

# **MUSIC LISTENING AT WORK: CONTROL AND RESISTANCE**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Carl Wikeley

**School of Media and Communication**

**The University of Leeds**

Nov 2022



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

## Abstract

---

This thesis investigates the socio-political effects of music listening in the contemporary workplace. Existing studies at the crossroads of music and work cover, on the one hand, the histories of music in the workplace, and on the other, the functional, psychological and scientific nature of music at work. However, few studies to date take a critical sociological approach to music listening in the modern workplace. The following research provides such analysis, informed by theory from both studies of work and employment and music studies.

Four case studies were selected for analysis, presenting data from a variety of workplace environments: Amazon warehouse workers, Uber drivers, US and UK postal workers, and commercial truck drivers. For each case study, multiple online forums were combed for data referring to music listening, which was then coded under themes derived from themes arising within existing literature in music and work studies: namely, control, resistance, and musical experience. By contextualising this authentic data from online communities within critical sociology, the aim was to explore the role music listening plays in the politics of the contemporary workplace.

Through both qualitative and quantitative analysis of workers' experience, the study shows that music listening plays a significant role in control and resistance in the workplace. Control is experienced via music listening through concrete rules, technological surveillance, and ideologies of work—specifically 'common sense' and 'customer service' ideologies. Music listening was also found to play an important role in resistance in the workplace, be that with regards to specific union or otherwise organised action, or acts of misbehaviour and rebellion. In the latter case, music listening technologies such as headphones and aux cables were central to workers' resistance. Musical experience was also shown to have significant implications for social relations at work: music listening helps people get through the working day because of its effects on the mind and body, while also representing a site of community-building and solidarity-forming, with the online spaces surveyed providing spaces in which workers share, discuss, and debate musical experience.

---

## Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b>	1
<b>Table of contents</b>	2
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	5
<b>1. Introduction</b>	6
1.1. Hanif's headphones	6
1.2. Origins	7
1.3. Structure of the study	9
<b>2. Literature and theory review</b>	14
2.1. Contextualising the field of work	15
2.2. Theoretical approaches to work	15
2.3. Control	16
2.4. Resistance	20
2.5. Contextualising the field of music	23
2.6. Emotion and mood	24
2.7. Affect	27
2.8. Taste	29
2.9. Existing literature at the crossroads of music and work	31
2.10. Music and power	35
2.11. Coalescence	37
<b>3. Methodology</b>	39
3.1. Research paradigm	39
3.2. The four case studies	40
3.3. Coding	42
3.4. Online forum data: benefits	44
3.5. Deindividuation and other issues with the data	46

<b>4. Control</b>	50
4.1. Rules	50
i) Amazon warehouse workers: ‘ya’ll have music?!’	50
ii) Mail workers: similar inconsistencies	57
iii) ‘I make the rules here’: Uber drivers	63
iv) Truck drivers: rules of the road	69
4.2. Surveillance	73
i) Uber: algorithms of control	74
ii) Amazon: airport-style security	82
4.3. Ideology	86
i) ‘Common sense ideology’	89
ii) Disagreement as refracting resistance at Amazon	95
iii) Customer service ideology among Uber drivers	98
<b>5. Organised Resistance</b>	103
5.1. Suggestion boxes and whiteboards: replacing unions at Amazon	103
5.2. Music and union organising among postal workers	106
<b>6. Non-organised resistance and misbehaviour</b>	119
6.1. ‘Sorry boss, no aux’: resisting passenger recommendations	120
6.2. ‘Just get rid’	124
6.3. ‘Machine sabotage’	125
6.4. ‘I flat out lie’: deceiving the customer	127
6.5. ‘Cell phone & make-shift boombox’—misbehaviour and resistance among Amazon workers	133
6.6. Don’t ask don’t tell: misbehaviour among postal workers	144
<b>7. Musical Experience</b>	148
7.1. Mood—positive: music as therapy	150
7.2. Mood—negative: music as an irritant	160
7.3. Bodily affect: setting the pace	168
7.4. Taste	177
i) Taste as a site of conflict at Amazon	177
ii) Difference and racial profiling among Uber drivers	182
iii) Taste as a money-making and experience-enhancing device among Uber drivers	186
iv) Taste as a centre of community-building among truck drivers and postal workers	195
<b>8. Discussion</b>	211
8.1. Control: the importance of rules, surveillance, and ideology in music at work	211
8.2. Resistance: the use of online spaces and technologies for resistance	216
8.3. Musical experience: mood, affect, and taste in music as a tool for dignity at work	220

8.4. Key theme I—online spaces and musical communities	225
8.5 Key theme II—ubiquitous music and power	226
8.6 Limitations	228
8.7 The future of the field	230
<b>9. Conclusions</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>10. Bibliography</b>	<b>240</b>

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Professor David Hesmondhalgh and Dr. Charles Umney for their invaluable support, advice, and supervision of this project.

Thanks also to:

- WRoCAH (White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities) for their support, both financial and academic
- staff at both the School of Media and Communication, and the Leeds University Business School
- colleagues and class-mates for their support and friendship (often virtually) during the global pandemic
- Prof. Marek Korczynski for his early advice on, an inspiration to undertake this project
- the many other scholars and writers who provided early and ongoing inspiration
- my co-workers at LSO St Luke's (Becca, in particular), for allowing me to rant, frequently, about my interests in music listening and its importance in our lives.

To family and friends: thank you for your support and encouragement through the years, and helping me to get to this point; the adorable Naomi—maybe you'll read this when you're old enough (I will understand if you don't).

Perhaps most importantly, thanks to the workers whose fascinating opinions and testimonies are the lifeblood of this study; their contributions, while existing online for all to see, are no less active than my own.

Lastly, thank you to the countless artists and composers whose music accompanied my work: Jo Yeong-wook, Michael Nyman, Philip Glass, Alexis Grapsas, Bruce Springsteen, RADWIMPS, Kate Bush, the ollam, Emmylou Harris, The Blue Nile, Agnes Obel, Karl Blau, Shaun Martin, Labi Siffre, Howard Shore, Joan Baez, Carly Rae Jepsen, Mike Oldfield, GoGo Penguin, Mariah Carey, Robyn, ABBA, Béla Fleck, Nanci Griffith, William Tyler, Lau, Karine Polwart...

## 1. Introduction

---

### 1.1 Hanif's headphones

In May 2021, a UK judge ruled that Misbah Hanif, a civil servant, had been discriminated against by her managers when they prohibited her from listening to music at work (*M. Hanif v Dpt. for Work and Pensions* 2021). Ms. Hanif argued that 'listening to music helped her to cope with stress and counter feelings of anxiety'; the employment tribunal agreed that her managers' actions had caused her 'significant disadvantage' due to the impact of music listening on her 'productivity at work, as well as her mood'.

This ruling was heralded in the media as a landmark case: 'Anxious workers can wear headphones', read a headline in *The Telegraph* (Telegraph reporters 2021); 'Worker wins case to wear headphones in the office', reported the *Metro* (Corbishley 2021). Characteristically of media law reporting, neither of these headlines were strictly true: the judge ruled simply that reasonable adjustments' had not been made by the Department for Work and Pensions, meaning that Ms. Hanif was 'due compensation'. What the ruling did not do was provide a blanket legal foundation for challenging employers or give workers the power to listen to music at all times in all situations at work.

Yet the case of Ms. Hanif presents two significant implications for both employment relations and wider society: first, a legal precedent has been set centring around workers' rights to listen to music and use headphones in certain circumstances at work; and second that, as is clear from the extensive media coverage, this case and its contents were of clear interest to the public. Studies have found that workers listen to music for as much as 40% of their working week on average (Haake 2011: 114), and that around 80% of those who do find music listening improves both job satisfaction and productivity (Spherion 2006): clearly the issue of music listening at work, as well as if and when it is allowed, is an important one to many people.

And yet, the issue of music listening at work is one that has received relatively little attention from music studies and from the sociology of work (as noted by Prichard et al. 2007; Johnson and Cloonan 2008; Haake 2011; Korczynski et al. 2013). This seems strange given that many of us spend much of our lives at work, and music plays an important role therein. The

disciplinary divides and theoretical contexts underpinning this lack of focus are discussed in chapter 2. However, much of this is to do with, put simply, not taking music seriously. Johnson and Cloonan argue that ‘there is a general refusal of the media to take these issues seriously’ due to the ‘trivialization’ of music (2008: 190). Symptomatic of this is a ‘deeply embedded ideology that shadows popular music studies by placing it on the defensive’ (Johnson and Cloonan 2008: 190): in this way, popular music studies is often hindered by its own insecurities while labour relations theorists and the sociology of work often overlook music as a lens through which to study control, resistance, and power. Both fields are weaker for this. The overall aim of the present study, then, is to address the crossover of music and work studies; it will contribute to both a theoretical and empirical pool that seeks to elucidate the importance of music listening at work, providing valuable resources to both researchers and workers.

## 1.2 Origins

The genesis of this research is a duality: while completing my Master’s in ‘musicology and ethnomusicology’ at King’s College, London, I funded my studies by working in a number of places in which music listening was an important part of daily life—experiences that informed my research in music studies and sociology, which reflexively influenced how I thought of my music listening at work.

While stage manager at LSO St Luke’s, a historic Hawksmoor church used by the London Symphony Orchestra as a multifunctional concert hub, I found music to be vitally important during the work day, in a way entirely separate from the intended use of the venue: many shifts would require long periods of time moving and lifting equipment, which required what could be considered a ‘backing track’. Coworkers would use the speakers intended for concerts as devices through which to whatever playlist or selection of music suited their mood, or helped the work feel less long and strenuous. Some of these music selections would simply be what someone was listening to in a week, or an artist they wanted to share with colleagues; however much of it was consciously selected for the specific goal of providing energy and rhythm when the mood was otherwise subdued (and the work required a relatively high intensity).

This phenomenon provided me with the impetus for researching a Master’s paper. The substantial body of work that covers music and its effect on the body, rhythm, and movement (Gabrielsson 1988; Gowensmith & Bloom 1997; Sloboda 1999; Juslin & Sloboda 2001; Frith 2002; Reybrouck 2004; Walker 2007; Csikszentmihalyi 2009; Schrimshaw 2013; Collingwood 2016) led me



to consider the literature imbuing these approaches with sociological angles relating to power, control, and resistance.

In this Master's paper, titled 'Underground music: social control and the Classics' (2018), I found that the choice of specifically classical music, piped over tannoy in various London Underground stations acted as a (varyingly successful) form of social control. In doing so, existing research on social control in public spaces was of prime importance (Brown and Volgsten 2006; Cloonan and Johnson 2008; Hirsch 2012). The conclusions of this (unfortunately relatively brief) study were obvious: music is 'ubiquitous in defining identity and territory, and exercising violence and control' (Johnson and Cloonan 2008: 173), and concrete examples exist of 'class-based musically controlled differentiation of occupancy of public spaces' (185), with the 'potential for discrimination and segregation [being] rarely acknowledged by authorities who implement music' (Hirsch 2012: 27). Such suggestions about music and its role in control and power are not new: Jacques Attali in *Noise* (1985 [1977]) highlighted music as a 'bureaucratic tool of power' that may be used to 'silence those who oppose it through repetition'.

Much of the existing literature that takes a critical sociological approach to music listening investigates its effects in *public spaces*, as opposed to in our homes, or in workplaces; this is understandable, given public spaces offer fruitful areas for inquiry wherein people, and often authorities, interact. So, what of the workplace—it is, usually, not a public space, and for this reason, research into music listening in such environments is less accessible. It is also for these reasons that I believe it to be at least as important. What goes on in the workplace with regards to music listening? Who is allowed music, what music do people listen to, and what impact does it have on their experiences?

Michael Bull, in his 2007 study of iPod and headphones use, discovered the ways in which music listening can act as 'a kind of territorial preserve, a boundary marker for others within the office space', and that 'earphones also signify the user's status in the organisation', as a potential way of establishing authority (2007: 112). Offices are a new kind of 'contested space', Bull argues, with 'open plan offices posing particular difficulty' in terms of 'auditory control' (2007: 117); in fact, in a remarkably similar case to that of *M. Hanif v Department for Work and Pensions* (2021), Bull interviews a civil servant who utilised headphones to 'regain control of her work space': 'the power to create a privatised auditory world of the user's making cannot be overestimated' (2007: 117), Bull writes.

And yet, the world of work is changing: even discounting the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and where and how people work, workplaces are not limited to traditional service

sector environments, offices, and factories; much work is increasingly mediated through digital platforms (Casilli & Posada 2019), and research into it should reflect this. As Polkowska notes (2019: 718), ‘as new forms of employment like platform work become a norm around the world, it becomes necessary to study the nature of the employment being created and its impact on the economic and social lives of workers’; music listening is, I will continue to argue throughout this study, a vitally important part of this. This research does not seek to answer all the questions related to music at work, nor does it purport to present a comprehensive review of music listening in every type of workplace. Instead, as highlighted in chapter 2.1, it contributes to a growing theoretical and empirical project that seeks to understand music at work and its importance for both the individual worker, and for collective action.

### 1.3 Structure of the study

In order to contextualise the empirical findings of my research, it is vital to first introduce and assess the existing theoretical contributions that exist within the two key strands of literature that this study seeks to combine: namely, the sociology of work, and (popular) music studies. From within these disciplines, two scholars represent diametrically opposed approaches: Marek Korczynski (2003, 2007, 2014, 2020), whose writing provides sociological accounts of music at work in a primarily historical sense, and Anneli Haake (2010, 2011, 2013), who focuses on the nature of music listening in *contemporary workplaces*, from a psychology of music perspective. It is around these two figures that much of chapter 2 revolves around, as I seek to situate my research and its theoretical contributions. Chapter 2 therefore begins with quotes from both scholars illustrating the differing approaches to music at work that characterise existing literature. In this chapter I also provide an account of the literature from within the sociology of work and music studies, examining the concepts of ‘control’, ‘resistance’, as well as key musicological approaches to emotion, mood, affect, and taste. The chapter concludes with a return to the work of Korczynski and Haake, as I argue that the historical and psychological lenses of the authors respectively leave a clearly defined space within which I situate my empirical data and its analysis.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodological approaches taken in designing this study, collecting the empirical data, and preparing it for analysis. It is important to note at this stage that the overall scope of my research changed significantly due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic: initially, a mixed-method approach was planned, with two office-based organisations in Leeds agreeing to in-person observation and interviews with workers, which would subsequently be

combined with two further online case studies of Amazon warehouse workers and Uber drivers (with the data for these gathered from forums and other social media platforms). Such a mixed-method approach was initially the goal of this study, so as to better understand the ways in which music, listeners, and their environment interact (Thorsen 1989; Haake 2011); Hodson (2011) and Grazian (2004) both allude to the advantages of a mixed-method approach, as this allows the researcher to better conceptualise the 'consumption of music in real time and space' (Grazian 2004: 206). Unfortunately, with the bulk of my data collection due to take place between 2020 and 2021, office closures and nationwide lockdowns resulted in in-person observation and interviews being postponed, and, ultimately, sacrificed. As a result, my methodological approach was adapted: two additional online case studies were selected, covering a broader spectrum of contemporary work sectors. In chapter 3, these four final case studies of Amazon, Uber, Postal and Trucking workers are outlined, and the benefits and limitations of my approaches are presented.

The case studies, which draw most of the focus in chapters 4-7, ended up providing a huge volume of incredibly rich data, representing a useful sample of the contemporary workforce and workplaces, from platformised labour such as Uber driving to occupations like warehouse work and postal delivery. An average of 115 threads related to music were selected from each case study, across 10 online forums/social media platforms representing over 635,000 workers.

One of the most significant obstacles needing to be overcome in order to present a useful analysis and account of all this data was the issue of how to organise it. The solution to this was not, I felt, to divide the data neatly into two thematic categories in 'work' and 'music'; since a key goal of this project was to synthesise theoretical approaches from both the sociology of work and from music studies, I ultimately decided on three central themes, within which the empirical data could be displayed: control, resistance, and musical experience. Following this theme of 'cross-pollination' between music and work studies, the aim of the first two sections would be to demonstrate what music listening can tell us about control and resistance in the workplace, and what role it may play, while in the latter, empirical data would be used to illustrate how themes relating to labour relations manifest themselves through musical experience at work.

Chapter 4 therefore considers the empirical data as it relates to the concept of 'control'. It asks what role music listening plays in control in the workplace, and how music acts as a tool of power and control. Broadly following the coding system set out in chapter 3, 'control' as it refers to music listening in the workplace is divided into three categories: rules, surveillance, and ideology. In chapter 4.1, examples demonstrating workers' experiences and opinions on music listening rules from across the case studies are shown, documenting their applications, inconsistencies, and how

they affect individuals' daily lives. In chapter 4.2, the phenomenon of technological surveillance as it relates to music listening is presented, with particular relevance to the case studies of Uber drivers, and Amazon warehouse workers. Chapter 4.3 presents data from multiple case studies that demonstrate various instantiations of workplace 'ideology'—namely, 'common sense' and 'customer service' ideologies, both of which play a significant role in controlling workers' behaviours, or their perceptions of what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' when it comes to workplace music listening. Ultimately, this chapter asks: how do workers experience control at work through music listening.

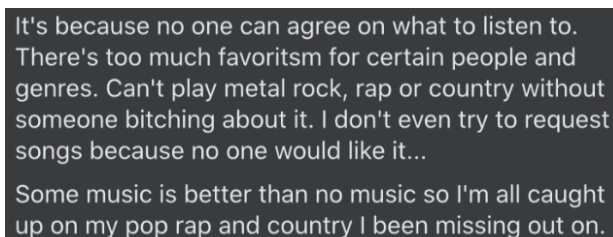
The concept of 'resistance'—in other words, movement *against* power or control—is divided across chapters 5 and 6, under the subconcepts of 'organised resistance', and 'non-organised resistance'. Again, the key questions connecting these chapters are 'what role does music listening play in resistance in the workplace', and 'how does music act as a tool of resistance for workers'. Not only do the two chapters represent different *forms* of resistance, they are also representative of a differing sample of work types: traditionally 'organised' resistance, meaning collective action and bargaining or union activity, was, perhaps predictably, only a topic of conversation in the case studies of Amazon warehouse workers and postal workers, meaning the issue did not arise in the data collected from online forums dedicated to Uber drivers and truckers. This divide is perhaps less stark in definition than my chapter delineation suggests, with the issue of organised activity becoming increasingly pertinent in the case of Uber drivers in particular: many ongoing legal cases have characterised a great deal of platformised labour sectors, with organised resistance resulting in greater protection for drivers in the UK Supreme Court (Russon 2021), and in Californian county courts (AP 2021); the issue of workers' position as 'independent contractors' as opposed to 'employees' continues to be a contested one, though, and it is unfortunately the case that the data collected in this research could not support any notions of organised resistance (with regards to music listening or otherwise) in the cases of Uber drivers, as well as truck drivers.

Accordingly, chapters 5.1 and 5.2 include evidence of different forums of organised resistance relating to music listening in the workplace: first, the use of online forums to form consensus and build solidarity among Amazon warehouse workers toward collective goals around music listening, and second the efforts of postal workers to collectively organise on the topic of headphone and 'personal stereo' (or iPod) use.

Chapter 6 presents empirical data illustrating non-organised resistance, and what might colloquially be termed 'misbehaviour'. Across all the case studies, instances of such 'small acts of

resistance' occur (Hodson 2001: 49), from Uber drivers sabotaging their own car stereos so as to prevent customers asking for unwanted music choices, to Amazon warehouse workers 'hacking' scanners in such a way as to enable music listening. Many of these cases depend on something of a 'don't ask, don't tell' attitude among coworkers, with in-person discretion being encouraged (for example not 'snitching' on someone wearing earbuds on the job), but with the 'don't ask' aspect more accurately meaning 'only ask online': extensive and engaged threads on many of the forums ask, for example, 'I know we're not supposed to but...what music do you listen to when at work?' (fig. 6.3). What links the empirical data presented in chapters 5 and 6 are the ways in which resistance through music listening at work is enacted, experienced, and shared among workers.

The final empirical chapter (7) considers the empirical data as it relates to key theoretical strands from within music studies. Issues of music's effect on mood, emotions, and the body are related to examples in chapters 7.1-3, and the impact of musical 'taste' at work is illustrated in chapter 7.4. In comparison to the previous empirical chapters (7-9), wherein labour relations approaches are explored through the lens of music, this chapter presents musical experience at work through a critical music studies approach. Chapter 7 poses the questions: what does musical experience in the workplace tell us about labour relations, how do aspects of music (i.e. genre, taste) affect social relations at work, and, following Hodson (2001), how does workers' experience of music at work contribute to 'dignity at work'. Musical experience at work as evidenced in the data is divided into its 'positive' and 'negative' effects on mood (chapters 7.1-2), its bodily 'affect'<sup>1</sup> (chapter 7.3), and the issue of taste (chapter 7.5); taste in particular is a central theme within workers' discussions of their music listening behaviours and its effects. Such topics result in often incredibly heated debate on these online forums among workers, presenting excellent material for analysis:



It's because no one can agree on what to listen to. There's too much favoritism for certain people and genres. Can't play metal rock, rap or country without someone bitching about it. I don't even try to request songs because no one would like it...  
Some music is better than no music so I'm all caught up on my pop rap and country I been missing out on.

Fig. 1.3. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfillment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Musical taste can, as fig. 1.3 shows, be a vehicle for disagreement among workers. It can also be, however, a site of community-building, solidarity, and sharing (see chapter 7.4.iv) or, among Uber

---

<sup>1</sup> See chapter 2.7 on affect.

drivers, a way to make money (chapter 7.4.iii). The data presented in chapter 7 demonstrates the wide and varied experiences of music listening in the workplace, and provides a portal through which to view the effect of music on social relations at work.

In chapter 8, I attempt to draw together the theoretical strands set out in chapter 5, along with the empirical data of chapters 5-7. This discussion chapter is organised in a way broadly similar to the presentation of the empirical data, exploring the importance of rules, surveillance, and ideology, within control, organised, and non-organised resistance as they relate to music listening at work, as well as the effects of mood, emotion, affect and taste through music in the workplace. In this chapter the potential limitations of the data are considered, and I ask, 'how useful is all this for workers themselves' (the answer is very!). I also explore the future of this field, and conclude in chapter 9 by drawing the key research questions together with my summarised findings.

This is an important and exciting area of study—one which academics have done a 'considerable disservice to' by 'continuing to avoid addressing [...] the relationship between music and work' (Korczynski 2013: 328-331), and one that is constantly changing: with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (among other ongoing global crises), the ways we work, the type of work we do, and where we do it, shift unpredictably. Alongside such changes, the importance of music at work will continue to be an important aspect of people's daily lives, and it is toward the goal of better understanding this that my research is situated, and to which I hope to contribute.

## 2. Literature and theory review

---

‘Academics will do a considerable disservice to both the literal and metaphorical voice of the workforce [...] if they continue to avoid addressing [the relationship between music and work]’

Marek Korczynski (2003: 331)

‘Managers can benefit from recognizing the importance of employees being able to [listen to] their own music’

Anneli Haake (2011: 122)

The quotes above represent both two of the major contributions to the field that sit at the intersection of music and work studies, and also the diametrically opposed approaches of existing literature, a gap between which this study seeks to fill. Marek Korczynski’s research provides a sociological overview of music at work in a *primarily* historical capacity (2007, 2013).<sup>2</sup> Anneli Haake has written about the nature of music listening in the contemporary workplace (2010, 2011, 2013), but from a purely music psychology perspective. The missing link is clear: a study of contemporary music listening at work, from a critical sociological perspective.

In addressing this gap, it was necessary to draw on theory from two strands from traditionally disciplinarily distinct areas: the sociology of work, and music studies. It does not make sense to divide the study of music and work into two: existing research shows that 80% of workers regularly listen to music in their workplace, amounting to a total listening time of as much as 40% of the entire working week (Haake 2011: 114); and yet an ‘interdisciplinary’ approach inherently necessitates delineations. My discussion of the empirical data in this thesis draws upon

---

<sup>2</sup> Korczynski’s body of work also considers the role of music listening in more contemporary factory workplaces (2014), however this specific ethnography represents something of an outlier with regards to music at work research. The aim of this study is to investigate how music listening effects, and is affected by power relations in a wider variety of contemporary workplaces, also reflective of the increasing platformisation of labour and work environments. Similarly, Payne et al. (2017) provide an ethnographic account of music listening in contemporary service work environments, in an effort to contribute to this under-researched area; they remark, however, that ‘the literature on music in service settings certainly has a lot of catching up to do’, and that this particular angle ‘deserves more attention than it has hitherto received’ going forward (2017: 1437).

these distinct, institutionally separated theoretical approaches. These approaches, that provide the context to empirical discussions and conclusions, will be set out below, before an overview of the (limited) literature that exists at the crossroads of music and work is provided, at which point the strands will be drawn together and my theoretical approach situated.

