Metal music fans, I aimed to reveal something of the everyday practices of the Extreme Metal fan and the distinct investments and attachments fans had to Extreme Metal as both a music genre and a music subculture. Such a focus demanded qualitative methods that aided the disclosure of Extreme Metal fans' experiences of listening to Extreme

Metal music and their related affective attachments and identifications. I wanted to consider my respondents' relationships with music: to explore how music was used and identified with, what feelings were attached to listening to the music genre and whether these were collectively shared. In designing the research, I was faced with the problem of how I could get people to talk about their feelings and their attachments to music. I was aware that there could be some discomfort in the disclosure of feelings and difficulty in describing feeling. A key concern was how to get people to 'open up' within the interview setting. By just asking respondents 'why do you like Extreme Metal?' I was likely to cause my respondents to feel as if they needed to justify their taste in music rather than describe their investments and the affective attachments they had. I decided, therefore, to turn to using music within my methodology and developed an approach to using music elicitation in a group interview setting.

I used music elicitation in two out of the ten research group meetings. My use of music elicitation involved participants bringing examples of Extreme Metal music they liked to the research group. For each session, group members were asked to choose and play a music track, (a track they 'loved' and a track that specifically drew out certain feelings or emotions). The group members were supplied with a notebook and pen, which provided the option to record their thoughts and feelings whilst listening. The group listened to a group members' choice of music and then took turns to describe their reactions to the piece of music. Attention then returned to the participant who chose the music to give an account of their reaction accompanied by an explanation for their choice of track. This was repeated with each participant and led to group discussion. The rich descriptions that resulted from my use of music elicitation indicate the method has particular use for stimulating talk. The content of data also suggests that music elicitation had significant benefits for my research.

Extreme Metal Feelings

One of my aims in undertaking music elicitation was to uncover my respondents' affective attachments to Extreme Metal music. By getting my respondents to talk about their reactions to each piece of music that was played, I found that my music elicitation approach was a successful way of inducing 'feelings talk'. My respondents showed willingness to talk in detail about what the music listening experience did and how they felt. For instance, after playing his music choice, group member Ben described the appeal of the track:

Ben: It is one of the most devastatingly sad pieces of music I have ever heard. It gives me a really physical reaction. I can feel my stomach sinking as the track starts and there is a real tense build up at the beginning. Where there's just feedback and then it breaks open, and I just feel [pauses] I don't really feel sad, because I am not sad about anything, but I just feel totally physically and mentally devastated. As it goes on, I get a kinda feeling of power out of it [...] like where it kicks in with the kind of martial drum beat, I thought that it feels like it's gradually lifting out, and lifting out, and then eventually the riff changes and once again the mood of the piece changes. I think this is really epic. It is very widescreen.

Such a description was typical of the other group members in its attempt to describe what music did and the importance of the affective reaction. Ben's experience of the music involves an encounter with powerful or 'epic' feeling. In analysing the talk that emerged from the music elicitation tasks I found that Extreme Metal music offered my respondents an encounter with *extreme feeling*. This was reflected in my respondents' use of a cultural vocabulary that drew on the romance language of power and love in order to express their feelings from Extreme Metal. By incorporating music within the interview, my respondents were able to describe what they experienced with a reference point: giving their descriptions context. The task involved respondents talking straight after the sensory experience which may have made it easier for them to form explanations and make sense of the experience as well as feel comfortable in the knowledge that the other group members and the researcher had heard (and may have experienced) what they were referring to. In addition, it changed the tone of the interaction, because the respondents, (and researcher), were experiencing the music together. After all of the respondents' music had been played, I returned to the semi-structured interview by asking whether anyone had any thoughts on what had emerged in the music elicitation exercise. Discussion then flowed as the group began to discuss what they found interesting; drawing on their perceived similarities and differences in responses. These interactions additionally produced group statements about Extreme Metal's appeal, and the importance of affect. For instance, one of the resulting discussions, after a music elicitation exercise, continued to centre on what music did and the importance of 'feelings':

Ben: Imagine you woke up tomorrow morning, you put on a CD, and you got no feelings from it. You put on all your CDs, no feelings.