## 2.1. Contextualising the field of work

Before introducing the concepts of control and resistance and setting these within the context of existing labour relations literature, it is important to provide a foundational understanding of work as it exists today and as labour relations literature considers it. In doing so, two broad conclusions arise: first, there has been a 'shift in [work] regimes away from traditional taylorism or fordism', toward work environments that use 'value-based practices to shape employee identity' (Thompson & Harley 2007); second, and relatedly, there has been a general shift in composition of the workforce. The vast majority of work in the contemporary global north is comprised of service-based employment: in 2018, over 80% of employment in the UK existed within service-based sectors, with less than 20% of work being in agriculture and manufacturing processes (ONS 2019). A clear and continuing trend can be seen throughout the past decades: there has been a slow, but steady increase in service sector employment since the 1960s, from 53% in 1960 to 78% in 2000 (Chiripanhura 2019). Vidal identifies along with this 'the introduction of lean production' (2011: 274). Much has been made of the distinction (or lack of) between 'Fordist' and 'post-Fordist' work, with Fordism describing industrialised labour processes of the mid-20th Century and post-Fordism describing the shift toward service sector work. Edwards and Wacjman suggest that labels like Fordist and post-Fordist do not necessarily reflect the nature of work in its entirety, or indeed any distinct periods (2005): they argue that Nolan and Wood (2003) were correct in diagnosing a gradual shift (rather than periodisation) from Fordist labour processes to a 'service economy'.

Regardless of relatively arbitrary delineations and periodisations, Nolan and Wood suggest that contemporary work can be simply characterised by the 'wide range of very diverse kinds of work' existing in our 'service economy' (2003: 28). As such, any study seeking to address the nature of music and experiences of individuals at work should take this composition into account: accordingly, my selection of case studies (as set-out in chapters 1 and 3) reflect this.



## 2.2. Theoretical approaches to work

Literature within the sociology of work has generally fallen within either ‘critical’ management studies, or ‘labour process theory’ (LPT). LPT, of which the first wave was represented by the work of Braverman (1974), Burawoy (1978) Edwards (1983) and others, can be considered a ‘theory building project’ that seeks to foreground conceptions of control and resistance at work (Thompson 2010). The main concern of LPT proponents was developing working approaches to understanding power dynamics at work. During the 1980s, there was something of a ‘paradigm war’ wherein LPT was criticised for focussing too closely on management theory and not enough on capitalism and labour directly (Thompson 2010); it was also seen as old-fashioned by some, being associated with outmoded scholars and approaches, with ‘critical management studies’ (CMS) being developed in the 1990s and the first ‘Critical Management Studies’ conference taking place.

Thompson (2010) argues that within the ‘battle’ between LPT and CMS approaches, a great deal of unnecessary confusion occurs. He asserts that the key task of any good sociology of work remains the same: ‘to develop a credible account of the relationships between capitalist political economy, work systems, and the strategies and practices of actors within the employment relationship’ (2010: 12). This is a central aim of my research.

## 2.3. Control

In order to lay the foundation for a critical interpretation of music listening in the contemporary workplace, theoretical approaches to the concepts of both ‘control’ and ‘resistance’ should be drawn from existing literature within the field of industrial relations and the sociology of work, as these are the disciplines most relevant to said themes. Control in the workplace has been a central focus of literature in the sociology of work, from early labour process theory (Braverman 1974; Wood 1982; Attewell 1987; Armstrong 1989), which took a Marxist approach to industrial relations, to more contemporary studies assessing the changes in the nature of control at work (Leidner 2006; Thompson & Harley 2007; Thompson 2010; Korczynski 2007, 2013, 2014). Korczynski notes that, more recently, music is being considered within scholarship as an ‘important element in the structuring of social interaction and experience’ at work (2003: 314), however it remains the case that relatively little attention has been paid to music in the sphere of work.

In 'shifting attention towards the production of surplus value' (Spencer 2000: 225), proponents of labour process theory sought to identify the 'erosion of worker control over the labour process', and determined that the capitalist character of work necessitated that power had to be passed 'into the hands of management [...] by the control and direction of each step of the process [of work]' (Braverman 1974: 100). By all means possible, capitalists seeking to 'fulfil their management function in the workplace' must seek to 'maintain control' over their workforce (Spencer 2000: 225). Labour process theory was thus interested in bringing to light the 'systems of control' through which power was enacted in the workplace (Wood 1987: 4).

What, then, are these means of control? One might imagine rules being a key facet of control: in the classroom, teachers control students by introducing and enforcing certain rules; in society, 'law and order' is enforced by codified rules. In the workplace, control is exerted by managers over workers by different types of rules: these may include 'rigid work rules' (Wardell et al. 1999: 11), which may refer to what one is permitted to do at work, as well as how one must act, what one must wear, and what time one must clock in; they may also include 'bureaucratic rules' (39), determining processes, and who answers to whom etc. These can be considered as 'official' forms of control; if a worker is observed 'breaking' a rule, then they may be reprimanded or fired. Thus, rules are enforced.

Many scholars identify the 'systems of control' at work as consisting of both 'soft' and 'hard' forms of control: Thompson and Harley, for example, theorise a shift from the 1980s onwards toward a 'softer and sometimes more indirect form of control' (2007). So, if set rules fall under 'hard' control, what do these 'softer', more 'indirect' forms of control consist of? With the general shift in work environments identified by Thompson and Harley from the 1980s onward, many workers experienced less direct managerial supervision, as they might have previously endured on the factory line. A shift away from primarily industrial labour and toward new working environments such as office and service work necessitated new forms of control through which management might exert power over workers and 'keep an eye on them', without literally keeping an eye on them.

One key instantiation of Thompson and Harley's 'softer' and 'more indirect forms of control' (2010: 9) is workplace ideology. In its normative form, 'ideology' tends to allude to the political, meaning a set of ideas, ideals or ways of thinking which guide decisions and actions. Social scientists have traditionally tended to see ideology as 'normative': Downs, for example, defines ideology as 'a verbal image of the good society and of the chief means of constructing such a society' (1957: 96). Ideology in the sphere of work is usually defined in existing literature as

a way of understanding, or belief, in how things should be done: Armstrong et al., for example, point to 'notions of fairness and legitimising principles' as key facets of 'managerial ideology' (1981: 15). Power, they argue, can 'most economically be deployed behind those interests which can most effectively be legitimised' (15). In this way, 'managerial ideology' can be defined as a method of 'generating matters of principle' in the workplace, which are reflexively legitimised as they are agreed upon (16). Armstrong et al. thus theorise 'managerial ideology' as a top-down method of creating 'matters of principle', meaning that certain rules and practices become accepted as 'self-evident common sense' (54). 'Common-sense' ideology in the workplace is therefore a type of control, as this forms what Armstrong et al. term 'unwritten rules': with the decline of more direct forms of control, 'informal' rules and agreed sets of belief have 'supplanted written regulations' (Armstrong et al. 1981: 33).

Much 'managerial ideology' is also 'shared by the workforce' (Armstrong et al. 1981: 56). Some workers may even assume 'helper' functions (82), taking it upon themselves to actively support and spread these 'common-sense' beliefs as 'matters of principle'; Burawoy similarly argues that 'workers develop a stake in those rules and objectives' (1978). Although the tendency of some workers to 'acquiesce' to a dominant ideology is not 'absolute' (Armstrong et al. 1981: 88), this nonetheless represents a significant way in which control can be exerted by management in the workplace, without 'direct control', merely through 'legitimising principles'.

The role of ideology in the workplace as a method of control has increased with a tendency toward softer managerial methods that may appear 'more attractive to workers' (Leidner 2006): as Saval notes, the Taylorist 'rule' that 'the unobserved worker is an inefficient one' still holds much truth from a managerial perspective (2014: 42), and so new ways of controlling and monitoring individuals at work are of prime importance to employers, of which ideology is merely one.

The role of ideology in the workplace has also shifted in line with the changing nature of the workplace itself: related to 'managerial ideology' and 'common-sense' is the notion of 'customer service ideology', a phrase utilised within existing labour relations literature (Budd 1997; Sturdy & Fleming 2003; Bishop et al. 2005), and is of increasing significance with the rise of 'gig work' such as in the case of Uber or Deliveroo. Bishop et al. suggest that 'customer service ideology' generates normative beliefs about practices and behaviours at work that prioritise 'customer sovereignty' (2005) in service work: in other words, the customer is not only always right, they are also de facto your boss in cases such as Uber, where the 'employer' is something of an abstract concept. Leidner describes the 'customer—worker—management triangle' with

regards to service work (1993), a structure wherein workers are effectively required to answer to both the customer (or Uber passenger) and management (Uber) at the same time. In this way, workers depend on the customers for everything from tips to job security, and so pleasing them becomes not just important but common-sense. The legitimisation of the ‘sovereignty’ of the Uber passenger, as an example, then means that acquiescing to every request is expected of drivers. In a similar way to the observation of Armstrong et al. that some workers may ‘internalise’ managerial ideology and act as ‘helpers’, spreading this ideology through the workplace, individuals may also internalise customer service ideology—leading to the legitimisation of customer sovereignty and entrenchment of so-called common sense.

It is important to distinguish between the different ideologies that may be present in the workplace and which may be, more-or-less, part of systems of control: managerial ideology, as seen above, has traditionally in labour relations literature been considered specifically as the ways in which management formulate and seek to legitimise power and their control in the workplace (this might be more broadly and perhaps simply defined as ‘the belief or argument that there is a correct way to do things, and that is how management says they should be done’); customer service ideology is a separate phenomenon that may in some ways overlap with managerial ideology (its aims or effects may be the same), but can simply be defined as ‘the belief or argument that service work ought to be done in a certain way, so as to prioritise the customer’. Both these two key types can be described as ‘common sense ideologies’, in that they both rely on legitimisation principles that result in certain rules, behaviours, and actions as being taken for granted or accepted as the norm. It is therefore fair to say that ‘common sense ideologies’ are a central theme within what Thompson and Harley define as ‘softer and more indirect forms of control’ (2010:9).

In parallel with the shift of control in the workplace away from ‘direct’ shop-floor tactics and toward ‘softer, more indirect’ approaches, the use of technology and algorithms have increased, often supplanting direct observation as facets of managerial control. A linchpin of Braverman’s theory was that ‘technology is deployed by management to improve control over [...] workers’ (1974). In the historical workplace, this might have meant increased security and rule measures such as ‘autograph recorders’ or clocking-in machines whereby workers’ job efficiency could be monitored remotely. Such surveillance technologies were aimed at ‘increasing efficiency, measuring productivity, decreasing risk, and generally maximizing profits’ (Rosenblat et al. 2014), with monitoring methods seeking to ‘prevent workers from slowing or sabotaging the modes of production’. In the contemporary workplace, these surveillance technologies remain and take

increasingly opaque and malignant forms: in the case of Amazon warehouses, for example, employees must pass through metal detectors and other security measures to enter their workplace (Gracely 2012). Surveillance as a method of control at work is facilitated by the ready availability of such technologies as CCTV and metal detectors; in parallel, personal data is more easily accessible and may be monitored or even controlled by employers. In our increasingly platformised digital age, ‘technology has a primary role in both managing labour relations and labourers’ working conditions’, argue Birgillito and Birgillito (2018): with an increasing number of people employed in ‘gig work’ such as through Uber, the necessary use of apps and other technology for these jobs means that a huge wealth of digital resources are available through which to monitor employees, both directly (through GPS and data tracking), and indirectly (through reviews, feedback, and social media activity etc.).

One of the key characteristics of this facet of control is that we do not know how they work: online data and digital technologies generally remain relatively opaque to the average worker. In discussing the ways in which Uber functions and how drivers are matched with riders and subsequently rated (and reviewed, tipped etc.), Birgillito and Birgillito remark that ‘we don’t really know how the algorithm works’ (2018:32). There is a ‘drastic imbalance of power in the platformised economy’ that is further obfuscated by such technologies, leading to a ‘lack of trust’ and atmosphere of suspicion and surveillance (36). Technologies of surveillance, monitoring, and control also require the researcher to grapple with questions of discrimination: scholars have pointed to the potentially ‘racist’ and ‘sexist algorithms’ that characterise contemporary platformised labour (Chander 2015: 1025). Algorithms are designed within a world so ‘permeated with the legacy of discriminations past’ that the possibilities of discriminatory ‘manipulation’ of these technologies ‘are legion’ (Pasquale 2015: 82). For example, the disproportionate surveillance and policing of Black people in society may continue within the opaque technologies of control, with scholars suggesting that ‘racism will likely evidence itself in these systems’, leading to consequences in the particular case of Uber of ‘Black drivers being less well-rated than white drivers’ (Leong 2014). The potential for discrimination within such systems of control are not limited to the algorithm either: within the context of many studies demonstrating the disproportionate and discriminatory effect of security features like police ‘stop and search’ on Black individuals (Delsol & Shiner 2006; Bowling & Phillips 2007; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah 2011), it is reasonable to predict similar phenomena in the case of workplaces—for example, Black Amazon workers may be more likely to be treated to closer scrutiny through warehouse security measures.

These ‘systems of control’ lay the foundation for my discussion of the empirical data, and will be evidenced subsequently.

## 2.4. Resistance

‘Resistance’ is an antithesis of ‘control’. While labour relations theory regarding control in the workplace can seem dishearteningly negative, Armstrong notes that management and workers exist in a state of ‘structured antagonism’ (1989: 312), entailing a sense of agency from all sides of the labour process. Notions of power and control in social relations often return to discussions of Foucault and Latour, however in order to acknowledge and discuss the relative agency of workers and their ability to resist managerial power it is not necessary to delve deep into ontologies of power, and whether Foucault is correct in theorising that power ‘circulates’ around social networks (1983), rather than being concentrated in one place or enforced downward in a Marxist sense. In fact, proponents of LPT sought to ‘distance themselves’ from such Foucauldian conceptions of power (Burrell 1988: 167), as the notion that worker resistance might simply create ‘more disciplinary attention’ was ultimately self-defeating for ‘Bravermaniacs’ (167).

Regardless, it is undeniably true, as is theorised in much existing labour relations literature (Armstrong et al. 1981; Armstrong 1989; Hodson 2001; Taylor & Bain 2003; Thompson 2010), that resistance—be it ‘organised’ or otherwise—occurs, and is important for many people in the workplace. ‘Organised’ and its alternatives I find to be productive categories for understanding resistance at work. Armstrong et al. (1981), Hodson (2001), and Taylor and Bain (2003) all similarly distinguish between ‘organised’ and other forms of resistance in the workplace. For Taylor and Bain, the main alternative form of resistance is subversion and misbehaviour (in their study humour is used as an example of a tool with which to achieve this), while Hodson describes ‘small acts of resistance’ such as sabotage and misbehaviour as vital for worker ‘dignity’ (2001). Any categorisation of ‘organised’ and ‘non-organised’ resistance is inevitably not clear-cut, with Armstrong noting that ‘tensions and contradictions’ always exist within hierarchical work relationships (1989: 312); Korczynski explores how individual acts of resistance can take on a ‘dialectical quality’, whereby such acts can be seen to have ‘both enacted social order and expressed a spirit of resistance’ (2020).

For the purposes of analysing my empirical data, however, I chose to make clear this distinction. Organised resistance is a relatively uncommon phenomenon when it comes to music listening at work; unsurprisingly, when collective bargaining, music is rarely at the top of the

agenda for worker demands. Similarly, when strike action and collective organising does occur, it is rarely on the grounds that workers are unable to listen to music at work, or for other music-related reasons. In the UK, strike activity began the 21st Century at a record low level (Taylor & Bain 2003: 1487)—a level which has remained relatively low (Lyddon 2015, 2018; Vandaele 2016)<sup>3</sup>— and this progressive weakening of collective organising power seems to only be increasing with the surge in platformised work and in anti-union ideology espoused by companies like Amazon and by politicians at a high level, particularly in the US (Leidner 2006). Much literature on work in the UK and US has concluded that organising is increasingly becoming weakened due to surveillance and managerial ideology (Taylor & Bain 2003); indeed it does seem that many avenues previously available to workers in organising efforts no longer exist, particularly due to platformisation whereby a new worker will often be available immediately should others strike. Even an ‘effort bargain’, whereby workers organise to provide less effort in their labour until demands are met, is essentially nullified through contemporary platforms and algorithms, with poor reviews leading to less work and pay; in the example of Uber drivers, collective action would inevitably be limited.

Taylor and Bain do argue, however, that the narrative of the ‘disappearance’ of unions and collective organising has been ‘overstated’ (2003: 1488). Even as I am writing this thesis, unionising efforts are proving increasingly effective, particularly in the cases of Starbucks and Amazon (Clayton 2022). Although anti-union sentiment remains strong among both management and some workers themselves, such cases do indeed point to the ‘continuing relevance of unions’ (Taylor & Bain 2003: 1488). Edwards and Wacjman also write that ‘new methods of solidarity and resistance’ at work are being sought (2005: 31), based on shared values, tastes, and cultures.

If ‘organised’ resistance is characterised by union activity and collective organising, then the alternative to this is ‘non-organised’ resistance. As Armstrong notes, ‘the capitalist agency relationship is shot through with the potential for conflict’ (1989: 316), creating what Bain terms ‘contested terrain’ (2003: 1489). It is on this contested terrain that workers may resist managerial control in ways that do not rely on structured and union activity. Hodson stresses the importance of ‘countless small acts of resistance against abuse’ in the experiences of workers (2001: 49), wherein practices as simple as ‘misbehaviour’ may constitute a subversion of power (or an attempt therein): ‘resistance to management can include both passive and active elements’, Hodson notes (2001: 60), including ‘withholding enthusiasm, and avoiding work’, or engaging in

---

<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing, however, strike activity, particularly within the transport sector, has seen an uptick in both frequency and media coverage (Ambrose 2022).

‘machine or social sabotage’. A material example of this type of non-organised resistance appears in the memoirs of General Motors factory plant employee Ben Hamper (1991), who describes how workers ‘threw rivets and blasted [...] radios’ to both irritate and inconvenience their ‘corporate pit bull manager’ (334).

In their case study of two UK call centres, Taylor and Bain remark on similarly non-organised acts of resistance in the form of humour: shared jokes and mocking of superiors constituted ‘undirected subversion’ (2003: 1494), with a ‘general mocking and cynicism about management undermining team leaders’ (1498). The authors point to workers sharing in humour and the ‘belittling of superiors’ as having the potential to ‘erode the defence of authority’ (2003: 1498). In concurrence with Linstead (1985), Taylor and Bain suggest that non-organised acts of subversion, while ‘relatively disorganised’ (2003: 1496), can effectively ‘resist’ and ‘sabotage’ managerial control, and upset the balance of power in the workplace. Although in Taylor and Bain’s study they note that it is impossible to define precisely the ‘contribution that humour [might] play in successful unionisation campaigns’ (1506), remaining more of a ‘directionless subversion [...] unconnected from conscious strategy and not accompanied by a broader union challenge to the employer (1500), such acts of non-organised resistance should not be dismissed. They reject the ‘simplistic and mistaken application’ of totalising theories of control in the workplace that lead to the conclusion that such strategies are futile or redundant (2003: 1488).

Indeed, Hodson argues that through these ‘small acts of resistance’, while existing within an antagonistic workplace relationship wherein organised union activity may not be overwhelmingly present, ‘dignity at work is realised’ (2001: 50). To work, and exist, with dignity is a ‘central concern for workers’, even if ‘the founders of sociology were only secondarily concerned with workers’ active struggles to achieve [it]’ (2001: 50). As Hodson points out, workers are not ‘passive victims of social structure’, but rather ‘active agents in their own lives’. It is important, he argues, to pay close attention to both the ‘active and passive strategies’ through which workers resist control (2001: 49), and consider the ways in which ‘small acts of resistance’ such as humour, misbehaviour, sabotage—and music listening—provide workers with the capacity for dignity.

Studies such as Taylor and Bain’s (2003) remain the only major contributions to non-organised resistance relevant to the contemporary workplace. It is for this reason that the empirical evidence offered in this study will be crucial to providing a fuller and more productive account of workplace power dynamics, particularly in relation to music listening.



## 2.5. Contextualising the field of music

Music studies (including musicology, sociology of music and the psychology of music) have tended to ignore the field of work. And yet, as Hesmondhalgh notes, music itself can be central to power relations, ‘fueling capitalism’s incorporation of autonomy’ (2008: 337). Music has increasingly come to be ‘recognised as an important element in the structuring of social interaction and experience’ (Korczynski 2013: 313), yet ‘little attention has [still] been paid to music in the sphere of work’. In analysing empirical data for this study it was therefore necessary to draw on existing theory not just from labour relations but also music studies, in an aim to unite the different strands and draw attention to relevant conclusions for both disciplines.

A key limitation identified by Korczynski (2013: 314) is that studies of music such as those of Tia DeNora (2000) and Bull (2007) fail to ‘investigate centrally music within work’ (my emphasis). Other writing on music, such as work by Sloboda (1999, 2011), Bull (2007), Bergh and DeNora (2009), Katz (2010), Lesiuk (2010), and Frith (2013), are however important in contextualising musical experience at work. In the following section, existing literature on the effect of music on mood, emotion and the body, as well as the importance of taste and genre, in relation to the lives of workers, will be set out.

## 2.6. Emotion and mood

The effect of music on the mind and body has been extensively covered within musicology and the psychology of music (Juslin & Sloboda 2001; Lesiuk 2010; Sloboda 2011; Frith 2013). Anderson, differentiates between moods as ‘like colored lenses through which we judge [and experience] the world’, and emotions, being ‘physiological-rooted feelings’ (2015: 816). Traditionally, the effect of music on emotion and mood has been separated from its effect on the ‘physical body’, and this divide continues to thrive in even contemporary literature (El-Aouar et al. 2016). This divide can be unhelpful and such a ‘mind/body dualism’ has been critiqued extensively. It is, I believe, helpful however to define mood, emotion, and ‘bodily affect’ as distinct phenomena in order to effectively analyse empirical data that may exhibit instances of each.

There is a plethora of existing studies showing that music can help ‘enhance’ mood at work (Oldham et al. 1995; Lesiuk 2005; Haake 2011; Hagen 2015). Haake’s 2011 study concluded that ‘music improves your mood’, and ‘helps you relax’ (116), noting that in particular classical music

had a positive effect on mood (113), although this was ‘not necessarily related to greater levels of relaxation’ (121).

Lesiuk found in two similarly designed studies that office-workers ‘reported decreased levels of states of anxiety when music was used’ (2000), and that ‘when music evokes a pleasant mood and an increased arousal state, [workers] perform better on non-music tasks’ (2005: 173). ‘Music listening certainly has a positive effect in the work environment’, Lesiuk argues (2005: 188). Mood ‘states’, Lesiuk writes, ‘are a result of an individual's unique past experiences’, meaning that memory plays an important part in music listening at work.

With the advent of new listening technologies such as Spotify and Pandora Radio, the ability to control ‘mood states’ has come to the fore (Anderson 2015): in his study of streaming platforms and mood, Anderson connects a historical thread through lounge music, early 20th-century Muzak, to what he describes as ‘Neo-Muzak’ (2015: 811). Music streaming services such as Spotify, increasingly prevalent in the workplace, utilise technologies and algorithms to ‘curate musical moodscape’. Many of these new platforms ‘explicitly advertise themselves as new tools for user-guided mood elevation’ and regulation (2015: 811), which Anderson terms ‘Moodagement’. Streaming platforms like Apple Music and Pandora in particular are designed to make use of music playlist algorithms (rather than hand-curated music); this is particularly relevant to the work environment of Uber drivers, with over one third of new cars in the US previously coming integrated with Pandora (Pandora 2013)—although Pandora is now in decline, both financially and from a user perspective (Ingham 2021). Mood-oriented streaming services allow listeners to like, skip, or reject songs, enabling what Anderson describes as a ‘rudder controlling the musical flow’, and giving them greater specificity with regards to controlling mood (2015: 827). Such ‘Neo-Muzak’ brings ‘a new kind of pleasurable relief from ambient anxiety, boredom and drudgery’ (2015: 831), and gives listeners a tool to better adjust their ‘moodscape of work’. Crucially, users of such platforms Spotify, Apple Music, and Pandora are ‘overwhelmingly overrepresented’ in the workplace in comparison to those who listen regularly at home (Anderson 2015: 831),<sup>4</sup> and so the impact of algorithms on individuals’ work lives is significant. Listeners are afforded what Anderson calls ‘relative autonomy’ in managing their ‘individualised psychic space’ (2015: 839). Ultimately, Anderson concludes, ‘self-guide mood music’ can act as an effective ‘mood stabilizer’, staving off

---

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, as Landay and Harms note (2019), up-to-date figures on music listening and platform use in the contemporary workplace are often impossible to ascertain, particularly in a generalisable state: ‘little research has examined the role of music in the modern workplace’ (2019: 375). It is partly for this reason that the empirical findings of this study are so vital.

fear, anxiety and stress, and providing workers the opportunity to ‘preserve their psychological capital’ (2015: 839).

Hagen makes reference to a similar phenomenon in her study of ‘mood music’ (2015), demonstrating how streaming services ‘elevates personal music preferences’, allowing people to ‘manipulate and actively maintain’ their own moods (18). It is Hagen’s belief that individuals’ connection to music is deeper than merely ‘being able to choose one’s own playlist’, arguing that music and its elicited moods, emotions and feelings become ‘more valuable and meaningful’ the more we are able to feel in control of them (2015: 13). The ability to access ‘context-sensitive’ playlists for different moods, in particular ‘alongside work’ is valuable to the individual (2015: 12).

Yet the effect of music on mood is not always a positive one: Furnham and Strbac (2002), for example, conducted a study of office workers, finding that music can ‘negatively impact task performance’ by impacting on focus, and ‘irritating’ individuals’ concentration. Haake similarly notes that music may create an annoyance at ‘extreme levels’ (2011: 110). While music can have a positive effect on individuals’ mood, it can also possess ‘distracting qualities’ (2011: 117). In fact, many of the ‘negative effects’ of music highlighted in Haake’s study are attributed to it being ‘too effective’ in its ability to offer anxiety alleviation and ‘escapism’ (2011: 121). While Haake is quick to emphasise the negative impact this over-effectiveness may have on ‘task completion’, a critical approach might prioritise the well-being of the worker over the productivity of the work.

A critical approach to music and its effect on mood might also draw attention to the implications of ‘Moodagement’: Eriksson and Johansson, for example (2017), note that music streaming services and mood playlists are ‘not neutral’ technologies (67); Spotify and Pandora, in their mood-managing playlists ‘for work’ play into what they term ‘neoliberal individualist ideology’. Music and its effect on mood is often considered in a purely functionalist sense (see DeNora 2000), and as benefiting productivity: these new technologies form ‘structures made for producing and monetizing intimate expressions’ and ‘exemplify how systems that provide freedom and flexibility for the individual user might also be bound up with productive constraint’, representing merely tools with which to ‘monitor and regulate’ workers (2017: 78). Spotify and other streaming services seek to associate themselves with ‘the progressive and liberating visions [and politics] of digital technologies’, through which to engender ‘freedom of choice’, yet in reality the ‘flexibility and freedom for individual [listeners] is bound up with control and disciplining of audiences’ (Eriksson and Johansson 2017: 78). In this way, the regulation of mood, or ‘Moodagement’, can disguise the political control of workers: Eriksson and Johansson set these streaming services in the context of the ‘long tradition of using music as a means to impact upon

worker output' and productivity (2017: 74): official playlists on Spotify centred around working and productivity take on a more sinister edge in this light.

Against this backdrop, there remains a significant research gap in critical approaches to mood and the effect of music in the contemporary workplace, one that my research seeks to address. As Hesmondhalgh notes, 'emotions matter [...] they are linked in complex, opaque but important ways to ethics' (2013: 13), and, following Higgins (2012), play a central role in 'enriching people's lives through music. Hesmondhalgh argues that 'some cultural theorists are too inclined to dismiss emotion' and mood (2013: 13); such topics will therefore be central in my analysis.

## 2.7. Affect

The second aspect of musical experience for which I draw on existing literature is bodily 'affect': both an overused and under-developed concept in musicology. 'Emotions, feelings and moods' are all 'the realm of affect', states Hesmondhalgh (2013: 11), yet affect also concerns 'how people compose their bodies, how they conduct themselves', and 'how they experience the passage of time' (DeNora 2000: 17). So, what is affect? Many different, often divergent philosophical lines of inquiry, have been brought into discussions of music and its effects on individuals' experiences. Affect is 'thought as necessarily being relative or bound to feeling', suggests Schrimshaw (2013: 30); following Shaviro (2010), we might consider emotion as 'residing on the side of subjective affirmation', while affect 'itself' constitutes something akin to the 'carrier' of this emotion or mood, while 'remaining distinct from it'. In a similar way, Priest talks of 'music affecting us emotionally' (2022: 45): in other words affect as a phenomenon is distinct from, potentially carrying, but residing outside of—or above—emotion, feeling, and mood. Jarman-Ivens conceives of musical 'affect' as 'including not only emotions but also moods and bodily rhythms' (2013: 184), while Anderson differentiates between emotions, moods, and 'physiological-rooted feelings' (2015: 816). We might then consider affect as encompassing mood, feeling, bodily rhythm and physical feeling.

It is prudent, in seeking to provide an account of, and analyse, workers' lived experiences of music listening, to take a clear stance on such theoretical distinctions. Thus, I define affect in relation to music as—while necessarily including 'emotions, feelings and moods', as Hesmondhalgh notes (2013)—primarily its bodily impact and effect. In line with DeNora, then, when I speak of the 'affect' of music, I speak of how it 'may influence how people compose their bodies, how they conduct themselves', and 'how they experience the passage of time' (2000: 17).

What music does to and for the body, and how it affects one's 'energy' is central when considering affect, then (DeNora 2000: 17).

There exists historical precedent for such discussions of musical affect: work songs and music chants 'informing the rhythm and pace of labour' is one example of this (Korczynski 2013: 317). In the case of industrialised workplaces, the affect of music can be viewed critically: 'Music While You Work'<sup>5</sup> in factory settings had an impact on bodily pace, coordination and functionality in the west in the 1940s (Jones & Schumacher 1992; Korczynski & Jones 2006). The 'regulating' function of music on the body and its ability to impact one's perception of 'time and space' was important in increasing productivity in Fordist workplaces. Such bodily affect has not disappeared in modern times, merely changed, with the increasing prevalence of listening technologies and streaming services: Hoskin refers to the 'organising function' of music listening as creating 'in us an embodied sense of timing and spacing', and a 'sense of how to navigate around routines' (2004); in this way the bodily affect of services such as Spotify can stand to benefit employers in terms of productivity. Tacchi, from a musicological perspective, suggests that listening to the radio 'helps establish affective rhythms' in listeners which may play an important role in their experiences at work (2009: 2). Prichard et al., approaching the subject from more of a labour relations angle, implore future researchers to consider how individuals 'tune in to rhythms' and conduct themselves while listening to music (2007: 16): in doing so we might conclude that music listening, in having the effect of making the work day appear to pass faster, provides a bodily affect that is potentially beneficial to both the worker and the employer.

Two key facets of affect and music's impact on the body are highlighted by Sloboda (2011) and Korczynski (2013): first, its 'energising' capabilities; and second, music as 'entrainment'. Music plays a role in 'affect management' in that it may energise the individual (Sloboda 2011), or even provide literal verbal encouragement through lyrical content (Haake 2011: 121). Music as entrainment<sup>6</sup> is highlighted in the historical examples provided by Korczynski, wherein music and

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Music While You Work' was a BBC radio programme that ran from 1940-1967, specifically designed to provide optimal background music for factory settings and other workplaces, however the phenomenon itself encompasses many official (or otherwise) broadcasts and alternative music listening occurrences.

<sup>6</sup> Musical 'entrainment' refers to the 'process by which independent rhythmical systems interact with each other' (Clayton 2012: 49); these can be bodily movements or functions as well as non-human systems like musical rhythm. As Clayton argues, 'some form of coupling must exist between the rhythmical systems', in order for such a phenomenon to be deemed entrainment. Such 'coupling' can mean synchronicity, aligning phrases or periods, among other examples. Entrainment itself is not a 'domain specific' term (Clayton 2012: 51).

song helped workers physically ‘sync’ their movements at work, providing a feeling of energy and impetus. With the increasing proportion of work in service-based employment, however, the use of music as entrainment (and indeed in many cases its energising effect), may have decreased, as repetitive manual labour and assembly-line work has become less common (or at least less visible). However it is not outside the bounds of possibility that music as entrainment occurs in environments such as offices: related to task engagement, it is likely that music may encourage workers to ‘sync’ to the beat, aiding said work. Indeed, research from within the psychology of music suggests that musical entrainment is crucial to more successful cognitive skills, including basic and more complex work tasks (Maróti et al 2019: 664). The goal of this research, though, is not to provide evidence (for or against) musical entrainment and its effect on task performance at work: this is a topic well-covered by the literature presented here; instead, my interest in entrainment lies with its implications for workers’ rights, and control and resistance in the workplace. For example: does entrainment represent an underexplored facet of control in the workplace, with music listening encouraging workers to unwittingly complete tasks more quickly and profitably for managers? Can it act as a form of resistance, with warehouse workers tuning in to the rhythms of their own music in a way that works against the drudgery and oppressive nature of capitalistic work culture? Or does the reality lie somewhere in-between, reflecting the push-and-pull of workplace social relations? Such questions will be explored in relation to the empirical evidence presented in chapters 4-7.

## **2.8. Taste**

The third key thread from existing music theory that I draw upon for my analysis is on musical taste. Playing a central role in our experiences of music, taste, and judgements thereupon, always reflect things ‘outside the musical world’ (Frith 2013: 18). Many scholars from within musicology and sociology more broadly have explored aspects of musical taste (Barber 2010; Frith 2013; Lewis & Kaufman 2018; Webster 2020), although rarely are these theories applied to the sphere of work.

In order to more accurately analyse what people talk about when they talk about taste, many scholars have found it important to ascertain what we mean by ‘good’ and ‘bad’ musical taste (Fox 2004; Frith 2013; Trotta 2020). Simon Frith suggests that a better question is often to ask not ‘what is bad music’ but ‘what is ‘bad music’” (2013: 15): we cannot point to different forms of ‘objectively bad music’, but rather to how people—and groups—decide what is and isn’t their kind of music. Frith suggests that the question, and possible answers, are ‘not musical’, but rather

sociological (2013: 15): what occurs when people make judgements about music and taste is a form of 'displaced judgement', whereby 'bad music' describes a 'bad system of production, or bad behaviour' (2013: 15), possibly including gratuitous sex and violence. As such, judgements about what is 'good' and 'bad' in terms of musical taste are in fact judgements of 'the social institutions or [...] behaviours for which the music simply acts as a sign' (2013: 16). Taste in general 'is a cultural logic, determined by social relations structured in hegemonic dominance and resistance' (Fox 2004: 43).

So it turns out that 'bad' is an excellent word to use when describing taste, as 'aesthetic judgements are necessarily tangled up with ethical judgements' (Frith 2013: 19); meaning 'bad taste' refers both to the content of the music itself as well as the social context. Arguments about taste are 'arguments that matter' to people, Frith writes (2013: 22), but as well as often boiling down to ethical judgements, also frequently defer to the 'problem of noise' (2013: 24): Frith argues that the problem is not necessarily the content of the music itself but rather the 'feeling that someone else's music is invading our space' (2013: 24). In a similar way, Trotta argues that there is a difference between 'annoying noise', and 'music taste' (2020), wherein arguments around music taste become about the nature and context of sound rather than genre or taste per se. If we are forced to listen to 'someone else's music', our 'sense of spatial integrity' is violated, meaning that disagreements on taste become disagreements on space and sound (2013: 25). In conclusion Frith argues that 'the music [taste] itself is not really the issue' (2013: 25), rather that it is invading our space.

Judgements of taste often come couched in sweeping statements about genre: arguments are 'always framed by generic umbrella genre classifications', Trotta argues (2020). Genres are formed by social consensus and are not rigid: they 'provide a set of ideas, expectations and moods', formed in part by how people associate them with social values (Frith 2011; Trotta 2020). They also 'do not coincide in any straightforward way' (Negus 1999: 29); Brackett describes the 'paradoxes of genre' through which genre itself 'speaks to the transitory divisions in the musical field that correspond in discontinuous and complex ways to a temporally defined social space' (2005: 75). Crucially, discussions of genre and taste can be just as central in how people build community and express solidarity at work, as they can be fields of disagreement and negative experience.

For Born (2011: 378), music 'conjures up and animates imagined communities, aggregating its listeners into virtual collectivities and publics based on musical and other identifications'; in this sense taste and genre must have a significant impact on individuals in the workplace. It is

Born's assertion that music is increasingly important 'in its powers to generate imagined or virtual communities' (2011: 381), with genre being a 'primary mechanism for the mutual articulation of musically imagined communities and social identities'. Similarly, Drott succinctly concludes that music taste 'both constitute[s] social groups, and [is] constituted by them' (2011: 7). It is in this context of community building and shared taste that many of the examples within the empirical will be analysed.

Of course, music taste does have significant negative effects in the workplace: just as shared taste may help build 'imagined communities', so might divergent tastes manifest in racism, classism, or sexism. Much existing literature on the nature of 'cultural taste' considers the role music plays in reproducing class structures (Lewis & Kaufman 2018; Webster 2020), with Lewis and Kaufman asserting that taste is 'highly correlated with socioeconomic status and provides nuanced markers of subcultural distinction', representing a 'natural site for examining culture' (2018: 1684). However accounts often fail to consider the impact of race and gender: as Lonsdale writes (2020), an 'intersectional analysis' is required in order to assess the perceived values ascribed to certain music genres and their impacts on existing workplace dynamics—consider for example the cases of Uber drivers receiving poor ratings on the basis of race (Leong 2014; Chander 2015), and how music listening might play a role in these. These theoretical considerations were paramount for me in approaching this research and, in collecting the empirical data from online forums and message boards, proved to be well-founded.

## **2.9. Existing literature at the crossroads of music and work**

I finish this review of the existing literature and theory exactly where my original research began: at the crossroads of music and work. While preparing a paper on music in London Underground stations at King's College London, I discovered a (relatively) niche pool of existing literature on music and power relations, mainly from an 'ethnomusicological' perspective (Cusick 2008; Johnson & Cloonan 2008; Hirsch 2012). The majority of these texts consider how music might be used to control and manipulate individuals in both public and private spaces, but none of them studied the workplace. It was from here that I arrived at the work of Korczynski, whose writing provides a critical perspective on the histories of music at work (2007, 2013). In the following section, then, I will provide an overview of the literature and theory which currently exists at this crossroads between music and work—primarily that of Korczynski and Haake (2011, 2015), but also



introducing some pertinent conclusions from the studies of Johnson and Cloonan (2008) and Hirsch (2012).

Music in the workplace has, historically, been utilised for ‘control in the Brave New World sense’ (Korczyński 2020: 3), to ‘help workers forget the relations of exploitation and power in the factory’. The most obvious historical example of control as being instantiated through music at work is the ‘Music While You Work’ BBC radio broadcasts which lasted between 1940-1967—music that could be piped to large numbers of employees and which was specifically tailored to encourage positivity and productivity in the workplace (Korczyński et al. 2013). Such an example is evidence of ‘top-down’ control via music broadcasting, with the dual purpose being of both boosting productivity and also placating workers with enjoyable or calming music (Korczyński et al. 2013).

Korczyński argues that music as a form of control in the workplace was enabled through two key facets: first, music acted in ‘setting the pace of work’ (2013: 323), which in itself is a political process, with workers enduring a ‘loss of autonomous pacing’ and managers ‘appropriating the aural space of the labour process (321); second, music as utilised by managers often acted as a ‘reward’ to workers for ‘good behaviour’, and for putting up with the ‘lack of freedom’ endured within the industrialised workplace (Korczyński et al. 2013: 322). In this way, music as used in the Taylorised workplace ‘affirmed the necessity of labour’; in other words, music played a ‘vital role in making the workday bearable’ while also entrenching the existing power relations brought about by capitalism and the division of labour.

Korczyński also notes that music might have also been used in a controlling manner through its absence: work songs, singing and whistling were common in pre-industrialised workplaces, and these were ‘effectively silenced’ in the Taylorised workplace. Music and song was frequently banned in factories, with many employers seeing it as ‘non-productive’, and often concerned over the ‘workers’ collective voice’ that was enabled through shared music listening and performance (2013: 322). In this way, the control of music both in its usage and absence has been a historically important aspect of labour relations.

Resistance in the historical workplace, as achieved through music, is another theme within Korczyński’s accounts: in pre-industrialised environments, for example, work songs acted as both a way of enduring the work itself, as well as setting the pace. Although evidence of the specific nature of these songs is ‘particularly thin’ (Korczyński 2013: 318), oral histories and commentaries suggest that music primarily helped in overcoming the difficulties of work life, in particular its ‘tedium’ (319). Following Clayre (1974), music in pre-industrialised work settings could be said to

take on a character of resistance due to the ‘meeting of work and play’, wherein ‘serious productive labour’ is infused with the ‘intrinsic satisfaction in the work itself’; in this way, music arguably becomes an empowering aspect of work life.

Music as resistance is of particular relevance in industrialised workplaces where the means of production are not controlled by labourers, meaning that the tensions between management and the workers themselves is more acute. Numerous oral and written histories including Hamper’s (1991) provide accounts of music representing a form of resistance to managerial power. In a similarly ‘dis-organised’ example of resistance, Korczynski notes how music listening helped workers ‘resist boredom’ and re-appropriate ‘alienated time’ in the workplace (2013): it ‘took people away from clock watching’. He also suggests that even in environments where workers did not have control over their music listening, they retained ‘the opportunity for [their] bodies to resist being dominated [...] in a musically-inflected agentic way’ (2013): in other words, workers might move and react to music in personal ways, outside of the realm of managerial control.

Ultimately, historical musicking culture at work ‘had a dialectical quality’, being ‘simultaneously with and against the monotonous, routine, hierarchical social order of the factory’ (Korczynski 2013). Music at work throughout history ‘both enacted social order, and expressed a spirit of resistance’. It is Korczynski’s suggestion, however, that the ‘decentralised consumption’ that characterises contemporary music listening, and the bringing of the ‘private’ space into the workspace might take away from any meaningful role it could play in resistance (2013: 327): the growth of ‘niche-oriented music’ and personal stereo usage etc. ‘increases the likeliness of meaningful experiences’ at work (328), and that workers ‘may use music functionally in the labour process’.<sup>7</sup> This highlights the importance of my empirical data in analysing the role of music listening in the contemporary workplace; indeed, Korczynski stresses the importance of

---

<sup>7</sup> Korczynski does not of course conclude that ‘functional’ uses of music are necessarily more ‘meaningful’; instead, it is instead likely the case that the meaningful experiences conferred through the use of increasingly personalised music listening at work *can* act functionally, in that they may aid or contribute to task completion. It therefore follows that more functional uses of music *≠* more *meaningful* (read important or better) experiences. This is a vital distinction to make when considering the liberatory potential of music listening in the workplace: to consider music’s functionality inherently positive is to endorse a capitalist ideology (Liz Pelly provides excellent insight into mood music, streaming services, functionality, and capitalism in her work [2017, 2019]). It is important, however, not to relegate the voice of the listener—worker—in these conversations (hence the choice of empirical sources for this study), as two things can be true at once: curated music listening at work offered by streaming platforms can reflect a capitalistic functionality effect, but it can also lead to positive experiences that help people survive their day.

considering ‘a range of cases [...] to draw out the likely implications for the relationship between music and work [...] today’ (2013: 328). Academics ‘will do a considerable disservice to both the literal and metaphorical voice of the workforce [...] if they continue to avoid addressing’ the issue of music at work in contemporary society (2013: 331); so, while Korczynski provides theoretical underpinnings for music at work from a historical perspective, the importance of studying it in the context of the fast-changing modern world of work is clear.

This is not to say that studies into the nature of music listening in the contemporary workplace do not exist: rather, these are situated primarily within the psychology of music. One such key example is Anneli Haake’s research (2011, 2015): using a ‘strongly data-driven approach’, Haake examines ‘what music is listened to [at work] and what functionalities are attributed to it’ (2011: 111). Immediately, the shortcomings from a critical perspective are apparent: Haake’s work is functionalist, coming from a musicological tradition in the same vein (Juslin & Sloboda 1999; DeNora 2000; Sloboda 2011). This is not to say that Haake’s work cannot tell us much about music listening at work that can subsequently be viewed through a critical lens. Following Hesmondhalgh (2013), and Korczynski (2013), we should prioritise the voice of the workers themselves—such sociological studies often allow us to do so.

Haake’s 2011 study is one of the most extensive accounts of music in the contemporary workplace, illustrating the nature and effects on workers. Her research is useful in two key ways: first, she lays the groundwork for surveying the nature of music listening in the modern workplace, offering a substantial and relatively up-to-date data set on the subject; second, she offers concrete ways in which music affects workers, and how they themselves experience it from a personal perspective.

The ubiquity of music listening in the contemporary workplace is highlighted by Haake: in her study she found that workers listen to music for an average of 36% of their entire working week (2011: 114), with a ‘majority’ of office workers regularly listening to ‘a myriad of [...] genres’, most frequently cited of which was classical (113). Aside from its ubiquity, Haake highlights the increasingly personalised nature of ‘self-selected’ music listening (2011: 110): the ability to choose music is seen as a significant benefit to many workers.

Many of the effects of music in the contemporary workplace that Haake identifies are similar to those discussed in the musicology-specific sections, including ‘improving mood’, ‘helping to relax’, and even ‘inspire’ workers (2011: 121). Crucially, however, Haake considers these conclusions in a functionalist manner, suggesting how music may be ‘used’ to help work (2011: 108), rather than centring the desires or needs of workers. She even suggests that ‘managers can

benefit from recognising the importance of employees being able to select their own music' (122), noting that managers involved with her study were 'very interested' in any results (presumably that might help productivity). Bull observed similar enthusiasm from managers for 'positive' results in his 2007 study on iPods and headphone use.

As Korczynski notes, 'research on the effects of [music listening] on productivity and tiredness 'mushroomed' in the mid-to-late 20th Century', and continues to do so, from a functionalist perspective (2013: 10): Haake's work is just one example of this relative lack of critical approach to contemporary music listening.<sup>8</sup> It seems clear to me that a research gap exists within this exact space: music listening in the contemporary workplace must be studied with a critical lens; hence my interest in combining these existing studies and theories with relevant empirical data.

## 2.10. Music and power

The final literature precedent through which I contextualise my analysis of the data is the relatively small branch of critical music studies that *do* consider power and social relations with regards to music (contemporary examples of which, alluded to in the subsequent section, include Cloonan & Johnson 2008, and Hirsch 2012).

Work on music and power from a critical perspective actually has a lengthy history, albeit a patchy and incomplete one. Theodor Adorno (1941) and Jacques Attali (1985) represent the two most significant voices from within what might now be academically defined as critical music studies. Adorno was concerned with the ways in which the cultural industries manipulate and use music, and the ways in which music and its contents then reflects this. According to Adorno, the 'standardization' of popular music, referring to the repetition of easily-memorable melodies and harmonies, allowed for the commodification of its art (1941: 25), an observation with which Attali would later concur (1985 [2009]: 81). In other words, Adorno argues that the specific structures and other musical characteristics of genres such as pop lend themselves well to manipulation within capitalism.

---

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that Haake's study is not in fact even strictly contemporary (2011): at the time her work was conducted, there was more limited availability of social media sharing platforms and streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music (2011: 122). As such, regardless of the limitations of its functionalist approach, Haake's research does not cover these crucial developments in modern music listening technologies, as will be addressed in this study.

Korczynski observes that for Adorno, in a theory linking directly to labour relations, ‘the main mode of listening to music in the industrialized world involves passivity’ (Korczynski 2003: 322-323). Authority figures, Adorno asserted, might use pop music within the Taylorised labour process in order to wield power, and ‘as a sign reminding the workers of the rewards for putting up with the lack of freedom for eight hours’ (Korczynski 2003: 324).

Attali pithily stated that ‘with music is borne power’ (1985 [2009]: 6), and that music has historically ‘refused to stay tied to a camp whose power was dwindling’ (49), resulting in the increasing prevalence of the ‘manipulation of power through music’ (114). In an introduction to Qureshi’s ‘Music and Marx’ (2002), Attali writes that ‘music is a way of expressing to humans their labours, of hearing and making heard their condition’ (2002: x): beyond the semantic connection to music at work, it is evident that Attali continues to consider music as a central force within power relations. As Jones and Schumacher note, ‘for Attali, [music] is indicative of forms of power that are generalised and dispersed in their effects’ (1992: 165), in something of a Foucauldian sense. Crucially for Attali, music ‘signifies the presence of a power that needs no flag or symbol’ (1977: 111): this is particularly relevant in the case of anti-capitalist critiques of social consumption, as he continues to state that ‘music repetition confirms the presence of repetitive consumption’ (1977: 111).

Timothy Taylor argues, however, that ‘there has been little advancement in thinking about music and capitalism’ since Adorno (2015: 1). This is not to say that there has been none: Johnson and Cloonan (2008: 10), for example, note that music can be ‘exploitatively manipulative’, with the ‘dark side’ of music listening, particularly in public spaces, being an underdeveloped area of research (2008: 190). The main examples pointed to in more contemporary literature remain in the public sphere, with Johnson and Cloonan (2008) and Lily Hirsch (2012) both analysing the use of music in Australian city suburbs and public spaces, in order to deter ‘unwanted’ people: in Hobart, for example, Bing Crosby was piped into a residential (but public) area ‘to deter loiterers’, while Hirsch points to a government ‘trial program to deter local youths’ in Sydney wherein classical music was piped in public spaces late at night (2012: 15); both these examples are instances of what Johnson and Cloonan call ‘class-based musically controlled differentiation’ (2008: 185), whereupon music is used as a weapon to ‘banish by virtue of musical tastes’. Hirsch similarly states that ‘this potential for discrimination and segregation is rarely acknowledged’ (2012: 27).

Music may also have a manipulative effect in ‘homogenizing’ based on tastes and ‘social norms’ (Brown & Volgsten 2006: 4). In their study of music and manipulation, Brown and Volgsten observe that ‘music has an important role in bringing about behavioural conformity and in

stimulating compliance' (2006: 4), by 'fostering enculturation of individuals', thereby 'sorting people into social groups' and 'creating musical-preference groups'. If, as Frith suggests, 'music's power is to construct our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers on the body, time and sociability' (1996: 124), then it is clearly of importance who controls the music.

Of course, workplaces are not always (but may be) public spaces. As such, how applicable is a critical approach to music and power, following Johnson and Cloonan and Hirsch, to case studies not within public space? In the case of a postal worker listening to Spotify with headphones, perhaps not at all. In the case of an Uber driver navigating a social interaction with their customer—in which what music is playing on the stereo often matters—perhaps more so. In the case of Amazon warehouse workers where music is often heard by others, chosen by others, and wherein headphone use is more controlled, perhaps more applicable still. In this case study, as is shown in the data, music taste, disagreements, and shared 'norms' are incredibly important and play a significant role in workers' experiences; so a critical approach as informed by existing theory is prudent. Furthermore, with the demise of musical control devices such as 'music while you work' broadcasts in factories, these more insidious instantiations of control, power or manipulation may in fact become more relevant than before.