Liam: That would be horrible.

Ben: And then, what if you got feelings when you put some Jazz on?

Liam: That's horrific.

Jack: Then you would listen to Jazz wouldn't you?

Ben: Well, yeah, that is what I think.

Liam: I suppose you would. Yeah, because your inherent passion for music just would have shifted focus, I guess.

Chloe: Mmm, yeah. But having been listening to Metal for the past 15 years, that isn't very likely.

This extract, like many other discussions after the music listening was a more reflective consideration by the group members of the similarities in their investments in music that had emerged. Here, the disappearance of feelings is likened to a loss and described as 'horrible' and 'horrific'. The group members, both individually and collectively, claimed that they would shift their music genre fandom if they failed to 'feel', even to a music genre far removed from Metal such as Jazz (a music genre that all respondents disliked). Despite their claims, Chloe reminds the group of the investment they have made (i.e. labour through time, and effort spent as fan) which indicates that commitment is not aligned with feelings alone. Feeling, for my respondents, provided the drive to work, invest, learn, perform, and to identify and unify as members of the Extreme Metal subculture. The discussions that resulted from music elicitation, therefore, gave an extra dimension to the existing data from the group interviews and highlighted the importance of feeling alongside other elements of subcultural participation and music fandom.

The music elicitation method utilised in my study was productive in getting respondents to focus upon their affective experiences of music. Music may produce feelings for the listener. It can also be used to recreate a particular mood or feeling and be chosen because of the remembered feeling that is associated with it (Anderson, 2004). However, a particular feeling may emerge on listening to music because it triggers a personal memory. In the following extract of group member Chloe's remarks, after hearing another group member's music choice, the affective experience was connected to the memory elicited by the music:

Chloe: That song reminds me of living in [city] quite a lot, being about 16, 17, 18, going out with a real massive fan at the time; so we used to listen to that a lot. It kinda gives me goose bumps but it could just be that I'm sitting by an open window, but I think the song itself makes me a bit goose-bumpy [...] I must say it just invokes quite a lot of nostalgia for me, and nice nostalgia as well it's pleasant memories which is a bit strange because it is a fairly morbid song.

Chloe said that her response to the music was related to it triggering her memory of a past relationship. The feelings Chloe describes as 'goose bumps' are related to the memory of the relationship at the time. It indicates that her feelings were not related to the music per se. Due to my focusing upon my respondents' attachments to music, the memory was not explored further but the emergence of such data indicates that music elicitation could have noteworthy value for researchers wanting to investigate memories. If I had wanted to investigate this, I could have asked Chloe to elaborate on the relationship, I could have got her to play other music tracks she might also associate with the relationship and continue the interview with that particular focus.

Extreme Metal Practices

Although a key aim was to get my respondents to talk about their affective attachments and the feelings they associated with music, using music elicitation in my study also drew out a great deal of data about music use. The music elicitation method was productive in gathering descriptions of the everyday, common place uses of music and accounts of managing the listening experience. My respondents described the suitability of some Extreme Metal music choices for particular activities. For instance, after listening to his choice of track, Rob described the suitability of the album for listening whilst travelling:

Rob: It is not just that track. I like to listen to this album all the way through if I can because it gets more depressive as it goes along and the songs really fit together so well. I like the combination of Black Metal vocals with a more doomy tone. It's his voice that creates atmosphere as well because I think he really is at the end of the world. When I listen to it I like to zone out and listen to the whole album, that's why whenever I've got a long journey I will play that album because you can just disappear into it.