Music as 'controlling consumers' within retail environments has been a frequent line of enquiry for more contemporary studies (Goodman 2012: 142), so why not as controlling workers? Johnson and Cloonan suggest that many of the problematic aspects of music listening and musical experience are both 'obscure' and 'unforeseen' (2008: 171). There has been, they argue, a 'general refusal of the media to take these issues seriously' (190), reflecting an attitude of 'trivialization' of music that is a 'deeply embedded ideology that shadows popular music studies by placing it on the defensive' (2008: 190). In this way, trivialization of music and its power—in both control and resistance—has seeped down through the institutions, and has resulted in a dearth of important studies. The relevance of applying a critical lens, reflecting the confluence of existing literature within music studies and the sociology of work, to the data in this study, is undeniable.

## **2.11. Coalescence**

In reviewing the existing literature and theory from within sociology of work and music studies it is clearly apparent that the weaknesses of both are in failing to consider the other: both Haake and Korczynski, two of the primary sources residing at the intersection of the two disciplines, stress the way in which music can be an enlightening lens through which to view people's

experiences at work; in a similar sense, Taylor and Bain's study of humour in the workplace provides a template for using elements of culture to analyse labour relations (2003), yet the equally valid angle of music listening is rarely utilised. Furthermore, in outlining the work of Korczynski (2003, 2007, 2013), and Haake (2010, 2011, 2013), it is evident that even the literature existing at the crossroads of music and work studies is necessarily limited in different ways: Korczynski primarily studies the historical instantiations and importance of music at work, while Haake considers contemporary music listening at work, albeit from a functionalist psychological perspective.

It is within this clearly defined space that I situate my empirical data and discussion thereof. To return to my introductory remarks (see also chapter 4): the aim of this research is to contribute to a burgeoning pool of literature that seeks to understand music at work and its importance for workers, providing both key theoretical and empirical input. It is my belief, as evidenced throughout this chapter, that the fields of music and work studies suffer from a hesitancy to pursue interdisciplinarity, and even those studies that exist in this realm leave significant gaps that need addressing. In this context, I present over the next four chapters (following methodological discussion) empirical evidence that addresses the key issues around music listening in the contemporary workplace, and continue to approach the data with the aim of combining theoretical approaches from both music and work studies. Although chapter 11 offers the most independent theoretical analysis of the data, I attempt to subfuse the empirical data as presented in chapters 4-7 with observations from existing literature and link them appropriately with various strands of theory. It is my hope that the following research will not only contribute to a greater understanding of music listening at work, but also a push toward further investigation and interdisciplinary approaches.

### 3. Methodology

---

The methodology and overall scope of this project has changed significantly from prior to the Covid-19 pandemic: as set out in the introduction (chapter 1.3), a mixed-method approach was initially planned, following Hodson (2001), Grazian (2004), and Haake (2011), however the impact of the global crisis prevented me from pursuing this plan. It was therefore necessary to adapt. In researching relevant internet forums for both Amazon warehouse workers and Uber drivers, it became apparent that abundant and rich data was available in both cases; more than enough for a thesis of its own. Therefore, two additional case studies, where internet message boards would be the primary source, were selected, with the aim of covering a broad spread of contemporary work sectors. Utilising four case studies of different worker-types would enable both a greater variety of data, and more generalizability, while also seeking to make any conclusions applicable to a greater number of workers and work environments. Necessarily, choice of case study was limited to those sectors for which substantial online communities existed already: in order to produce a rigorous and relevant systemic analysis of internet forums about music at work, it was decided that for each case study there should be two separate active message boards in existence, each with at least 1000 members. In each case, data should yield at least 50 individual threads on the topic of music (this number ended up being closer to 100 for every case study).

In the sections below, the process of selecting, collecting, coding, and analysing data for each case study will be explained, before the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology will be discussed.

#### 3.1. Research paradigm

Social research such as that undertaken within this thesis is faced with epistemological and ontological challenges. Epistemology is concerned with what knowledge is, 'what counts as knowledge', and 'how knowledge claims are justified' (Ejnavarzala 2019: 94). Ontology deals with 'the existential conditions related to material, social, cultural and political contexts' (Ejnavarzala 2019: 94). Within both epistemological and ontological philosophies are contained a variety of approaches, however these can most simply be defined and delineated within the two main



research paradigms within the social sciences: positivist (or post-positivist), and constructivist (or interpretive) paradigms.<sup>9</sup> According to Chilisa and Kawulich (2012: 54), positivist paradigms are ‘informed by realism, idealism, and critical realism’, asserting that there is ‘one, knowable reality’ (2012: 55). Contrastingly, constructivist paradigms assert ‘multiple socially constructed realities’ (2012: 55), and that ‘truth is context dependent’. In order to best understand the nature of music listening at work and workers’ experiences, an ‘interpretive’, or constructivist approach was most prudent. The research methods that were envisioned (recording and interpreting online data directly from workers) reflect, and are paradigmatic of, such a constructivist approach (Chilisa and Kawulich 2012: 56). In the subsequent sections, the nature of such methods are set out and explored in terms of usefulness, reliability, and generalisability.

### 3.2. The four case studies

Case Study	Amazon	Uber	Postal work	Trucking
Forum name(s) and type(s)	a) Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes (Facebook group) b) r/FASCAmazon (SubReddit)	a) UberPeople (message board) b) r/UberDrivers (SubReddit)	a) USPS Postal Maniacs (Facebook group) b) Royal Mail Chat (Facebook group) c) r/USPS (SubReddit) d) RoyalMailChat (message board)	a) TruckNet (message board) b) r/Truckers (SubReddit)
No. members (in thousands)	a) 36.8 b) 9.2	a) 172 b) 78.7	a) 33.5 b) 14.6 c) 48.2 d) 99.6k	a) 84.6 b) 57.2
No. threads selected	136	129	109	89
No. mentions of ‘music’	2118 (2.7%)	4040 (1.8%)	588 (0.8%)	948 (0.8%)
Other relevant keywords	‘Safety’ (320) ‘Listen’ (256) ‘Allowed’ (214) ‘Headphones’ (179)	‘Aux’ (1349) ‘Play’ (1324) ‘Radio’ (1182) ‘Bluetooth’ (421)	‘Radio’ (607) ‘Headphones’ (565) ‘Listen’ (372)	‘Radio’ (1468) ‘Song’ (287) ‘Listening’ (272)

Fig. 3.1. Table of case studies.

<sup>9</sup> As Chilisa and Kawulich note (2012: 54), other research paradigms exist, most notably ‘transformative, emancipatory’, and ‘postcolonial, indigenous’ approaches. They define the emancipatory paradigm as aiming ‘to destroy myths and empower people to change society radically’: this is certainly a goal of mine, however I believe this aim to be beyond the scope of a doctoral thesis.

Why were the above cases selected for study? In addition to the original case studies of Amazon warehouse workers and Uber drivers, internet forums from postal workers and truck drivers were selected as rich sources for analysis. A total of four different work environments result, offering both a greater volume of data, and more variety. From preliminary research, each case study appeared to offer unique insights into different aspects of music listening at work: for example, threads among Amazon warehouse workers frequently referenced 'health and safety' in relation to music listening, Uber drivers often discussed radio stations and aux cables, and postal workers referenced 'headphones' more than any of the other three case studies. An initial survey of the internet forums therefore indicated where different theoretical approaches might be appropriate, and a reflexive relationship between the data itself and the critical theory I wanted to discuss was developed.

In pursuing answers to the central research question of this study (what is the nature of music listening at work?), it was logical to seek paradigmatic, or 'exemplar' cases (Flyvbjerg 2011: 307). Selecting paradigmatic cases enables the researcher to 'develop a metaphor or establish a school for the domain that the case concerns' (Flyvbjerg 2011: 307), thus ensuring a certain level of generalisability. Therefore the cases (as set out in fig. 3.1) were chosen to act as 'exemplars', reflective of a broad variety of contemporary work environments. The four case studies selected also exhibit characteristics of 'extreme' or 'deviant' cases, in that each promised the opportunity to study particularly unusual and 'especially good' examples of music listening at work (Flyvbjerg 2011: 307).

Having established the justifications for each case study, the search engine of each message board was utilised in order to find every original thread in which music was mentioned. Given in-built search engines are relatively imprecise, this process yielded many irrelevant threads, so individual threads were selected for coding and analysis based on critically assessing their pertinence: necessarily, such a process includes a certain level of subjectivity, yet by combining critical and systemic analysis, I hoped the best results would be achieved. In line with Giles (2017: 200), datasets of internet threads should be limited by identifying a suitable time-frame, and so results were ordered up to and including the final month of data collection (September 2021); relevant threads in the case of each forum therefore come from their inception until this date. My initial aim was, ultimately, to analyse 100 threads within each case study, thereby ensuring both significant sample sizes, and equivalency among them. Inevitably, the number of relevant threads in which music listening at work was discussed varied between case study, with the fewest being truck drivers (89 threads), and the greatest being Amazon warehouse workers (136 threads),

however with a mean of 116 and median of 119, there are no statistical outliers, and a broadly similar data set was ensured.

Optimising online message board threads for analysis and discussion is a ‘pragmatic’ process (Giles 2017: 201), and in most cases is ‘simple, if laborious’: often simply a case of ‘cutting and pasting text from the browser into an offline document’. As my dataset included threads from a variety of different message boards and forums, this process was certainly laborious but not entirely simple: Reddit, Facebook, and the other sites used in this study each employ different formatting types and, in many cases, it is not possible to simply ‘cut and paste’ text; therefore, a mixture of techniques were used to extract threads, including converting sites to HTML, and printing web pages and subsequently converting these. Homogeneity was the goal in order for ease of analysis and replicability, however this was sometimes impossible. A similar issue is described by Medley-Rath (2019: 1772): Facebook, for example, ‘truncates comments on posts’ (this also occurs on Reddit), meaning the researcher has to manually ensure all relevant data is collected during this process; furthermore, ‘automated data collection [...] violates Terms of Service’, making employing coding tools impossible.

Then, as is unique to online data, as opposed to in-person interviews of observation, decisions need to be made about ‘non-textual information’ (Giles 2017: 200), with forums including the use of ‘emoticons and images’ in posts: if, as Gilles asks, an individual comment or post consists of ‘nothing more than a link or an emoticon’, is this ‘analysable material’? Discretion was therefore required in deciding what material would ultimately be coded.

### 3.3. Coding

Coding of the data took place in ATLAS.ti, a software similar to NVivo. There were two central reasons for using such software to code the data: first, a level of systematic analysis could be achieved lending itself to greater reliability and more relevant conclusions; second, themes interwoven between threads and case studies could be highlighted, extracted, and brought forward for discussion—what Armbrorst terms ‘latent patterns’ that ‘cannot be observed by simply reading the material’ (2017: 3). As Hodson notes, ‘by using systematic methods of comparison across multiple cases, researchers can introduce the methodological tools of probabilistic (as opposed to deterministic) causality’ (2001: 53). This was a key aim, for ‘without the aid of content analysis software, it is not possible to systematically read between the lines of large text samples’ (Armbrorst 2017: 4). Two levels of codes were used: the ‘upper’ level derived from the key

theoretical discussion points as set out in Chapter 2; the ‘lower’ level of codes fell under these categories and referred to more specific topics as they appeared in the data. As seen in fig. 3.2, these top-level codes included ‘control’, ‘resistance’, and ‘musical experience’, as well as codes for comments specifically relating to listening technology and those I termed ‘great quotes’, the former of which ultimately became a part of the three main codes, and the latter merely acted as a reminder of unmissable data.

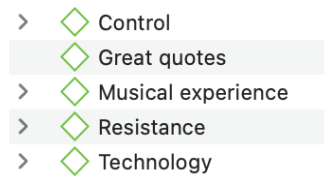


Fig. 3.2. Screenshot from ATLAS.ti.

As shown in fig. 3.3, these upper-level codes included within them more specific and detailed topics apparent in the data:

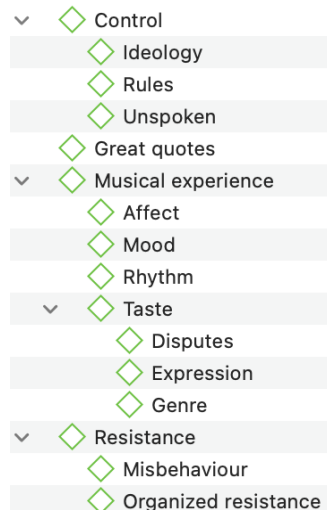


Fig. 3.3. Screenshot from ATLAS.ti.

Within ‘control’, thematic ideas of ideology, rules, and unspoken instances of control were coded, while ‘resistance’ was divided into misbehaviour (or non-organised resistance), and organised resistance. Within the code of ‘musical experience’, the subcode ‘taste’ was itself divided into smaller codes relating to ‘genre’ and ‘disputes’; my aim was to create a blueprint for systematic analysis that mirrored the theoretical discussions.

Having completed the coding, the data from the four case studies, stored virtually in ATLAS.ti, could then be used for both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Method should serve a purpose: the purpose of undergoing this systematisation of the data was to both highlight themes,

connections, and patterns, and make illustrating a critical discussion of music listening at work clearer and more effective.

To this end, the data was analysed quantitatively, to support theoretical assertions, and individual examples were selected from the coding which were then organised and prepared for use in this thesis. In doing so, a number of precautionary steps had to be taken: first, names and identifying geographical information were redacted from all screenshots used at source (doing so at any point after would allow sensitive information to be uncovered by digital software); second, any profile images or other personal images were redacted. In collecting and presenting the data, anonymity was not possible. However, effective steps have been taken to ensure confidentiality,<sup>10</sup> in line with Holtz et al. (2012). Ethical perspectives concerning using data such as internet message boards have been discussed at length (Eysenbach & Till 2001; Holtz et al. 2012), but there is a consensus among researchers that online groups where posts can be read by anyone present ‘less ethical concern’, being ‘relatively public behaviour’ (Herring 1996), in comparison to private communication spheres in which privacy is a key factor due to certain vulnerabilities, as in the case of self-help groups, and those centred around the victims of crimes or diseases etc. (Holtz et al. 2012: 6). Of course, there is usually ‘no need to publish users’ names’ in academic publications, as is the case in this study. Privacy concerns should be approached ‘on a case by case basis’, Holtz et al. argue (2012: 7), with there being a ‘trade off’ between ethical perspectives and the ‘transparency and accessibility of data’. This project, I believe, effectively achieves such a compromise.

### **3.4. Online forum data: benefits**

Studying internet forums offers significant research opportunities, many of which are inaccessible via traditional means. From the ‘earliest iterations of online communities’, scholars have ‘recognised the potential for using forums and message boards for research’ (Weslowski 2014). Facebook and other platforms continue to be ‘fruitful sites for research’ (Ditchfield & Meredith 2018: 3). While an increasing number of relatively contemporary studies, particularly in psychology, utilise data from forums and message boards (Holtz & Wagner 2009; Galasinska 2010), digital platforms remain something of an ‘emerging field’ (Skitka & Sargis 2006). And, as Hesmondhalgh notes, it has historically been a common fallacy that many ‘empirical studies of

---

<sup>10</sup> For more on this, see chapter 3.4.

popular music audiences' exist (2002: 118); in fact, very few exist in which 'we actually get to hear the voices' of music listeners.<sup>11</sup> The benefits of focussing my empirical research on music at work through the lens of online forums is therefore twofold: first, the data yielded is relatively 'authentic' (Holtz et al. 2012: 4), forefronting individuals' voices, and it is of good quality for analysis; second, such an approach can yield better results than traditional methods (Weslowski 2014).

One of the key benefits of analysing data from online message boards and forums is that it is 'naturally occurring' (Potter 2004), in that it 'would exist in the online sphere whether or not the researcher had been there to collect it' or not; it follows that online data is 'relatively authentic' (Holtz et al. 2012: 4), providing 'natural data with few constraints'. This reflects not only on the content of the data but also its accessibility, traceability and replicability: it is 'comparatively easy for other researchers to retrace [the] analysis process', ensuring conclusions are both open and relevant. Accessibility and replicability is of central importance to a good sociological study, and is certainly appropriate for one in which technology plays such a key role (as in music listening).

The quality of the data itself was crucial in devising my methodology, and online forums offered an excellent space for accessing such material. The reasons for this are many: data from internet forums, for example, benefits from 'relative anonymity' (Holtz et al. 2012: 4), meaning contributors are more motivated 'toward openness'; similarly, comments yielded in forums frequently represent 'more detailed responses, which my clarify thinking about an issue [...] more effectively than in interviews'. Benton et al. describe internet message boards as providing 'rich data' for a variety of purposes (2011: 989), while in an important indication of the relevance and quality of such data, Langer and Beckman argue that 'for many, the internet has replaced traditional word-of-mouth' in both casual discussions and 'advice-seeking', meaning that 'authentic and genuine communication' can be studied (2005).

In a similar way, drawing data from internet message boards provides the opportunity to foreground the voices of workers themselves: as Hodson argues, 'workers' views are frequently missing from discussions about what is right or wrong in the contemporary workplace' (2001: 50). In formulating this research I speculated that systematically analysing large samples of data from internet forums would address this call, and in the process of collecting my data and writing this thesis, this theory was confirmed.

---

<sup>11</sup> Certainly, more research exists than at the time of this publication (Hesmondhalgh 2012), however it remains true that such studies are relatively few and far-between within academia; there is certainly less funding for popular music studies than other disciplines.

The strength of my methodology lies also in that which alternative methods cannot provide: surveys, for example can result in ‘workers’ views [being] frequently missing from discussions’ (Hodson 2001: 50), as traditional methods such as these do not necessarily ask ‘about the behaviours through which [workers] adapt to, challenge, and make sense out of the structures they confront’: this has been a key theme within my data. Certain contemporary sociological methods may, as Hodson notes, ‘reproduce many of the limits of our leading theories’; analysing data from internet forums, on the other hand, can allow the voices of the workers themselves be the driving force behind discussions of themes, theory, and conclusions.

In some of the workplaces in which the critical study of music listening is of most relevance to issues of power and control, traditional methods are simply not possible: while traditional ethnographies ‘having a long tradition of providing in-depth descriptive accounts of work life’ (Hodson 2001: 51), a number of factors can make these methods ‘difficult or even impossible’—such is the case with Amazon warehouses. Very rarely do Amazon allow media or researchers access to their warehouses, especially unguided, as would be necessary for any good ethnography. Furthermore, as is the case in particular with Uber drivers, but also with truck drivers and postal workers, direct observation is difficult if not impossible, meaning that online forums provide perhaps the only space in which this type of data presents itself; the ‘abundant material’ available on message boards may not just be more easily accessible (and replicable) online, but this methodology may be the only way to actually access it (Holtz et al. 2012: 3).

Relatedly, studying online forums provides the opportunity for the researcher to gain insight into the many subcultures and inner workings of different communities. Taylor and Bain argue that it is of the utmost importance to ‘acquire an intimate knowledge of an organisation’s ‘underlife’ (2003: 1491): observing the data, readily accessible to the public, in its ‘natural environment’ on message boards, therefore, can present an excellent space in which to do so.

### **3.5. Deindividuation and other issues with the data**

There are necessarily drawbacks to drawing empirical data solely from online forums and message boards: these will be discussed below, and include ‘deindividuation’ (the way in which people may act differently online [see Holtz et al. 2012]), questions of relevance, as well as issues of interpretation, subjectivity, and confidentiality.

‘Deindividuation’ is the phenomenon in which people may act differently, impulsively, and potentially more extremely or offensively, in situations where they are relatively anonymous and

less likely to be identified or held accountable—such as online. Holtz et al. note that this may make data collected from forums and message boards less reflective of reality and accurate to in-person experiences and actions (2012: 5). As a result, statements collected in this study might be exaggerated or untruthful. There are two mitigating factors here: first, discretion is ordinarily, and must continue to be, applied by the researcher, meaning reasonable steps will be taken to identify and avoid reproducing clearly unreliable data; second, deindividuation may indicate exaggerated and potentially extreme behaviours online, however these behaviours still occur offline—in other words people may lie, exaggerate or act in extreme ways in person, and therefore more traditional data sources such as interviews and direct observation are not immune from these issues. It should also be noted that this study is designed to reduce the potential impact of deindividuation, with data being collected from a variety of message boards and forums, and in significant sample sizes.

Although online data may seem relatively and in general more contemporary, it is conventional for studies to warn that ‘everything they contain is going to be soon out of date’ (Crystal 2001: 224). A difficulty encountered in collecting data from this project was that more—and seemingly increasingly relevant—material was appearing online as fast as it was being collected. A cut-off point for data collection had to be decided, though some pertinent worker discussions were inevitably left out. Yet as Ditchfield and Meredith note, research analysing such data should be viewed as ‘part of a cumulative collection of studies of online spaces’ (2018: 11); it is important to accept the impossibility of instantaneous publishing of data!

As noted previously, there were also practical difficulties inherent in the methodology: for example, ‘scraping’ (digitally mining) data is often both against the terms of service of platforms, as well as technically impossible (Medley-Rath 2019: 1772). Furthermore, due to the differential formatting of online platforms, a webpage and its data may appear different depending on the medium and by whom it is being viewed. It is therefore impossible to say that the data is completely replicable: if another researcher was to repeat my processes they may find discrepancies. Certain tools are available to standardise online data, such as internet extensions and word processing add-ons (Medley Rath 2019), but findings will likely never be exactly the same. It is therefore important to qualify any claims to the replicability and accessibility of the project; yet by the nature of the data being drawn from sites available to anyone with an internet connection, this method retains its strengths.

A further difficulty identified with online data and the methodology utilised in this study is the issue of interpretation: as Hodson observes (2001), the author of a text may intend one



meaning, while the researcher may present an altogether different reading. Hodson suggests that all interpretations 'are our own and may not always reflect the predispositions, judgements, and conclusions of the original' (2001: 59). There is no productive benefit in becoming bogged down in 'postmodernist claims' that texts have 'multiple layers of meanings' (Hodson 2001: 59). This is more-or-less true but difference in intention and interpretation is an ever-present issue, and is potentially more pronounced in its differentiation than data collected through more traditional means: in an interview, it is possible to observe other indications of meaning, such as body language and facial expressions. Similar indicators do exist in online data, notably in the examples of emojis, image replies, and other non-textual information. However, 'decisions need to be made' as to how, and indeed whether, to analyse this material (Giles 2017: 200); a level of subjective interpretation will remain regardless. Of course it is worth noting that such subjective interpretation will necessarily be present in any other form of qualitative analysis, including of interviews and direct observation.

Penultimately, there is the issue of the worth of online data and social media platforms more generally. In his book 'Netnography' (2009), Robert Kozinets brings into question online forums as places of any 'meaningful social relations', and therefore of study. Kozinets refers to online forums as 'geeking communities' (2010: 36), suggesting that there is less value in studying message boards and groups than in-person activities. He does, however, note that online forums offer 'their members and readers deeply detailed information about a particular set of activities' (36). Scholars including Giles (2017) strongly disagree with Kozinets' assertions regarding the relative lack of value online communities offer both their members and researchers, and it is my view that this latter observation in 'Netnography' identifies some of the strength of online data: it does offer 'deeply detailed information' that can otherwise be difficult or impossible to access, and it is the job of the researcher to identify and bring this to light.

Confidentiality, as touched upon in chapter 3.2, is the final key issue identified, and one that is a common point of contention when considering online and otherwise relatively freely available data. Take as an example the statement of a postal worker in fig. 3.4:

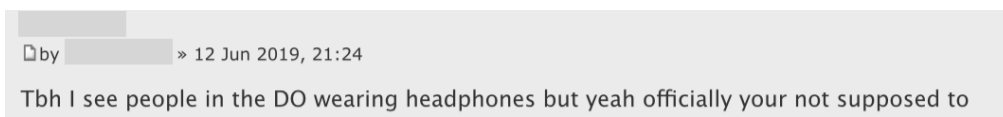


Fig. 3.4. Screenshot from Royal Mail Chat.

Varying across the different online platforms, directly identifying features in the data range from forum usernames to actual Facebook names, personalised user icons to individuals' real headshots, and even specific locations from which messages and comments are sent. Equally, an individual's identity might be revealed from contextual clues included in the content of messages (for example, 'I drive past X location every day'). The first category of identifying information is relatively easy to completely redact in the data, following Medley-Rath (2019), and has been done in this study. To an extent, the latter category (contextually identifying information) is less problematic when separated from the former, becoming meaningless when individuals' names, pictures, or locations are removed. It still remains the case though that specific online data, and therefore the people behind the comments and usernames, is relatively easily accessible via a simple google search: depending on whether a Facebook group, forum, or SubReddit is still active (or archived), typing the text from any number of the examples contained in this study often leads to a link and then straight back to its origins.

It therefore remains that, beyond the common sense steps such as redacting names and profile pictures (as is done in this research), the remaining issue of confidentiality is something of a grey area: as Williams et al. note (2017: 1159), data gathered from social media usually conforms to 'most guidelines' given the research is conducted 'in a public place where people would reasonably expect to be observed by strangers', but some of these spaces 'blur the boundary between public and private space'. Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that 'what is public and what is private is rarely clear-cut' (1995: 267); it is therefore the conclusion of Williams et al. that 'a social media researcher's point of view must take to account the unique nature of this online public environment' (2017: 1160). As such, while recognising that 'providing total anonymity to directly quoted users is not practical in this form of research' (due to the searchability of text online), the researcher should use discretion when handling such data. Accordingly, in this study a certain level of necessary subjectivity is employed in deciding what to include in terms of direct quotes, and potentially identifying information: some comments from workers are not published in this research, despite being publicly available, because they are *very* revealing (for example, an postal worker describing their exact daily route—and its musical accompaniment). A delicate balance is therefore attempted between research and public interest, and personal privacy: one which I believe is achieved in this study.