Here, Rob uses the idea of disappearing into music ('to zone out') as a reason for both its appeal and its suitability for the long journey. This may be because time and people can become ignored and, instead, a private space can be created through the auditory. Such practice is described in Bull's (2000; 2001) study of walkman use. Bull claims walkmans establish zones of separation through creating personal auditory space for the user and, therefore, making their experience (often of urban space) more manageable. On the other hand, the ability to 'zone out' also points to the music creating intense atmospheres that involve the listener's full attention. The group members claimed that some effort was needed to become attuned to the Extreme Metal music genre sounds and a level of concentration was required to appreciate them fully. My respondents' responses to music elicitation were interspersed with information about listening practices, highlighting the effectiveness of the method for drawing out information about the music fan.

The use of music elicitation in my research, additionally served to gather data that aided an understanding of how music was evaluated by my respondents and insight into their shared notions of musical virtuosity and authenticity. In asking my respondents to choose music to play to the group there would have been an element of conscious selection to transmit information about their fandom and present themselves to the other group members. Furthermore, my respondents' descriptions of their reactions following the playing of their music, and their later discussions, conveyed the research group members' shared distinctions of taste as Extreme Metal fans. Their reasons for their choices, their likes and dislikes, and what they considered was and was not Extreme Metal all gave insight into how music is personally, and collectively, judged and how the music genre was classified. In explaining playing a particular track he 'loved', group member Jack asserted his ability to recognise good music:

Jack: The reason I chose that is that it is a fairly new track and it is very, very derivative of like old stuff and one of the things I like about it is the enthusiasm behind it. The fact that the guys who made it are obviously trying to, have absorbed all of their influences, and are trying to cram it in to one song at once. It is absolutely mental. It's got like Thrash, it's got sort of amazing almost Speed Metally leads in there; it's got Grind like old Grind and stuff that's all jumbled up and completely frenzied. It's relatively crisp on the production but if you listen to it properly it's insane. The drumming is all over the place and the guitar playing and so forth it's all just mashed together in one big mess. It's a homage to music. The enthusiasm it, like, just comes spilling out of the speakers.

Jack's reference to 'enthusiasm' suggests an expectation for the musicians/band to be emotionally invested in the music and to convey their feelings. His description is also presented as an opinion of an experienced and knowledgeable fan that knows the varied genres and can decipher the music. His statement 'if you listen to it properly' confirms that he is able to make distinctions and judge the music. In the group discussion following the music elicitation the group began to talk about their music elicitation track choices fitting into Extreme Metal subgenres and the technicalities of what Extreme Metal music was and what could and could not be classified into the genre. In the following extract one of the group members had stated that the popular

Metal band *Slayer* had certain features in common with Extreme Metal subgenres such as Black Metal and Death Metal. Debate and disagreement between my respondents then erupted:

- Chloe: So I wouldn't have classed *Slayer* as an Extreme Metal band. But that's just me. I would call them very heavy and I suppose I could have classed them as Death Metal at some point, but I wouldn't have classed them as a
- Ben: [Interrupting] there's a lot of Black Metal, which is less extreme than *Slayer*.
- Liam: Yeah, very ambient.
- Ben: Yeah, a lot of, I don't know, say *Forefather*, they're more accessible than *Slayer*
- Jack: [Interrupting] that's not Black Metal.
- Ben: Well, I was trying to think of an example mate. *Forefather* is quite folky and melodic isn't it?

Here the research group were very vocal about their genre opinion, for example, Jack interrupts Ben with the exclamation 'that's not Black Metal'. Chloe's statement about the band *Slayer* not fitting into the category of Extreme Metal is an example of how fans might police genre and attempt to enforce rules upon other fans, but this proves a difficult task because the group classified Extreme Metal in a variety of ways. Bands such as *Slayer* were excluded from the genre if they were considered too 'mainstream', or not extreme or 'heavy' enough, whilst other bands (as Ben's example *Forefather*) were placed in the category of Extreme Metal even though their music had a sound comparable to folk and their sound was considered as 'accessible'. By placing music into the group interview setting, via music elicitation, the content of the interview became focused upon music and what it meant to the listeners. I was able to view the relationships between the group members and the practices they participated in to police and taxonomise the music genre they were invested in. Music elicitation created an arena of conversation and debate and, in fact, the group discussions that followed the music elicitation exercise flowed with little input from the researcher.