## 4. Control

---

Under each subheading within this chapter, a number of case studies are considered in the context of the literature and theory on control and resistance as set out in chapter 2. The extensive primary data lends itself to supporting Korczynski's conclusion that music is an 'important element in the structuring of social interaction' at work (2003: 314); in this case with particular regard to control and resistance.

### 4.1. Rules

#### i. Amazon warehouse workers: 'y'all have music?!

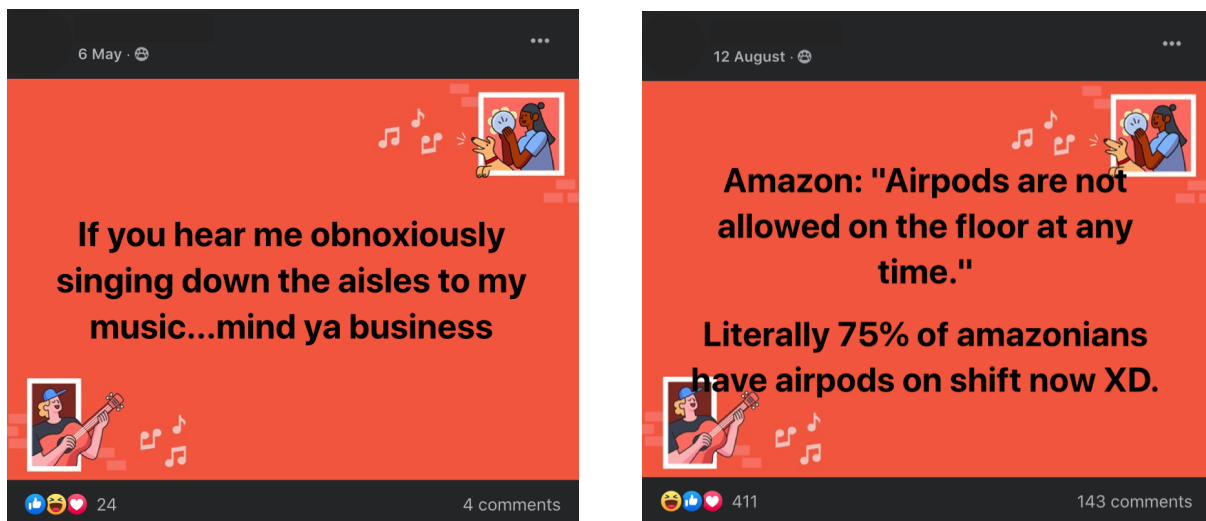


Fig. 4.1. Screenshot from Amazon warehouse workers' Facebook group.

Amazon warehouses are spaces in which a dynamic of authority (management) and 'the people' (workers) exists. They represent fertile grounds for research into how rules and control are exerted by those in power, often to the detriment of individuals. It is of scholarly and public interest to investigate the realities of rules in such hotly-contested and relatively inaccessible spaces where people work, and where authorities are often keen to avoid critical inquiry; this is an area which

existing research into rules, control, and music listening occurs (Cloonan and Johnson 2008, Hersch 2012). The data gathered from the Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook page and an Amazon workers' SubReddit offers a unique scalpel with which to dissect such discussions.

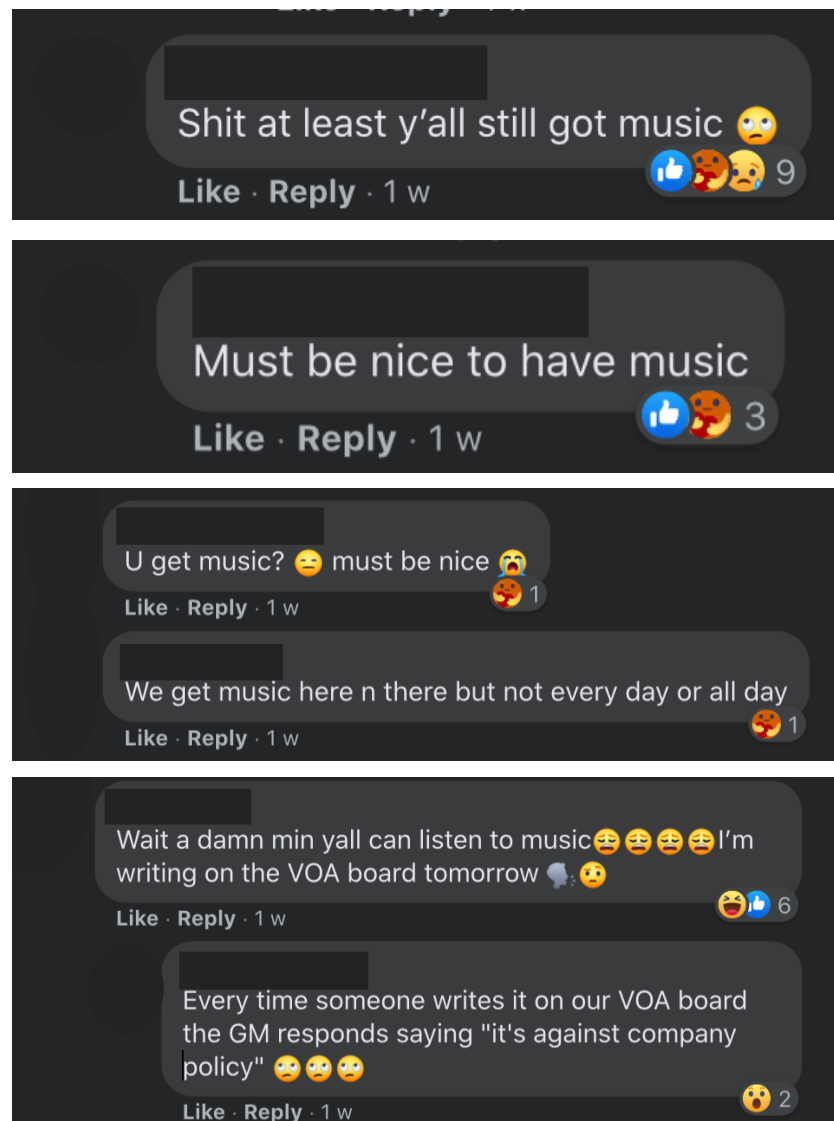
Rules regarding music listening in Amazon warehouses are a hot topic in the Facebook group: 'allowed' is the second-highest occurring seven letter word (after 'working') in all posts about music listening, occurring 214 times in total, accounting for 0.3% of all text. In a reflection of the strength and ubiquity of rules and control in the workplace, the majority of these occurrences are referenced negatively (i.e. 'music is not allowed', or 'we are not allowed to use headphones'), accounting for 76%, in comparison to positive or neutral statements; it speaks to the prevalence of rules and prohibitions that linguistic negatives like 'don't', 'never' and 'can't', are common occurrences with regards to discussions on music listening. 'Policy' occurs 180 times, and 'rules' 106 times. The most common concurrent topic of conversation with regards to what is 'allowed' is also what is often referred to as the reason for the rules: 'safety' (occurring 320 times within all posts, of 0.4%). Threads on the rules surrounding music comprise 83 of the 138 total selected, and these are often the topics which generate the most interaction by Amazon workers. Compare and contrast, for example, the number of comments and likes on two similarly-formatted posts, fig. 4.2 about singing on the job, and fig. 4.3 about headphones not being 'allowed' on the floor:



Figs. 4.2-3. Screenshots from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

The most direct way in which management exert control over workers in Amazon warehouses within the sphere of music listening is by banning it in its entirety—regardless of how effective this actually is, as implied in fig. 4.3. Specific rules regarding the prohibition of music in warehouses are difficult to ascertain and certainly not made readily available to the public, and

they are often alluded to in a comparative sense; for example, the following comments on posts about music in the workplace:



Figs. 4.4-7. Screenshots from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

While the reply in fig. 4.7 directly references 'company policy', a common occurrence in the data gathered seems to be the realisation that music is banned in workers' own workplace but allowed in others'. In the data there is no mention of official, unified company policy, but multiple examples like those above from which it can be concluded that rules differ between, and are specific to, locations. The 'side-eyeing' and 'frowning' emojis frequently used by these commenters in figs. 4.4-7 demonstrate displeasure, likely both at the perceived unfairness and inconsistency of these rules. Digital platforms like Facebook groups offer unique spaces for individual workers from often

distant geographic locations to coordinate and discuss the reality of their situation with others (in the case of this Facebook page, 37k others), gaining perspective that certainly would not have been possible without these forums. Workers may previously have held similar views regarding the unfairness of not being able to listen to music, however through online interactions, are able to justify their feelings and potentially even form collective beliefs or norms. As will be discussed in chapter five, on organised resistance, these interactions reflect what Coulter identifies as the potential for digital platforms to ‘foster community among coworkers’ (2014:17).

Many workers do specifically reference rules about music, and on occasion how they are enforced:

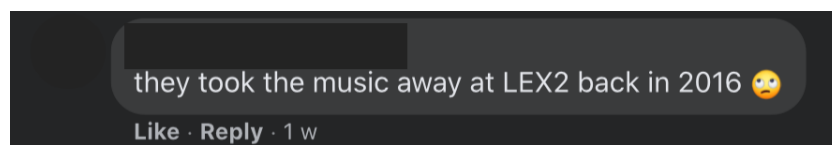


Fig. 4.8. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

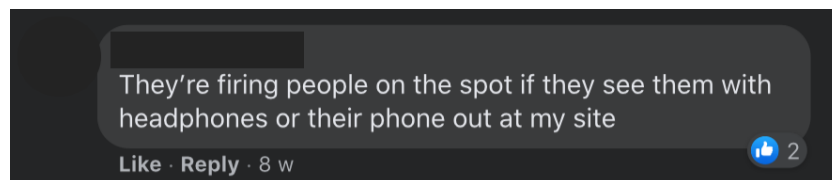


Fig. 4.9. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Although ‘the music’, as described in fig. 4.8, could refer to any kind of listening (headphones, speakers, PA systems etc.), it is clear in my research that management in many warehouses have prohibited music listening in general, whether or not it was ‘taken away’, or simply not permitted in the first place. The worker in fig. 4.9 makes more explicit reference to the specificities of rules and regulations: headphones are not permitted and ‘they’re firing people on the spot’ when anyone breaks this rule. This rule regarding headphone use, as with all managerial control, does not appear consistent across differing workplaces, however they clearly impact workers where they do exist: the account provided in fig. 4.9 offers an example of quite how unpredictable and punitive these measures may be—not knowing if and when one might be fired for different types of perceived infractions would surely take a significant toll on the worker.

Where the use of headphones or speakers are ostensibly banned in Amazon warehouses, the ‘official’ reason for ‘company policy’ seems to be, most often, ‘safety’ (see fig. 4.9).

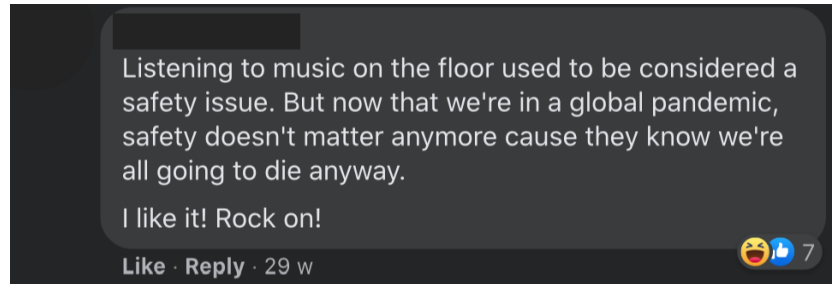


Fig. 4.9. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

As previously noted, the word ‘safety’ occurs 320 times in the threads used for this case study. The comment in fig. 4.9 is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, so it could be assumed that music would still ‘be considered a safety issue’, but regardless the notion of health and safety being used as justification for control and rule-making is a common theme across many of the posts studied. To take a critical approach is to reject the ‘common-sense’: managerial ideology partially depends on the general agreement that listening to music while working (particularly with heavy machinery) could present a safety hazard or danger, however this isn’t necessarily factually accurate, nor do all workers believe in such a justification.

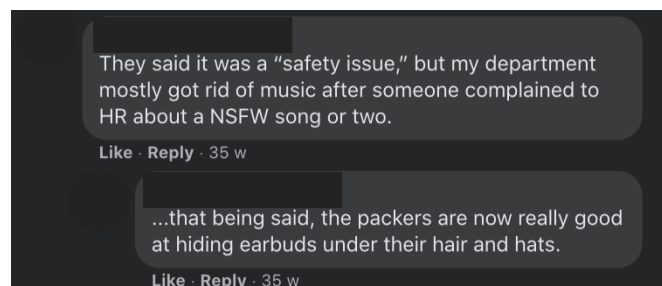


Fig. 4.10. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

In fig. 4.10, a worker refers to the same ‘safety issue’ regarding regulations at work, and although the reply appears in agreement that this is generally the rule, they note that many workers continue to listen to music with ‘earbuds under their hair and hats’. The OP in fig. 4.10 also suggests that the reason for music listening being banned in their workplace is due to ‘someone [complaining] to HR about a NSFW [‘not safe for work’] song or two’. The scare quotes placed around ‘safety issue’ also indicates a certain dubiousness as to the official justifications for the rules.

Many of the references to ‘rules’ and ‘safety’ in the threads, however, are indeed contained within remarks about the truthfulness or consistency of management: Approximately 30% of the replies to posts regarding rules indicate either a partial or total belief that rules in individual

warehouses either do not align with reality (and are therefore not justified), or with other Amazon locations (and are thus inconsistent and arguably unfair).

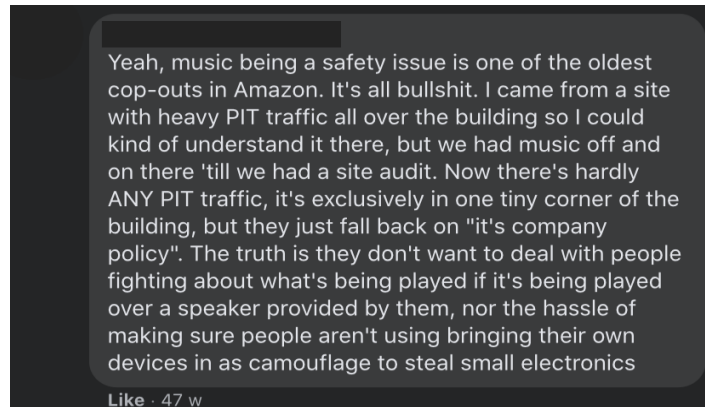


Fig. 4.11. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfillment Centre Memes Facebook group.

‘It’s all bullshit’, the worker in fig. 4.11 argues: the individual concedes partially to the ‘common-sense’ safety justification of rules on the grounds of using heavy machinery, however they note the inconsistencies in enforcement even where consensus might be reached on fairness. ‘Music being a safety issue is one of the oldest cop-outs’ at Amazon, they claim, which is not an isolated opinion: in fig. 4.12, we see not only reference to the inconsistency in rules across warehouse locations and spaces, but also the belief on the part of the workers that they are being ‘lied too [*sic*]’. The original poster (OP) writes that they were told ‘the entire North American node [area group] was forbidden to have music as a policy’, but that they ‘keep finding out that other facilities still play music’. Similarly, both commenters in fig. 4.13 note the inconsistencies and the second individual writes ‘I enjoy hearing the diff[erent] excuses amazon gives for this [followed by four crying laughing emojis]’. More than just an awareness of the inconsistencies and unfairness of rules regarding music listening in the workplace, then, through these digital platforms it appears that consensus are formed about management lying and deceiving employees. This point should be qualified by noting that although this particular online group represents a large sample of Amazon workers (over 36,000), the group itself does not contain the majority of total workers, and of those it does, only a small number of these individuals actually comment and interact with posts. Thus, any potential consensus are limited to those interacting, commenting, and perhaps even just seeing these discussions; there may be a large ‘silent majority’ of Amazon workers who simply do not care!



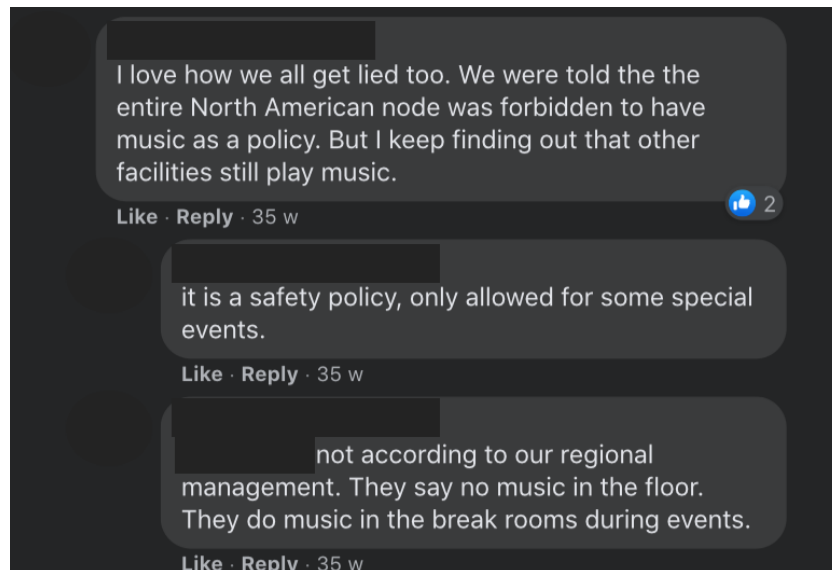


Fig. 4.12. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

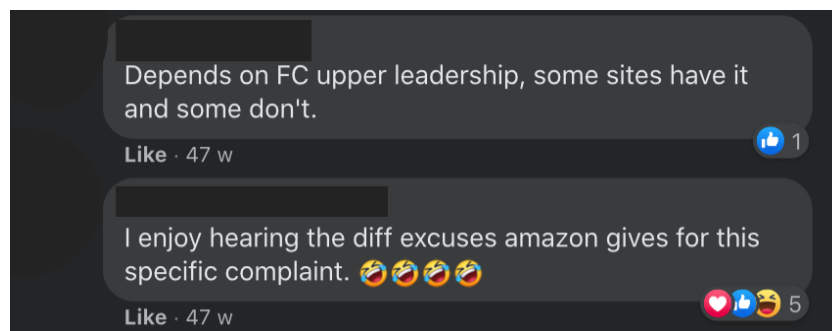


Fig. 4.13. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

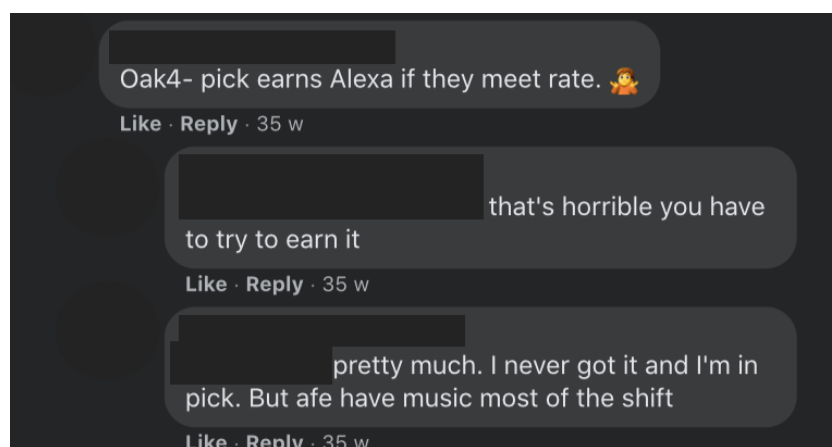


Fig. 4.14. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Fig. 4.14 provides an account of the way in which music listening technology can also be integrated into performance management systems: management in OP's workplace allows

workers use of an Amazon Alexa (voice-controlled bluetooth speaker) if and when ‘they meet rate’ (achieve a certain level of productivity in their area). Although one reply in fig. 4.12 alludes to music being allowed ‘for some special events’ in different locations, this case provides unique insight into managerial control. OP’s comment implies that music listening is not allowed in normal circumstances, and to those who are not productive enough; they note that they ‘never got it’. Specifically, the OP uses the word ‘earn’ to indicate management control workers by requiring a certain level of productivity in order to gain a reward, along with the assertion that workers do not ‘deserve’ such things otherwise. This represents what could be seen as a contemporary parallel to Korczynski’s observation of managers ‘offering allowances’, often ‘as a concession’ (2014: 157), to workers in order to promote productivity: in the case of Korczynski’s research, managers allowed portable radio use to workers, often dependent on good behaviour. From a critical perspective, this managerial approach can be seen as merely another way in which control is maintained; certainly, some workers are critical and aware of the implied power dynamics, replying, ‘that’s horrible you have to try and earn it’.

In the examples above, a clear answer can be given to the question ‘what role does music listening play in control in the workplace?’: through (inconsistent) rules in warehouses, Amazon managers use music as a tool of control in withholding it, but also in offering it as an incentive. In the context of Haake’s findings that workers listen to music on average up to 40% of their working week (2011: 114), merely refusing workers permission to do so evidently makes a significant impact on their daily lives. Its use as a bargaining or leveraging tool in order to encourage productivity in Amazon warehouse workers is yet another instantiation of the control over music listening at work as a powerful tool.

## ii. Mail workers: similar inconsistencies

Rules regarding music listening at work among mail workers is also a significant point of discussion and is shown in the data to impact their daily lives. To what extent might these rules effectively control and exert power over workers, though, in an environment that differs from the more traditionally Taylorist Amazon warehouse?

The composition of the work itself in the case of Royal Mail and USPS workers is somewhat more varied than in Amazon warehouses: the individuals commenting on threads about music listening in these groups might work in postal delivery, sorting, or more office-based spaces. One might imagine that there would be certain overlaps with Amazon warehouse work and postal

workers involved with delivery: ‘common-sense’ safety concerns regarding operating vehicles, completing tasks, or encountering potential hazards while listening to music; similarly, this might be the case in sorting warehouses etc. Indeed, not unlike the Amazon warehouse case study, ‘safety’ occurs 203 times in all the threads relating to music listening for postal workers (0.26%); relatedly, ‘headphones’ are mentioned 565 times, ‘hear’ 194 times (often in relation to being able to hear hazards while at work). One might also predict that postal workers are generally under less strict direct control than in Amazon warehouses, and indeed the words ‘allowed’ (145 counts) and ‘banned’ (89 counts) are significantly less common in this case study.

As with the previous case study, there are many reasons given for the prohibition of music listening among postal workers:

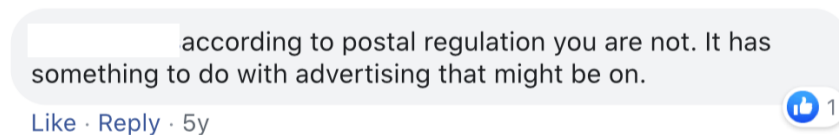


Fig. 4.15. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

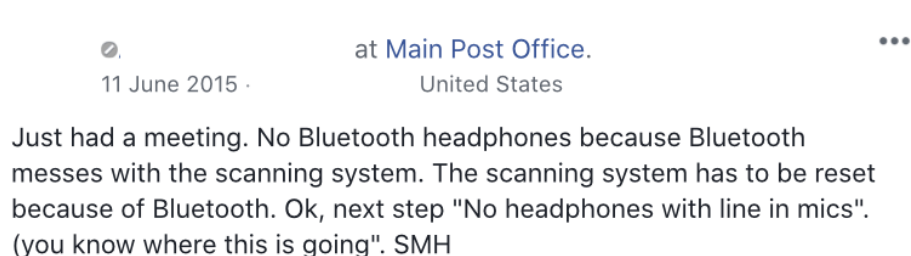


Fig. 4.16. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

In fig. 4.15, the worker makes reference to ‘postal regulation[s]’ meaning individuals may not listen to music at work, and that ‘it has something to do with advertising that might be on’ (it is true that businesses may require a music licence to play live or recorded music in their places of work, however this is neither an issue of advertising, nor with individualised listening). According to the postal worker in fig. 4.16, workers are not permitted to use ‘Bluetooth headphones’, because of potential technical interference with work equipment. The basis of this justification is clearly disputed by the commenter, as they comment ‘you know where this is going’, and ‘SMH [shaking my head]’.

Some postal workers make mention of rules regarding music listening without any reference to justifications given by management. ‘We’re not supposed to use any earphones’, writes one worker in fig. 4.18, while a reply to OP’s post in fig. 4.17 claims they are allowed to wear ‘one ear in if you are not moving around’ (with three ‘likes’ from fellow postal workers indicating agreement with or approval of this answer. Some of these rules, again, appeal to ‘common-sense’ safety justifications, for example assuming that having one ear free while listening with headphones represents an acceptable compromise, however if this were to be an official or legal guideline one would assume some specificity would be needed (e.g., only in the ear facing away from equipment/the road/the customer). Many mentions of rules made by postal workers do not make any reference to managerial justification, indicating that some level of control may simply be accepted: ‘banned in the plant?’ asks one, ‘yeah, banned’ replies another (fig. 4.19).



Fig. 4.17. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

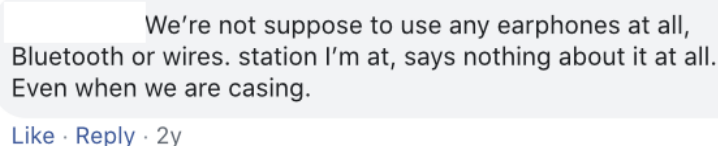


Fig. 4.18. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

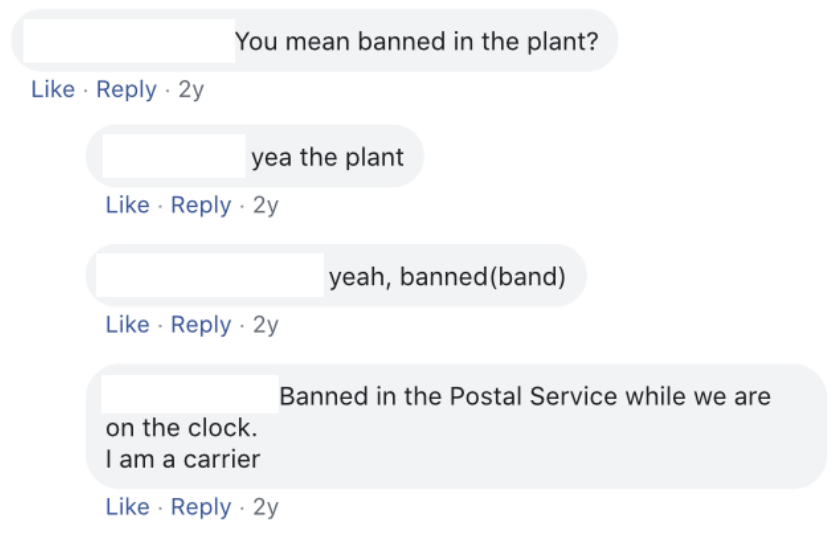


Fig. 4.19. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

An emphasis on inconsistency is again apparent in this case: the postal worker in fig. 4.20 offers a clear example of the arbitrary nature of rule-making and their justifications, explaining that ‘we have two plants [...] One said they did the other could[n’t] wear them’, a clear demonstration of the differing realities. Again, the worker is aware of these inconsistencies, stating ‘clearly it’s not true’.

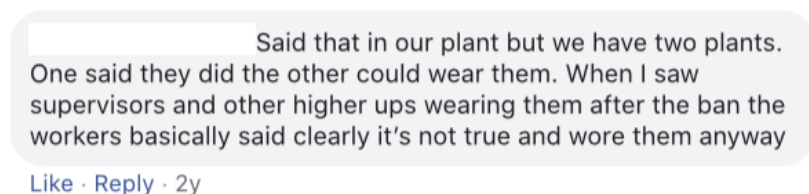


Fig. 4.20. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

As in the case of Amazon, digital platforms such as Facebook represent spaces in which workers can share their understandings and opinions and often come to consensuses that might have otherwise been impossible without social media (Coulter 2014). The reply (fig. 4.21) to a thread on headphone rules shows a postal worker identifying evidence of clear managerial inconsistency: on the cover of the latest NALC (National Association of Letter Carriers) magazine was a woman ‘sportin’ her Dr. Dre Beats (headphones)’. This clearly contradicts this commenters’ and others’ understanding that ‘we can’t have anything in our ears’. Although they suggest that ‘the rules are

different based on your district', an apparent discrepancy is highlighted and shared by this worker. These types of exchanges might then influence or inform the perspectives of others. The notion of 'legitimacy' is key to control and managerial ideology (Armstrong et al. 1981: 15), meaning that 'legitimation' of rules is required for control to be effectively exerted, and where discrepancies or 'injustices' are detected (35), the legitimacy of rules and control comes into question: therefore, in these digital platforms where space exists for discussions of rules and workplace politics, legitimacy can both be upheld or challenged; social media could be seen as the 'water cooler' of the modern workplace.

Have y'all seen the cover of the last NALC magazine that came out? A carrier from Texas right on the front cover sportin' her Dr. Dre Beats. I guess the rules are different based on your district. We can't have anything in our ears.

Like · Reply · 3y

Fig. 4.21. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

The ways in which these inconsistent rules surrounding music listening are enforced on postal workers again varies. In threads regarding music at work, 'fired' appears less than half as frequently in the case of postal workers, however references are often made to such issues: 'you will be pulled off the road' (fig. 4.22), given a 'first offense' (fig. 4.23), or potentially a 'suspension for failure to follow instructions' (fig. 24.24). Interestingly, the commenter in fig. 4.24 also indicates an awareness of the intensity of managerial control, stating that 'music playing devices attract supervisors', like predators (or perhaps flies).

Safety gave a talk at our office and said if they catch you on the road with even just one bud in your ear you will be pulled off the road. Told absolutely USPS policy can not drive with anything in your ears or ear.

Like · Reply · 3y

Fig. 4.22. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

My Station would remove CCA's with blue tooth or earphones on route. First offense. Safety hazard and failure to follow

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1y · Edited

Fig. 4.23. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

Music playing devices attract supervisors. If I'm caught again, it's a 2 weeks paper suspension for failure to follow instructions.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 3y

Fig. 4. 24. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

The enforcement of music-listening rules is clearly of concern to postal workers, with one writing that 'we have been told if we were caught using headphones while out on the street, we would be terminated', followed by 'Call your union !!' (fig. 4.25). Such a remark demonstrates an awareness not only of managerial control but also its severity, repercussions, and the steps necessary to combat this. It should still be qualified, however, that such discussions are relatively limited, and only appear in response to a relevant post prompting them: in the data for postal workers, 'union' occurs 146 times, however there are no original posts encouraging such activity, merely responses to individual issues raised by other workers. Union cases of opposition to managerial ideology are discussed in the second section, on organised resistance.

We have been told if we were caught using headphones while out on the street, we would be terminated. Period. Call your union !!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1y · Edited

Fig. 4.25. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

As is evidenced in the examples above, and in particular in the cases of figs. 4.22-24, rules around music listening in the workplace once again represent a significant tool of control and method of exerting power over workers. Music listening, many postal workers say, 'attracts' managers and, with the threat of being fired looming over them in these discussions, a sense of constant surveillance and control is still maintained over them, even in environments dissimilar to Amazon

warehouses, even where the beady eye of the boss is felt less directly. It is certainly fair to say then that rules around music listening in the workplace for postal workers manifest themselves as systems of control.

### iii. 'I make the rules here': Uber drivers

If official music listening guidelines in the cases of Amazon warehouse workers and postal workers often represent tools of control and demonstrate power exerted over them by management, then what of such rules in a less traditional work environment?

One might think of Uber driving as typifying what Thompson and Harley describe as a shift toward 'softer and sometimes more indirect' forms of control in the workplace (2007: 5): drivers are (more-or-less) their own boss, they do not have a supervisor watching them, and any performance or monitoring is abstracted and mediated through technology.<sup>12</sup> According to informal research, there are (virtual) handbooks given to drivers, dependent on geographical location, which provide broad guidelines on appropriate behaviour and conduct; however there are no specific rules regarding music listening on trips, or whether drivers should provide aux cables or offer radio use etc. This is not to say rules are not an important part of drivers' day-to-day work life: the frequency of discussions surrounding rules is in fact greater than in either the cases of Amazon warehouse workers, or mail workers. Mentions of 'rule(s)' occur 347 times in the case of Uber message board threads, accounting for 0.2% of the total text: in context, this is over three times as frequent as in the case of Amazon; it seems therefore that issues of rules are not absent from less directly-controlled platform work like Uber, rather they exist in a different form—who makes them? It most often comes down to the individual driver to make their own rules—or conversely to allow their passengers control. The fluid nature of rules and who makes them leads to confusion with regards to control:

---

<sup>12</sup> The question of whether such 'hands-off' surveillance represents 'softer' control relative to 'hard' rules and regulations is an interesting one and one which Thompson and Harley problematise (2007). To an extent, many of these distinctions are largely semantic.



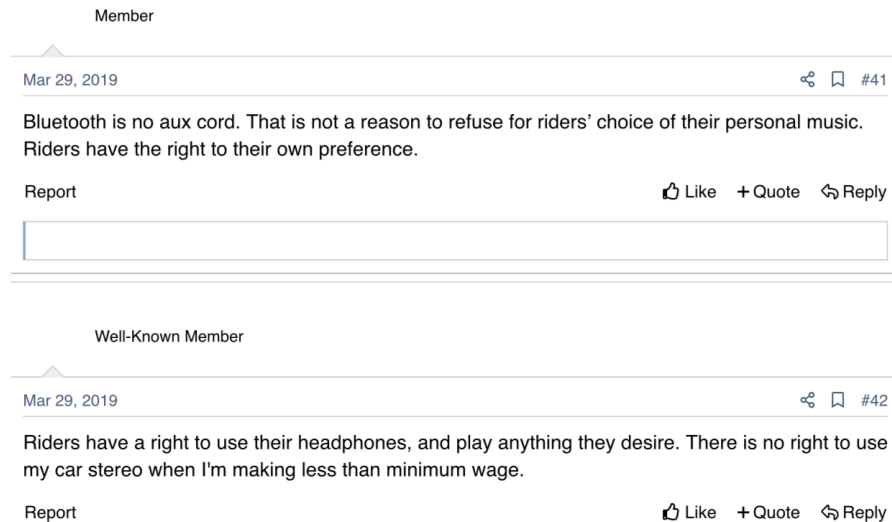


Fig. 4.26. Screenshot from UberPeople.

As can be seen in fig. 4.26, drivers often have opposing views on common 'law' in their vehicles: the first driver claims that 'riders have the right to their own preference [of music]', thereby implying that as a rule passengers should control the music; the second commenter argues that 'there is no right to use my car stereo' (with the addition of 'when I'm making less than minimum wage' suggesting that tips or an improved wage might change these rules).

As well as illustrating the differing views and potential confusion regarding music listening 'rules' in Uber vehicles, the comments in fig. 4.26 hint at a fundamental split among drivers: those who make their own rules, and those who more-or-less subscribe to a certain workplace ideology (following Armstrong et al. 1981, and Thompson 2010), in this case meaning what is 'expected' of, or 'common-sense' for service workers. What I call the internalisation of 'customer service ideology' will be discussed in section iii(c), while the following section will focus on drivers' rules and control in their cars.

Where there are no managers to set rules regarding music listening at work, as is the case in Uber, it is left up to the drivers. Some Uber drivers appear to take this delegation of responsibility as an opportunity to exert their own control on their work environment:

.....your car, your rules; if they do not like it, they can get out and summon another Uber/Lyft who will give them what they want. Those are called "ants". They have ants for a reason. If they ask for the AUX, let them know up front what the rules are. If they decide to take the ride, do be aware that you might be exchanging one-starts. *If you ain't been one-starred within five weeks of drivin' no TNC, you ain't been drivin' no TNC.*

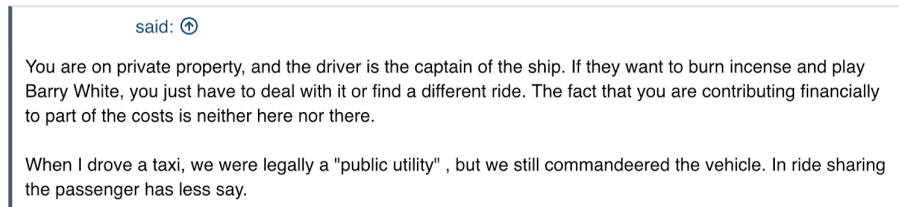
Fig. 4.27. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Your car, your rules, if they don't like it, they can get another uber. Kick them out and cancel trip if they give you attitude,  
You have to show them who's boss

Fig. 4.28. Screenshot from UberPeople.

'Your car, your rules' is a phrase repeated by two drivers on the UberPeople messageboards (see figs. 4.27-28), a statement of control which appeals to a common-sense conception of rights, autonomy and ownership: 'house rules', in other words. The driver in fig. 4.27. explicitly references 'the rules', which, it is implied, they wield over the passenger. Similarly, the commenter in fig. 4.28. encourages their fellow drivers to 'show them who's boss'; in the absence of a direct manager, the drivers may more-or-less assume that role, even if this is in relatively minor aspects of their work life like music listening, as opposed to overtime pay or benefits etc. In reality, of course, the power that the drivers hold, for example to 'kick them out and cancel [the] trip' is conditional: yes, they might have the power to cancel a trip, but the consequences of this might be lower ratings, less income, or even deactivation (an Uber driver's equivalent of being fired).

Of course, not all drivers share this same 'my car, my rules' perspective: in fig. 4.29, a discussion between two commenters occurs, demonstrating a clear disagreement in who has ownership over their workspace and therefore who can make the rules. 'You are on private property, and the driver is the captain of the ship', writes the first driver, to which the second responds that they are wrong, claiming that 'according to Uber's guidelines the passenger does have a say'. This driver continues to say that they are inclined to 'side with both Uber and the passenger'. Regardless of which individual is technically correct, it is clear that many drivers believe they can, and do, make the rules.



Wrong. According to Uber's guidelines the passenger does have a say. And is, also, the reason Uber investigates every complaint.

Have been a driver 4 years. Also, utilize the platform as a rider. The more I read this thread, the more I side with, both, Uber and the passenger. In fact, 80%+ with what I see here.

When I have a driver, with a "taxi" attitude, one ☆ & zero tip. And sometimes, a write up as well. In fact, even knowing the driver's a former taxi operator could trigger a down rating.

Fig. 4.29. Screenshot from UberPeople.

What are these rules, and how do drivers conceive of them? It is clear from figs. 4.27-28 that drivers do use the actual word 'rules', and in figs. 3.4-5 we see two individuals expand on how they conceive of these, and what they consist of:

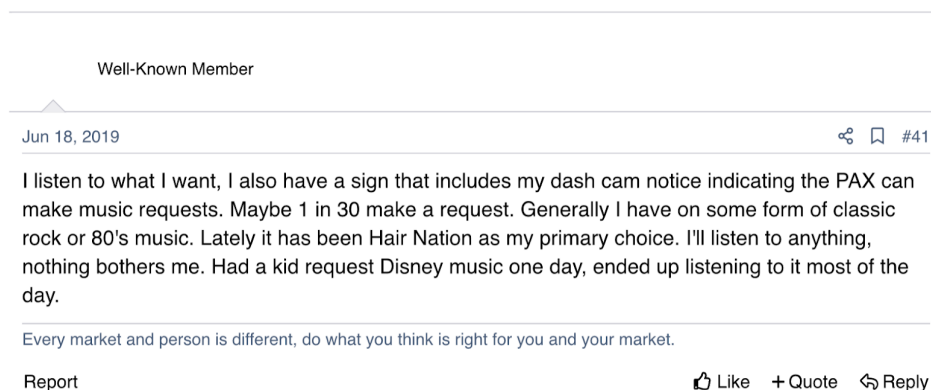


Fig. 4.30. Screenshot from UberPeople.

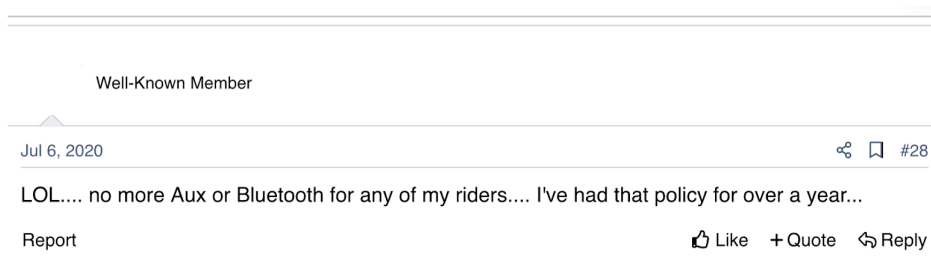


Fig. 4.31. Screenshot from UberPeople.

The ‘well-known member’ of UberPeople in fig. 4.31 refers to their ‘policy’ of prohibiting passengers from using their aux cable or bluetooth connection. This is an overt reference to their own perceived position of power—they are the boss. The commenter in fig. 4.30 details their workplace rules with a ‘sign’, presumably in view of any passengers, stating that their journey is being recorded, and also that they may ‘request’ music. Although this driver does not exert total control in banning any and all rider requests, they nonetheless still set the rules: the passenger may ‘request’ music, with the driver remaining in a position of power, either denying or accepting this request. The fact that this driver observes that ‘maybe 1 in 30 make a request’ hints at the potential prohibitory effect generated by a sign explicitly mentioning rules (although this could simply reflect the rarity of the phenomenon in the first place).

The following screenshots from r/Uberdrivers discuss similar rules set by drivers, and their justifications (usually monetary). ‘I don’t let anyone play music’, writes the original commenter in fig. 4.32, claiming that no one has ever ‘had an issue’ with this rule. Clearly, they decided upon this rule due to a poor initial experience, however their ultimate reasoning is more enlightening: ‘Anyone that will ask for that [music] will never tip you anyway.’ There ensues some disagreement in the replies to OP’s comment, however the general consensus remains that concessions like allowing riders to play their own music does not confer tips; it is therefore not worth the effort on the part of the driver, despite any potential social and cultural benefits alluded to in fig. 4.30 (for example, discovering new music). The driver in fig. 4.33 refers to the same ‘my car my rules’ ideology as evident in figs. 4.27-28, but they also explicitly state that ‘music selection requires you to pay more in cash’. The subsequent suggestion that ‘\$25 in cash and you can pick one song’ may be somewhat tongue-in-cheek, however it clearly indicates the desire for control contingent on money.

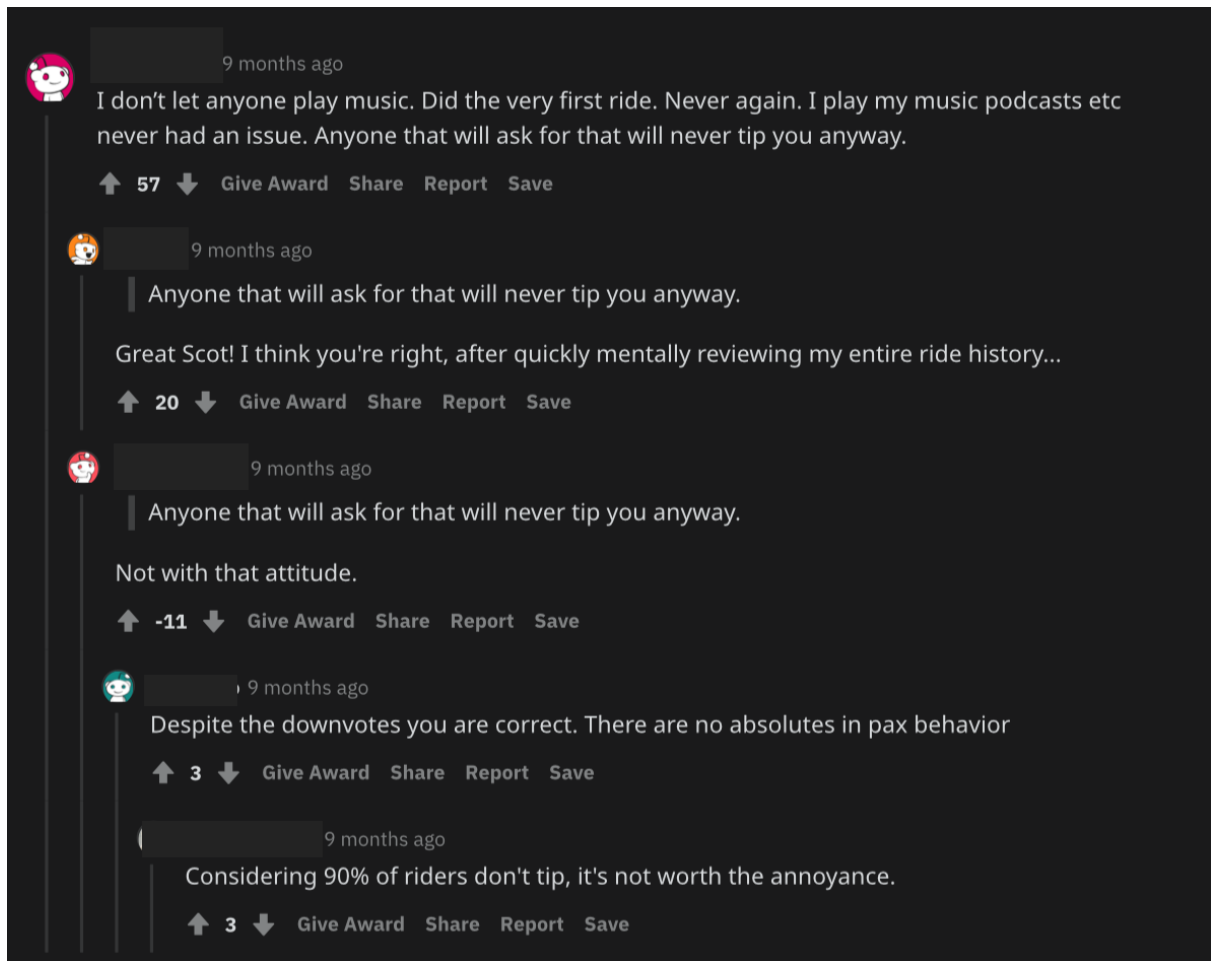


Fig. 4.32. Screenshot from r/Uberdrivers.

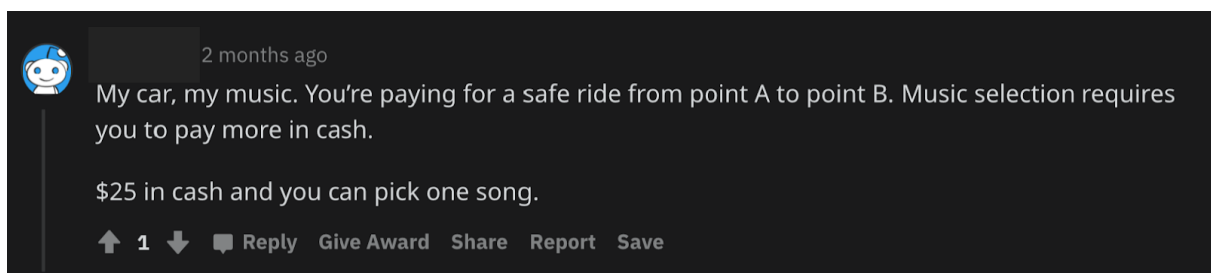


Fig. 4.33. Screenshot from r/Uberdrivers.

The desire demonstrated by many drivers to retain some level of control over their work environment by enacting rules is not something an outsider can—or indeed should—imbue with any subjective moral judgement. It is not for the researcher, or the reader, to determine whether drivers controlling the music listening in their Uber vehicle is a good or bad thing, or even how ‘successful’ it is based on certain criteria. We can, however, observe the effects: many drivers in these forums present with quite impassioned perspectives, frequently making use of emojis,

punctuation (multiple exclamation marks, for example), or bold, italicised, or capitalised typefaces to underline or embellish their arguments. As is made clear by the frequent capitalisation and use of punctuation in fig. 4.34, the driver feels strongly about 'their car', their rules. However, in this case, the claim to control and power manifests as misogyny: 'always remember to put women in their place', the driver writes. The entitlement demonstrated by the passengers in question is obvious from the comment the driver is replying to, however this misogynistic statement demonstrates that some drivers are aware of the potential (albeit contingent) power they hold.

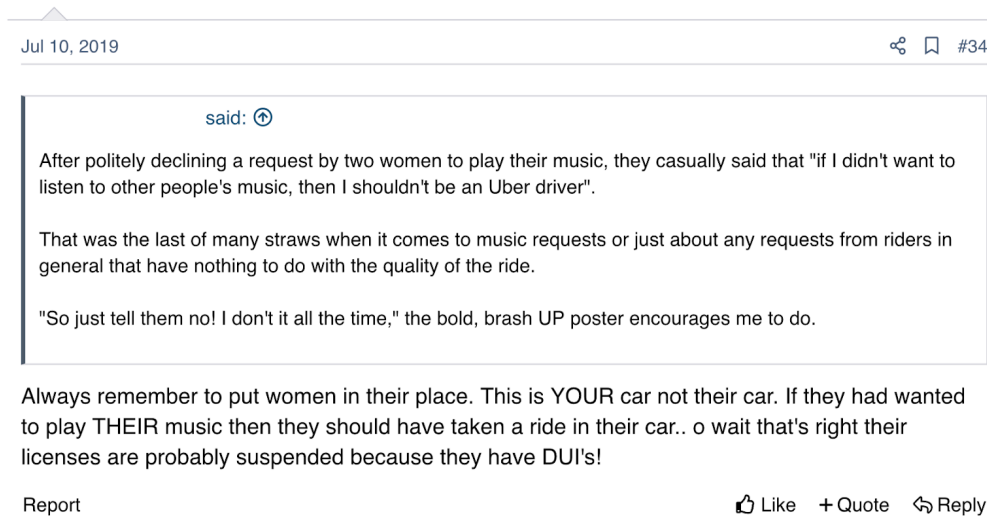


Fig. 4.34. Screenshot from UberPeople.

In this case study, then, the lines between control and resistance become somewhat blurred: as is evidenced in the examples above, where drivers are able to make their own rules around music listening, this takes on something of a defiant character. In most of the data, however, drivers do not appear to conceive of their own rule-making as resistance against management, but rather against the threat to their autonomy and power that the customer (passenger) poses. In this way, then, one might view the above examples as attempts to achieve or maintain control of the workplace on their own part. Rules regarding music listening become a tool with which the workers themselves might assert control—albeit not against management.