Music, Feeling and Interaction

I have so far highlighted that music elicitation served as a route to my respondents' feelings, gathered 'feelings talk' and opened up my respondents to consider their attachments and investments in music. However, there are underlying issues in trying to research intangibles such as feelings. The successes in gathering information on respondents' feelings were restrained by the limitations on how we can express feelings. My respondents' still found it difficult at times to vocalise 'feeling', that is, to find the vocabulary to explain how a piece of music made them feel. This was a problem recognised by my respondents, as the following extract implies:

- Chloe: Even though I'm thinking it [emotion/feelings], I found it hard to put into words.
- Liam: Yeah, you have to kinda intellectualize it almost. I think as soon as you try and put a strong feeling into words, it loses some of its impact because you are immediately limiting something that you can't describe.

This limitation of expression is not the fault of the music elicitation method, but because feelings exist outside language. My respondents not only highlighted the relationship between music and feeling, but also positioned music as feeling. Music can be considered a language that speaks feelings that are inchoate, or outside of language:

Historically music has been valued a medium of emotional communication precisely because it allows for the expression of feelings that cannot, perhaps should not, be put into words [...] Music has been about the unspoken and unspeakable; the emotionally precious, the personal, the hidden, the repressed.
(Wood et al., 2007: 885)

The respondents' talk was in-dispersed with pauses as they tried to find the words to express how they felt. Despite this ongoing problem in investigating feeling; music elicitation at least opened up my respondents to attempt to explain and describe their feelings and affective attachments, because of the presence of music within the interview and the ability to discuss the music listening experience after it had just happened.

Music listening, in the interview setting, offered a piece of shared business between researcher and respondents. Each member shared their music and experienced the sensory and affective encounter with the group. My use of music elicitation was particularly productive because it utilised music with the interactions of group research. The music elicitation tasks produced specific forms of interactions between the group members. For example, at times they created interactions that resembled a book club with respondents offering their evaluation and opinions of the music in turn; at other times, it resembled a confessional group with respondents 'admitting' to vulnerable feelings and obsessive behaviours. These valuable interactions also emerged because the music elicitation tasks took place in a small group. If the group had been larger, it would have been hard to organise the tasks, and my respondents may have become bored or uninterested in other group members' accounts. The size of group meant that it was intimate enough for discussions that involved all of the group members. These discussions after music elicitation produced important and rich data about music fandom, relationships and everyday life. Both the relational nature of music listening and the interactive nature of the small group interview, therefore, contributed to the successes of my use of music elicitation.

Conclusion

The use of elicitation methods in the social sciences is often confined to the visual, but there are other materials that researchers can draw on to enrich the qualitative interview. This article has introduced music elicitation as a valuable addition to qualitative methodologies. It has discussed the possible influences music could have on research and has presented a way in which music elicitation has been utilised to research music fans. My use of music elicitation in researching Extreme Metal music fans has hopefully demonstrated the beneficial qualities of the method. Music elicitation, when used in an interactive interview, offered rich data on a variety of topics. Music elicitation proved successful in gaining access to my respondents' interpretations of their feelings and affective attachments to Extreme Metal music and enriched group discussions.

Music elicitation is a valuable method with many possibilities. By placing music into the interview, I have shown that there is a potential to draw out data related to the listener's feelings, uncover memories, music use, music judgments and encourage rich descriptive accounts and conversation. The method is likely to evoke a many-layered and emotional response in respondents and may produce data that alludes to that experience. Although I have only described one approach to music elicitation that involved research on Extreme Metal music fans, what I hope to have demonstrated is that listening to recorded music is a worthy elicitation device for qualitative social research. It can be used to investigate music collectives, the everyday presence of music in people's lives, and in constructing identities. Moreover, the method is also suited to a wealth of research areas such as life history, everyday and personal life, and relationships. While the successes in my use of music elicitation were related to it taking place in the interactive small group interview this is not to say that music elicitation could not be conducted in individual interviews. Rather, the method would need some adapting to make it more informal and involve the integration of the respondent's music into the interview. Music elicitation could be adapted to suit various interview situations and be combined with other methods.