#### iv. Truck drivers: rules of the road

Continuing a general shift away from work environments of overt supervision, truck drivers are, in general, less directly controlled by management—and therefore arguably not so much subject to

'hard' forms of control. In the case of Amazon, any form of the term 'manager' occurs 216 times within the data, representing 0.27% of all words, while among truck drivers it occurs only 15 times, or 0.01% in total. This does not, however, mean that workers within the trucking industry are not concerned with managerial rules: in fig. 4.35, for example, a self-described 'novice' trucker asks whether they are allowed to listen to music (or radio/podcasts) while driving, to which a colleague replies 'depends on company policy'. This indicates that there are indeed rules in place regarding listening to music at work, and that they vary.


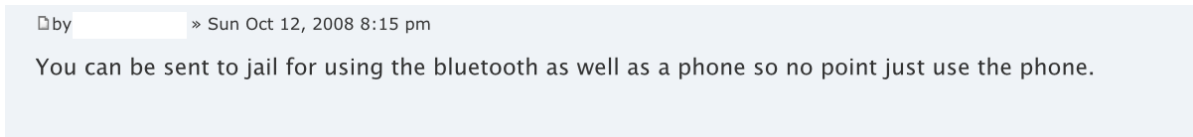
- 
4. Are you allowed to listen to the radio/music/podcasts while driving? I know they won't let you talk on the phone.
4. Depends on company policy. I blast the hell out of my radio if I need a boost. I make calls everyday with a headset. It's become habit so I don't even hold my phone to my ear anymore even when I'm not driving. I also talk to Siri a hell of a lot more so I can learn to get what I want from her. Also depends if you're team driving. Obviously you don't want to do anything that'll prevent your co-driver from getting quality sleep as he'll be driving while you sleep.

Fig. 4.35. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

Most truckers' concerns about rules and control surrounding music listening at work concern the law itself, rather than managerial guidelines. This represents a stark contrast to the focus of Amazon workers' concerns, although it also indicates a small overlap with postal workers (likely due to the nature of work in each of these cases). The terms 'illegal' or 'legal' occur 7 times, or 0.01% in total, within Amazon warehouse workers' threads, while the same terms occur a total of 111 times among all postal workers' threads, or 0.1% (in the case of postal workers, they occur 28 times, or 0.04%). Certainly, then, legalities regarding music listening while working are of significant concern to truck drivers. 'You can be sent to jail for using bluetooth', claims one trucker (fig. 4.36). You can get a '£60 fine and 3 points', writes one UK-based driver in fig. 4.37, although this is likely to be more today. There is still inconsistency and confusion over legal rules, though, with one commenter on r/Truckers saying 'it is often illegal to have headphones in / over both ears', while a reply claims that 'in most states it is legal to wear headphones in or over both ears, and that only '18 out of 50' US states have 'restrictions'. These differences in rules are significant for workers who traverse both nation or state borders.



by » Sun Oct 12, 2008 8:15 pm

You can be sent to jail for using the bluetooth as well as a phone so no point just use the phone.

Fig. 4.36. Screenshot from TruckNet.

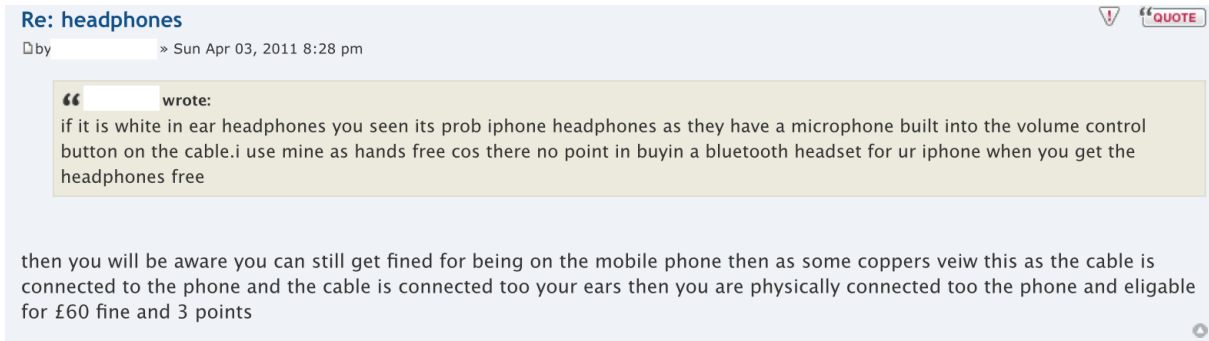


Fig. 4.37. Screenshot from TruckNet.

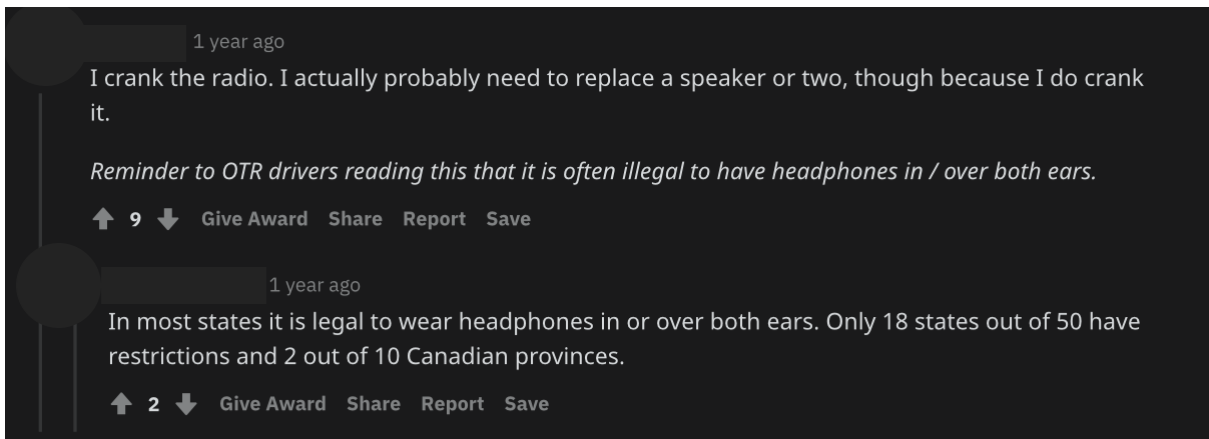


Fig. 4.38. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

The trucker in fig. 4.39 provides an extended explanation of the inconsistencies and intricacies of rules regarding music listening for their work. As they say, ‘it’s a grey area’. They claim that ‘technically you’re not supposed to have headphones in both ears while driving, but I know plenty who do including myself’. The trucker provides information for how to most safely bypass these rules if needed, including making sure to ‘take out your headphones when crossing a scale [weigh station, a road checkpoint]. It gives them one less thing to look at’. Some truckers, however, do not care about certain rules: fig. 4.40 shows a reply to OP’s post regarding listening to music while driving with the assertion that ‘covering both ears while driving is illegal’, and that they have ‘seen guys nailed for it’. In response, however, OP simply replies ‘don’t care’, reasoning that they’d ‘like to have some hearing when I retire’. Regardless of the actual practices of this particular worker, it is clear that truckers have significantly less direct control exerted over them in the form of managerial rules, although they generally must abide by the rules of the road.



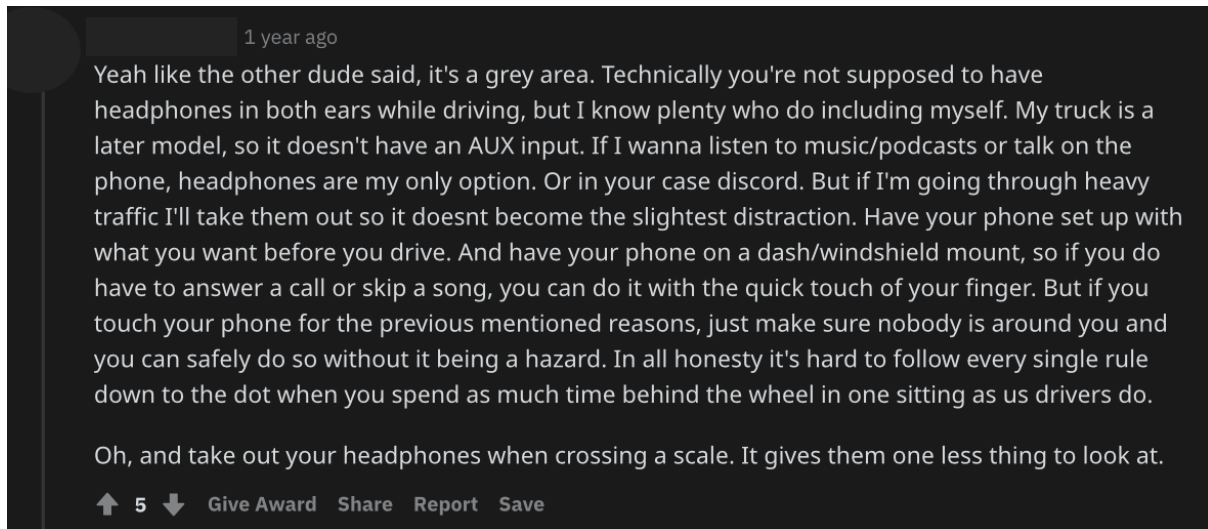


Fig. 4.39. Screenshot from r/Truckers.



Fig. 4.40. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

What role does music listening play in control in truckers' workplace, then? In similar ways to the three previous case studies, 'official' rules regarding music listening represent tools of control, exerting power over the worker even when no supervisor is actually present. To an extent, though, these are common-sense rules—an opinion shared by many of the drivers themselves, for their own safety (although disagreement is common, as in fig. 4.40). However it is fair to say that rules about music listening as they are discussed in the examples above demonstrate that, as in the case of postal workers, a sense of surveillance is key to systems of control: the feeling that you might get caught, or punished for going against rules at work is a common sentiment, and one which may be said to exert significant control over individuals. As set out in chapter 2.3, a key facet of control is such a feeling of control: the prevailing sense within managerial ideology is that 'the unobserved worker is [the] inefficient one' (Savalo 2014: 42); in this way, even just the *knowledge* that managers might at any time see you wearing your headphones plays a significant role in control in the workplace. More 'concrete' examples of surveillance culture surrounding music listening at work are explored in the next section (chapter 4.2).

## 4.2 Surveillance

Surveillance, whether real or imagined, is a key facet of control, and has a real effect on the worker's psyche, and their body: as Sakolsky notes, the feeling of control and the ideology of work can be 'internalised by the worker through [...] surveillance apparatus' (1992: 115). Crucially, these surveillance apparatus, or technologies, do not have to be physical objects (although they can be). In the below examples from the case studies, I will demonstrate this with reference to both the ratings and algorithms of Uber, and the very literal surveillance Amazon warehouse workers are subjected to in the form of metal detectors, and security cameras.

The surveillance of workers is a crucial and emerging area of study and, as Gill notes (2013: 22), has 'rightly become an important object of study in recent years'. In her study of cultural workers, Gill specifically mentions 'postal delivery personnel' as a key centre of these discussions in the way managers use technology to 'track workers', and she also references the surveillance to which Amazon warehouse workers are subjected, whereby their 'speed' of work is closely monitored.

The surveillance of workers has of course been a key concern in Labour Process Theory from its outset, with Braverman noting that 'technology is deployed by management to improve control over [...] workers' (1974: 141). Monitoring is meant to 'prevent workers from slowing or sabotaging the modes of production' in any given workplace (Rosenblat et al. 2014: 2), and although this has always featured centrally within literature in the sociology of work, following Gill, effort should be made to study the current and new technologies used by companies. Crucially, in an increasingly platformised digital age, 'technology has a primary role in both managing labour relations and labourers' working conditions' (Birgillito & Birgillito 2018: 31).

In the two cases below, then, control can be seen as manifesting itself through surveillance technologies: with Uber drivers, a key concern is ratings, and how algorithms affect work; while in Amazon warehouses, workers are acutely aware of surveillance devices such as metal detectors, used to monitor what is brought in and out of buildings. Music listening provides a unique lens through which to view both, and is particularly relevant in each work environment: in the case of Uber, music choice is often blamed for negative ratings, and in the case of Amazon, workers are frequently conferring on how, and whether, to bypass security in order to use listening technologies like mp3 players and mobile phones. When observing the following examples, it is prudent to recall Braverman's assertion that 'technology is deployed by management to improve control over workers' (1974: 141).

## i. Uber: algorithms of control

Technology is, as Braverman notes (1974: 229), a key facet of control in the workplace.

Contemporary instances of these tools of control are explored within the following sections.

Ratings are of great importance to many Uber drivers (not all—see figs 4.41-49). In total, any form of the word ‘rating(s)’ appears 903 times in the data collected from posts relating to music, accounting for 0.4% of this text. Good feedback and reviews are not only a desired part of service work, they can also be key in determining work and financial success. Once an Uber driver receives a certain number of low ratings, they are at risk of ‘deactivation’ (being fired). As Rosenblat et al. note (2014: 33), ‘platforms that make employment decisions on the basis of customer ratings do not fall cleanly under existing discrimination law’, which, coupled with the constantly-debated freelancer/employee status of drivers, puts workers in a very precarious position. According to some Uber drivers in the data gathered, Uber does make some effort to balance ‘unfair’ reviews, for example, by not counting one star reviews, with no given or ‘verified’ reason for such a low rating, toward a driver’s overall score. However, this does not stabilise the position of the driver, nor does the fact that Uber’s algorithms (not just the ratings system, but also how it is determined which drivers are offered which pickups etc.) are relatively opaque; in other words not even the drivers themselves know how they work—this is clearly not conducive to a relaxing work environment and altogether adds to what might be termed a ‘culture of surveillance’.

There are many cases in which Uber drivers determine their rating to have been negatively affected by music listening. Sometimes, these observations are inferred in reverse:

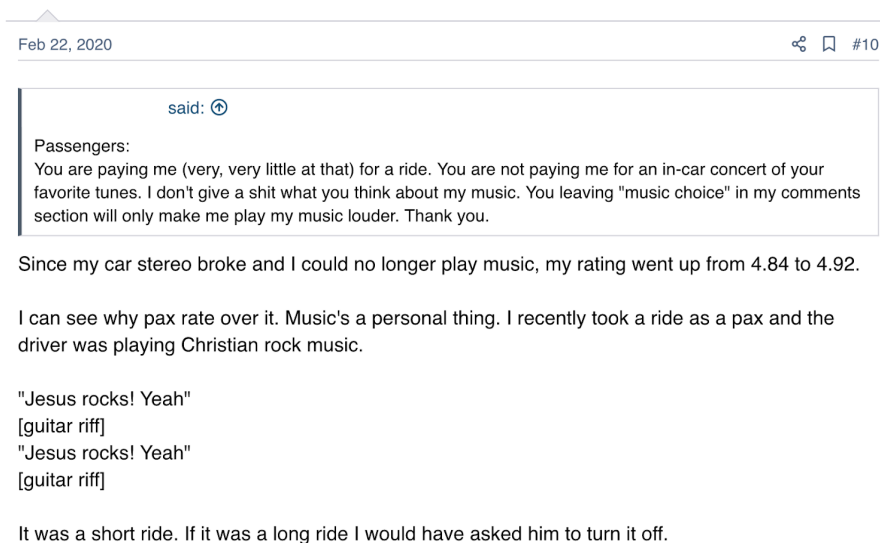
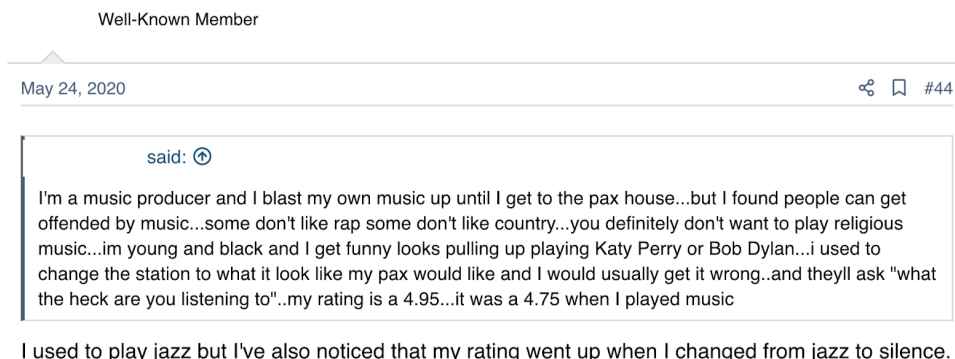


Fig. 4.41. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Lol my rating was always around 4.90- 4.93...my stereo stopped working too. Remembered my daughter bought me a bluetooth speaker for my birthday. I put velcro on it, stuck it on my dash and now the riders can make their own minds as to what they want. Silent, have a conversation or listen to their own music. Rating went up to 4.98.

Fig. 4.42. Screenshot from UberPeople.



I used to play jazz but I've also noticed that my rating went up when I changed from jazz to silence.

Fig. 4.43. Screenshot from UberPeople.

As seen in figs. 4.41-43, multiple drivers recount their rating improving when, for differing reasons, they stopped playing music in their Uber. In both fig. 4.41 and fig. 4.42, the drivers note how after their 'stereo broke' or 'stopped working', their rating would increase, in both cases implying that passengers rated more highly either being able to listen to their own music, or no music at all—in any case, it appears, anything is better than driver's choice. The Uber worker in fig. 4.43 specifies 'I used to play jazz', but that their 'rating went up when I changed from jazz to silence'; it is impossible to conclude whether this is a reflection of the genre of music, or simply the music being played at all. The comment that this driver is replying to also offers an example of someone's rating improving, from 4.75 to 4.95 since they stopped playing music. They offer something of an explanation for the potentially negative impact of music on ratings: 'I found people can get offended by music....some don't like rap some don't like country...you definitely don't want to play religious'. The issue of taste is a significant one, and will be explored in chapters seven and eight.

However, there are instances in which drivers provide clear examples of being negatively rated, specifically for the music:

## I thought I had seen it all...

Jan 30, 2019

Watch

Well-Known Member

Jan 30, 2019

#1

Got a 3 star for music choice. Uber must spend all day creating reasons for paxholes to downrating us.

I'm sure the next one is "driver is ugly." I'm sure that will be popular.

Fig. 4.44. Screenshot from UberPeople.

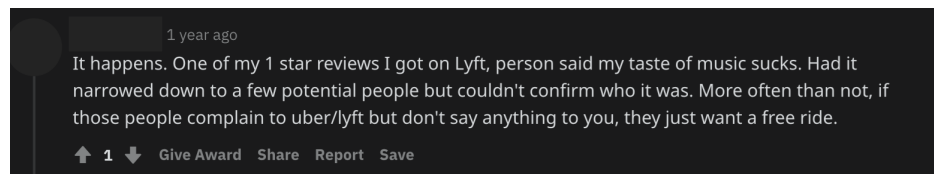


Fig. 4.45. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.



Fig. 4.46. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

In fig. 4.45, one driver recounts a '1 star review' they received which, according to the passenger, was due to their 'taste of music' which 'sucks'. Similarly, the driver in fig. 4.46 recalls being '1 starred' by a young person 'for driving, service, comfort, and music'. Both drivers also hint at a suspicion raised in fig. 4.44, where the worker 'got a 3 star for music choice', from which they conclude that 'Uber must spend all day creating reasons for paxholes [passengers + assholes] to downrating [sic.] us'. There is a belief among some workers in this case study that Uber as a company is deliberately making life difficult for them as drivers, constantly utilising new technologies to allow passengers more say—in a similar sense to Korczynski's 'sovereign customer'—and ultimately contributing to an atmosphere of surveillance and control.

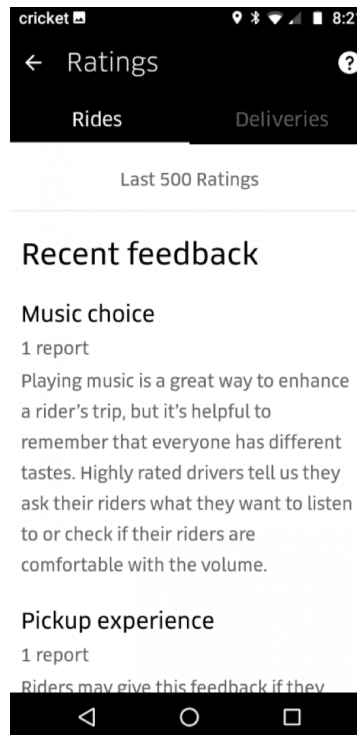


Fig. 4.47. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Fig. 4.47 shows an image attached to OP's thread, as titled in fig. 4.44. The screenshot from the driver's phone demonstrates that you can be 'reported' via the Uber app, under 'Music choice'. 'Playing music is a great way to enhance a rider's trip, but it's helpful to remember that everyone has different tastes', Uber's official guidelines tell the driver, adding that in order to rate 'highly'—or simply to avoid being reported—drivers should 'ask their riders what they want to listen to'. The driver's argument that Uber 'must spend all day creating reasons' for negative ratings is not without evidence and once again, the existence of such technologies contribute to worker surveillance. The very fact that 'music choice' is a tag offered to passengers when rating their drivers is evidence of this, and represents a clear technological control mechanism. It is also worth remarking on that it is likely easier, and therefore perhaps more appealing, to rate and report virtually, via an app, such as is the case with Uber, rather than having to submit complaints in person formally.

These ratings, or algorithms of control, will also inevitably be affected by issues such as race and gender. Protected characteristics in the case of employees are a particular issue with Uber in the US, as title vii of the American Civil Rights Act of 1964—which prohibits such discrimination—is not applicable to 'independent contractors' (Rosenblat et al. 2017: 45). As Rogers suggests (2015: 85), 'passengers might implicitly rate minority drivers less charitably [...] if their

self-presentation fails to emulate perceived white, middle-class norms': this may include 'music choice'. There is no direct evidence in my data linking specific music choice and discrimination with race, gender or any other protected characteristic. However, given there are multiple examples of drivers being rated negatively on the basis of music choice, and that many other drivers recommend Muzak to alleviate any issues (17 separate mentions of 'Muzak'),<sup>13</sup> it is fair to infer that 'outlying' tastes often result in poor ratings, and these are often those falling outside those 'white, middle-class norms'.

The phenomenon of Uber using its technologies to further control drivers is corroborated by the introduction of their 'Quiet Mode':

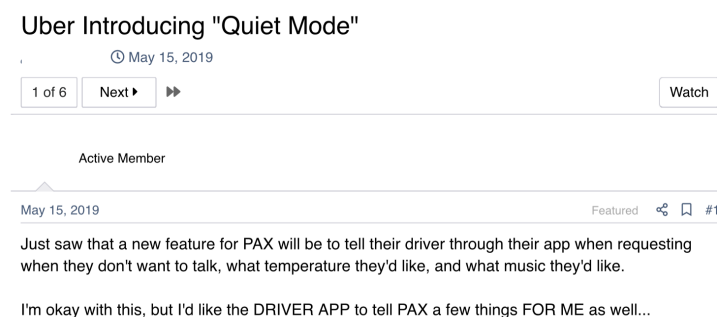


Fig. 4.48. Screenshot from UberPeople.

The driver in fig. 4.48 claims that with Quiet Mode, passengers can use the Uber app to request no talking, car ambient temperature, and 'what music they'd like'. According to Uber's official app and website (Uber Australia 2020), the reality of Quiet Mode is that riders can select 'preferences', but simply 'chatty' or 'quiet', and 'air-con' or 'no air-con'—no music order forms or the like. Regardless, many drivers do argue that they are increasingly surveilled and controlled through Uber's app and algorithms.

<sup>13</sup> The Muzak company, operating from the 1930s to 2011 provided 'programmed music' to companies and businesses (Sterne, 1997: 24), consisting largely of bland and inoffensive instrumental 'light jazz'. As Hesmondhalgh notes (2022: 7), Muzak was often 'condemned by radicals not only for having functional rather than aesthetic goals, but also for the particular functions they served': ie, capitalism. Attali similarly noted that Muzak contributed to musical banality and its 'commodification' (1985 [1977]: 122).

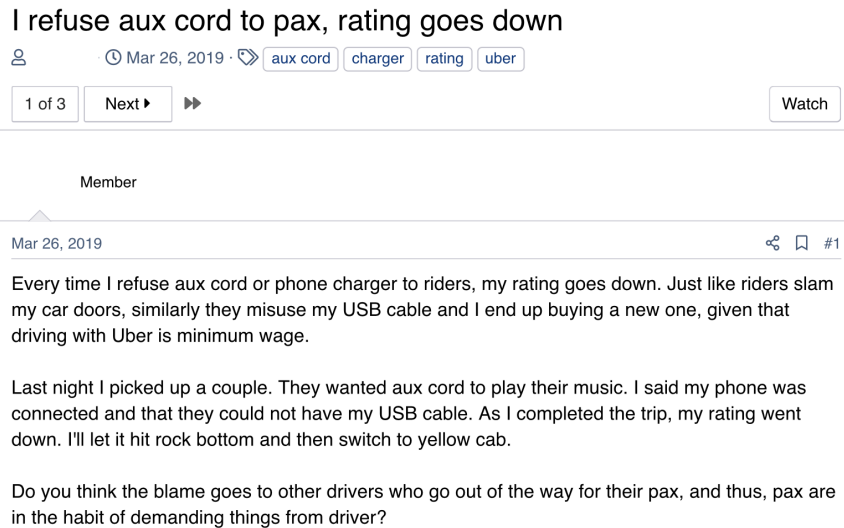


Fig. 4.49. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Furthermore, ratings may not just be affected by playing or not playing music, but also simply by not offering an aux cable: as can be seen in fig. 4.49, one driver noticed that every time they refused an aux cord, their rating went down. Not only do these examples highlight the power of technologies and algorithms in controlling workers, they also show the extent to which the worker cannot depend on the support of either the customer or the employer.