This article has sought to present that music, amongst other media, can be used within qualitative interviews as a tool to elicit and give context. Moreover, it has sought to provoke thought around the methods we are using and the potential benefits of adopting elicitation methods within our research. I have highlighted that the potential benefits of music elicitation are linked to music having the power to evoke feelings, memories and sensations. However, it is important to consider that music elicitation is a potent method to experiment with. The advantages of music being so evocative also make it impossible for us to predict the results of using music elicitation. Because the method introduces what could be considered as intense experience, there is the potential to bring up unexpected negative feelings, memories and hurt. There is, therefore, a particular need for researchers to be sensitive in its undertaking.

References

- Anderson, B. (2004) 'Recorded Music and Practices of Remembering', *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (1): 3-20.
- Anderson, B. (2005) 'Practices of Judgement and Domestic Geographies of Affect', *Social and Cultural Geography* 6 (5): 645-658.
- Bagnoli, A. (2009) 'Beyond the Standard Interview: The Use of Graphic Elicitation and Arts-based Methods', *Qualitative Research* 9 (5): 547-570.
- Banks, M. (2001) *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage.
- Bauer, M. W. (2000) 'Analysing Noise and Music as Social Data', in M. W. Bauer and G. Gaskell (eds) *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*, London: Sage, pp. 263-281.

Bull, M. (2000) *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg.

Bull, M. (2001) 'The World According to Sound: Investigating the World of Walkman Users', *New Media Society* 3 (2): 179-197.

Croghan, R., Griffin, C., Hunter, J., and Phoenix, A. (2008) 'Young People's Constructions of Self: Notes on the Use and Analysis of Photo Elicitation Methods', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11 (4): 345-356.

Crilly, N., Blackwell, A.F. and Clarkson, P.J. (2006) 'Graphic Elicitation: Using Research Diagrams as Interview Stimuli', *Qualitative Research* 6 (3): 341-366.

Daykin, N. (2008) 'The Role of Music in Arts-based Qualitative Inquiry', in P. Leavy (ed.) *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, New York: Guildford Publishers, pp.123-134.

DeNora, T. (2000) *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2007) 'Audiences and Everyday Aesthetics: Talking about Good and Bad Music', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (4): 507-527.

Keightley, E. (2009) 'Remembering Research: Memory and Methodology in the Social Sciences', in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a908213163?words=keightley&hash=2670014675>

Keightley, E., and Pickering, M. (2006) 'For the Record: Popular Music and Photography as Technologies of Memory', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9(2): 149-165.

Leavy, P. (2008) *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. New York: Guildford Publishers.

Loizos, P. (2000) 'Video, Film and Photographs as Research Documents', in M. W. Bauer and G. Gaskell (eds) *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*, London: Sage, pp. 93-107.

Miller, D. (2008) *The Comfort of Things*. Cambridge: Polity.

Mizen, P. (2005) 'A Little 'Light Work'? Children's Image of their Labour', *Visual Studies* 20 (2): 124-139.

Sacks, O. (2007) *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. London: Picador.

Snyder, E.E. (1993) 'Responses to Musical Selections and Sport: An Auditory Elicitation Approach', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 10 (2): 168-182.

Wood, N., Duffy, M. and Smith, S.J. (2007) 'The Art of Doing (Geographies of) Music', *Environment and Planning* 5: 867-889.

ESRC National Centre for

Research
Methods

Email: info@ncrm.ac.uk
Homepage: www.ncrm.ac.uk