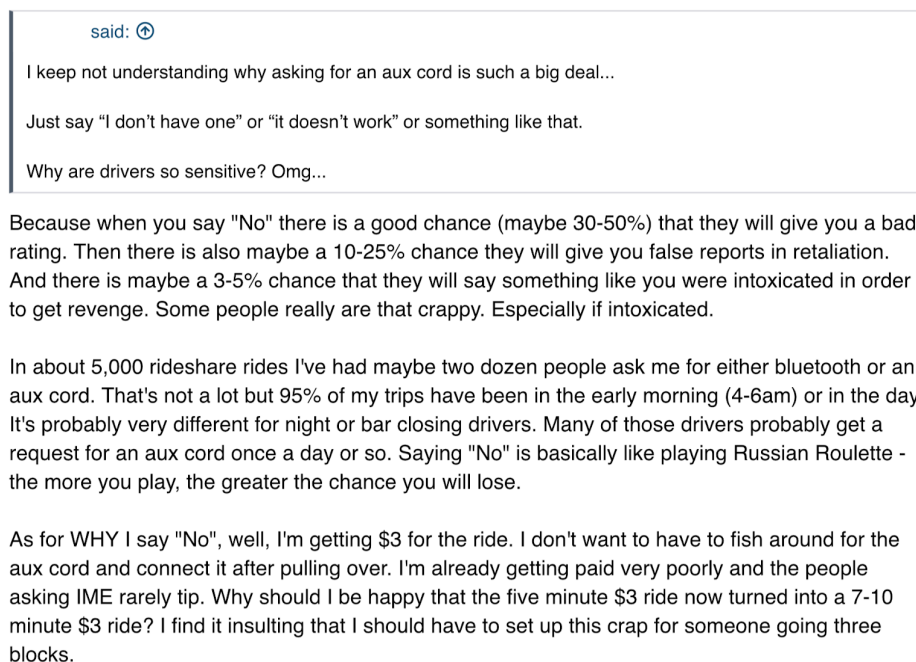


Fig. 4.50. Screenshot from UberPeople.

The driver in fig. 4.50 discusses at length the precarity of the situation they find themselves in: saying 'no' to an aux cable request, is, they describe, 'basically like playing Russian Roulette - the



more you play, the greater the chance you will lose'; and, by lose, they mean lower ratings and tips. The driver in this particular example is not arguing in favour of letting their passengers choose the music, but rather explaining their frustration with the situation they are put in by Uber, the app, and the customer, whereby refusing a music request results in a 'maybe 30-50%' chance of 'a bad rating' (and in turn, a lower income).

However, not all Uber drivers argue that ratings or reviews are important, and some even downplay the role these technologies of surveillance play in determining work factors:

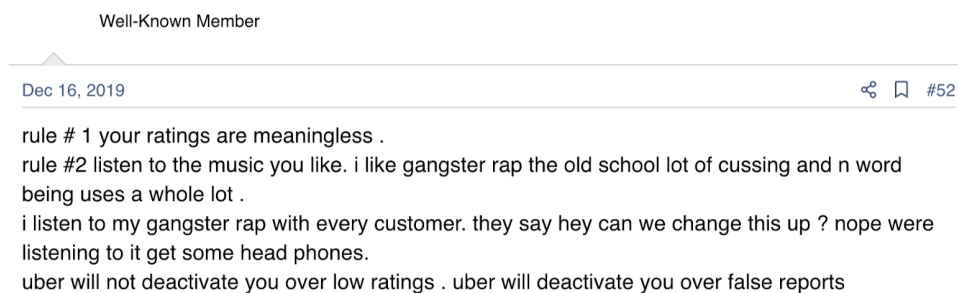


Fig. 4.51. Screenshot from UberPeople.

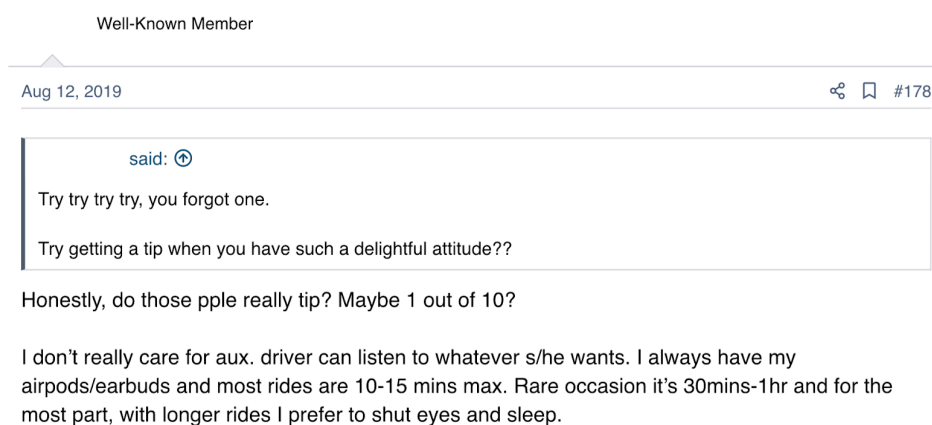


Fig. 4.52. Screenshot from UberPeople.

'Your ratings are meaningless', 'do those ppl [people] really tip?', 'ratings are horse shit', and 'your rating won't drop because of the music', some claim (figs. 4.51-54). There is some disparity between these examples regarding efficacy versus worth, and it is important to clarify this: some drivers, such as in fig. 4.51 and fig. 4.54, argue that 'uber will not deactivate you over low ratings' or 'because of the music', which is a debated claim on these messageboards; many drivers do report being deactivated over low ratings and even due to such petty claims. However, the broader consensus is that ratings and other algorithmic monitoring technologies (like

badges—which drivers can get rewarded after a certain level of service or number of relevant positive reports or ratings) are not worthwhile, i.e. they do not pay your bills: ‘your ratings or badges won’t [be] worth a penny’.



Fig. 4.53. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

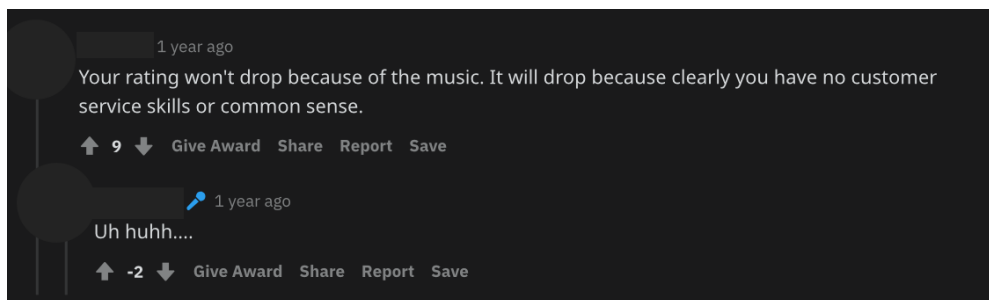


Fig. 4.54. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

The fact remains that many drivers experience ratings and other systems as surveilling and controlling, and some do lose their jobs as a result (Chan 2019: 187). It is not difficult to understand why a ‘lack of trust’, and an ‘atmosphere of suspicion’ prevails among workers (Birgillito and Birgillito 2018: 36). As Chan notes (2019), such ratings systems ‘facilitate the surveillance of drivers’ performance by rendering consumers ‘middle managers’ whose evaluations can determine drivers’ employability’ (184); Chan terms the sum of these processes ‘socio-technical surveillance’ (2019: 188).

A final consideration is the disproportionately negative effects of algorithms and ratings on racial and gender minorities (Leong 2014): in a situation in which ‘racism will likely evidence itself’ through these systems of surveillance and opaque algorithms, leading to ‘Black drivers

being less well-rated than white drivers’, what happens when music and all its cultural implications are added into the mix? Did the passenger who rated a driver one star because their music ‘sucked’ (fig. 4.45) do so because of some internal bias? As is described in fig. 4.53, ‘some don’t like rap, some don’t like country’: does Uber giving passengers the capability to easily chastise and negatively rate a driver due to them playing a particular kind of music exacerbate the problems that already exist within the ‘racist algorithm’ (Chander 2015)?

The role that technologies of surveillance and obscure algorithms play in control in the workplace is evidently a significant one, considering the examples given above: the effects of music listening on ratings, reviews, and tips etc., whether real or perceived, contributes to feelings of surveillance among drivers, and ultimately acts as a tool of control that may be wielded against them. Whether or not a worker knows for sure that a certain choice with regards to music listening while driving might result in a negative effect, their relative lack of power is emphasised and felt through these interactions: they are aware that both the customer and Uber as a company hold power over their work.

## ii. Amazon: airport-style security

Some workplace surveillance is more direct than in-app ratings, or algorithms: in the case of Amazon warehouses, a contemporary example of Braverman’s observation that ‘technology is deployed by management to improve control’ exists (1974)—the metal detector.

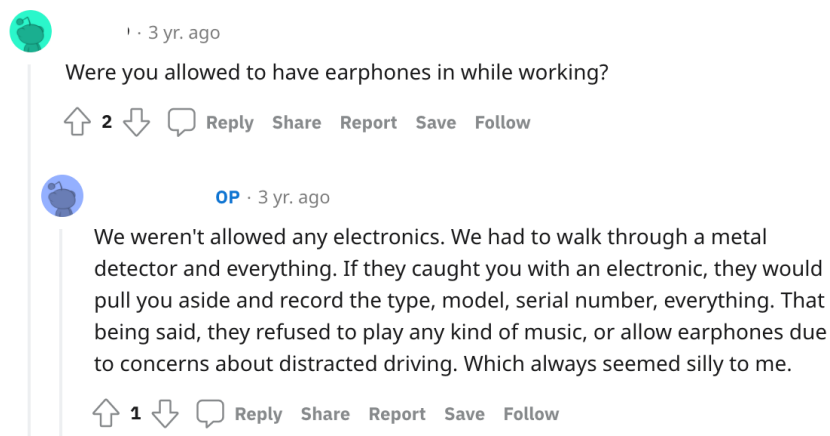


Fig. 4.55. Screenshot from r/AMA.

The above discussion (fig. 4.55) is not taken from the data collected in this research; it is one conversation taken from a thread on the SubReddit ‘r/AMA’, meaning ‘ask me anything’, whereby

celebrities or people with unusual lives or jobs can respond to any redditors' questions. The title of the original thread is 'I'm an ex-Amazon Warehouse employee, ask me anything.' This was not a particularly popular thread, with only 9 'upvotes', with the most popular threads on the SubReddit often having unique or shock interest, such as 'I used to be a member of a cult', or 'I was human trafficked'. In context, though, the question of earphones was the second most popular question asked. The worker explains that 'We weren't allowed any electronics. We had to walk through a metal detector and everything'; they also make reference to previous concerns raised over 'distracted driving'. Below, further examples from the data will be provided which corroborate and expand on the response in fig. 4.55, however this particular answer provides a particularly concise illustration of the surveillance technologies in place in Amazon warehouses, and their potential effects on employees: 'If they caught you with an electronic, they would pull you aside and record the type [...]', the worker claims, describing a scenario which can most effectively be likened to walking through airport security. Although the managerial goals of implementing such technologies in the workplace may be toward 'increasing efficiency, measuring productivity, decreasing risk, and generally maximizing profits' (Rosenblat et al. 2014), the result may be both a negative impact on the worker, and an increasing desire on their part to avoid or circumvent surveillance technologies. Both are demonstrated in the examples below:



Fig. 4.56. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

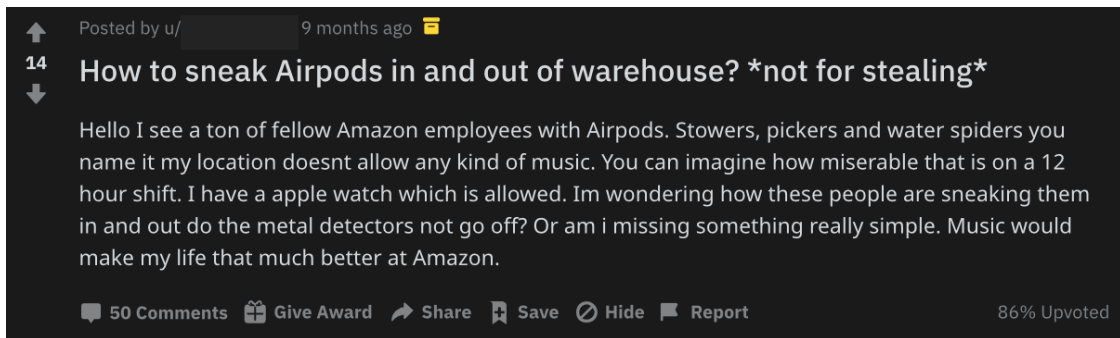


Fig. 4.57. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

The workers in fig. 4.56 and fig. 4.57 describe the presence of ‘metal detectors’ in their warehouses, and both are relatively popular threads, indicating engagement, and have received majority upvotes, indicating agreement. In both cases, the Amazon workers also provide us with an answer as to why this is such a significant issue for them in their everyday life: ‘music would make my life that much better at Amazon’, they say in fig. 4.57, while in fig. 4.56 the poster observes ‘fuck does it get boring as hell when you stow in complete silence [...] am I just doomed to silence?’. This is not just a case of ‘accept the rules’ (and the metal detectors), the existence of these surveillance and controlling technologies have a very real effect on workers’ experiences. This is so patently the case that both workers describe ‘sneaking’ music listening devices through security, with the two threads also inviting others to crowdsource ideas for how to bypass surveillance technologies. The second thread in fig. 4.57 also provides insight into the managerial ideology behind the use of metal detectors and other methods of control: the worker feels the need to specify that they are trying to bypass security ‘\*not for stealing\*’, and, as is alluded to in further comments, the purpose of scanners is ostensibly to prevent theft; the reality, however, is quite different for the workers.

Many workers detail the nature, power, and consequences of such surveillance technologies:

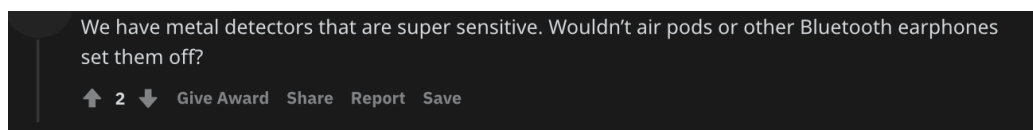


Fig. 4.58. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

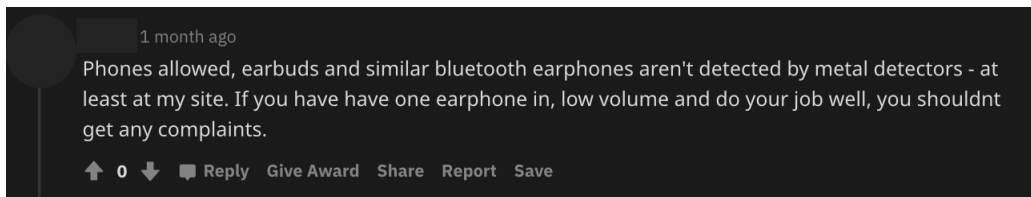


Fig. 4.59. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

In fig. 4.58, one worker describes how in their warehouse ‘we have metal detectors that are super sensitive’, indicating awareness of the intensity of surveillance, although this is somewhat contradicted in fig. 4.59, as another claims ‘earbuds and similar bluetooth earphones aren’t detected by metal detectors’. While there is a discrepancy in the descriptions of the power of the metal detectors, the fact that they are more-or-less sensitive to potential music listening devices is clearly on the mind of workers.

The consequences of being detected are discussed by multiple sources. In fig. 4.58, although the OP once again remarks on the inconsistency of surveillance and control methods—‘the difference in security is honestly surprising (and very inconvenient)’—they also remark how ‘if you get caught [...] you get a write up’, and that ‘three times = termination’. A worker in fig. 4.59 claims that ‘Amazon doesn’t play around w[ith] bringing outside stuff in’, and that ‘they can say you stole stuff and fire you’. Not only does this comment refer to the material consequences of these technologies of control, it also highlights the sense of suspicion and anxiety caused by something like a metal detector: ‘be aware [...] and be cautious’, the worker advises others; in conjunction with fig. 4.59, feelings of insecurity are engendered by managerial technologies of ‘security’. This atmosphere of suspicion and potentially paranoia is one shared by other workers (see particularly fig. 4.61):

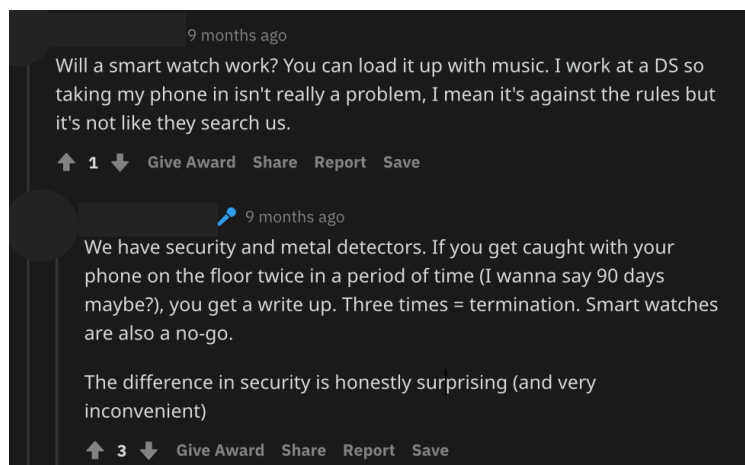


Fig. 4.60. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

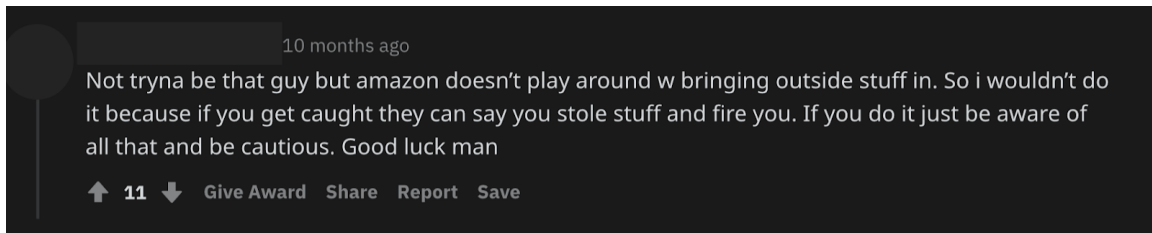


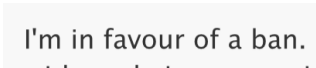
Fig. 4.61. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

The issue of metal detectors and other surveillance technology is clearly a central one for Amazon workers: the entire phrase ‘metal detector’ appears 40 times across the data, excluding other instantiations (including ‘death metal’ music), while there are 17 references to security cameras. Even more frequent are mentions of ‘security’, accounting for 0.05% the total text, of 42 mentions. Not only are these statistically significant in demonstrating the importance of surveillance and control in the lives of Amazon workers, it also is a unique profile across the case studies: it is perhaps predictable that work environments where more control is ‘soft’, and in which there is less direct control, would show material surveillance technologies as less of a topic of interest; so much discussion of metal detectors and the like was however difficult to predict when beginning this research. Regardless, the role that music listening plays in control and power in the workplace is evident in this case.

### 4.3. Ideology

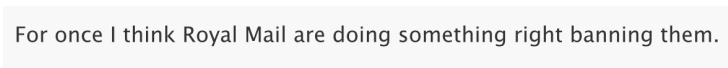
The third key aspect of control in the workplace that I consider a central theme within the empirical data of the case studies is ideology. Workplace ideology represents arguably a significant instantiation of what Thompson and Harley describe as ‘softer’ and ‘more indirect’ forms of control (2010:9). Normatively, ‘an ideology’ would refer to the political sphere, meaning a set of ideas, ideals and ways of thinking which guide decisions and actions, both of individuals and of institutions. In labour process theory, ideology refers to a set of principles, a way of thinking and doing thinking at work: most often this relates to managerial policy; and so, we arrive at ‘managerial ideology’ as encompassing not only the actual contents of rules and regulations, but also the ways in which these rules and their justifications are passed down to workers, accepted or rejected by them, and potentially internalised and espoused by them. In this way, managerial ideology can be subscribed to, and it can also be promoted by those not in managerial positions.

In the cases of Amazon warehouse workers, postal workers, and truckers, this ‘common-sense’ managerial ideology is apparent throughout the data, evident in both those who espouse it and those who disagree or argue otherwise. In a thread on Amazon workers using headphones while working (fig. 4.3), a third of lead comments (original comments, not replies to comments) shared some level of agreement with management and at least one reference to subscription to or espousal of managerial ideology (17 out of 51 comments). In a similarly focused discussion on Royal Mail Chat (see fig. 4.62-63), a very similar proportion of comments expressed either partial or total alignment with managerial ideology, and some workers even directly stated their support for rules:



I'm in favour of a ban.

Fig. 4.62. Screenshot from Royal Mail Chat.



For once I think Royal Mail are doing something right banning them.

Fig. 4.63. Screenshot from Royal Mail Chat.

Agreeing with certain rules does not indicate complete belief in a ‘managerial ideology’. As Armstrong et al. note (1981: 56), there is often overlap between the wishes and opinions of workers, and rules and control: ‘elements of managerial ideology’ may be ‘broadly accepted by most workers’, however this does not mean said workers share a managerial ideology in its entirety. Yet, these individuals who agree with certain rules can, as Armstrong et al. argue, take on a ‘helper’ function (1981: 82), in which they contribute to the legitimisation of managerial ideology: if workers’ resistance to managerial power is ‘conditional upon a shared sense of legitimacy’ (87), as Armstrong et al. suggest, then agreeing with rules may disrupt a consensus among workers in opposition to management.

In some instances, however, workers do indeed directly espouse managerial ideology, and even advance a further step to what might be termed the ‘internalisation of the logic of work’. This might be understood in the context of Marxist alienation or false consciousness (Armstrong et al. 1981: 83), and most commonly appears in the case of Amazon warehouse workers, with some individuals internalising both managerial ideology and a general capitalist ideology so as to consider control and its potentially negative effects as ‘deserved’; in other words simply what it means to be a ‘hard worker’:



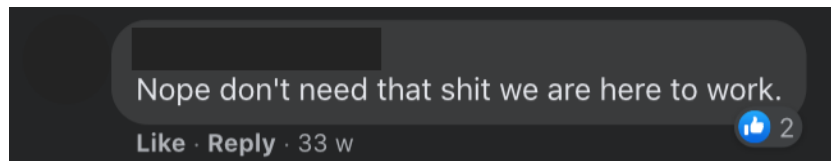


Fig. 4.64. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook page.

The second aspect of ideology as implicated in workplace control is the tendency for individual workers to focus their grievances toward, and place the blame for issues, negative experiences, and rules at work at the feet of other workers, rather than managers. The notion of ‘common-sense’ rules in managerial ideology depends significantly on their acceptance by workers, and therefore disputes regarding failing to follow rules and regulations become internal disagreements rather than threats to management.

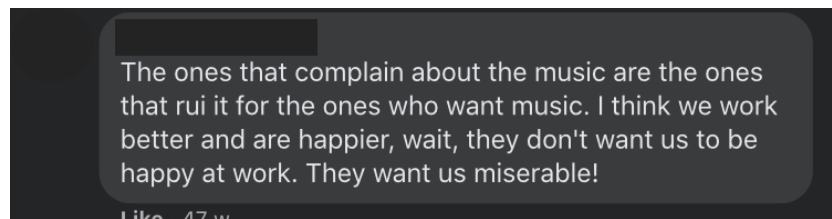


Fig. 4.65. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook page.

Finally, a phenomenon uniquely pertinent to the case study of Uber drivers is the notion of ‘customer service ideology’, a phrase utilised by Bishop et al. in discussing the relative ‘sovereignty’ of the customer in service work (2005). As with truckers, and to an extent postal workers, Uber drivers do not experience the same managerial control as Amazon warehouse workers, and others who work directly under supervision from superiors. In many ways, the customer, and their oft-perceived ‘sovereignty’ takes over aspects of the managerial role: they do not employ the worker per se, but they are able to report them and influence their working situation. The importance of the customer (passenger) in public-facing work (Uber drivers) helps generate the customer service ideology:

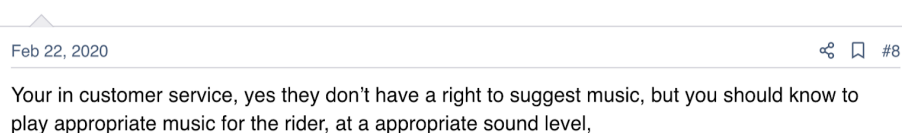


Fig. 4.66. Screenshot from UberPeople.

The final section of this chapter on empirical examples of workplace ideology will therefore consider the Uber-specific case of ‘customer service ideology’.

i. ‘Common sense ideology’

As is seen in figs. 4.9-10, rules regarding music listening at work are often attributed to ‘safety’: this is most evident in the cases of Amazon warehouse workers and postal workers, however the same can be said across all four case studies. As an outside observer, detaching oneself from whatever one might consider the reality of safety concerns with music listening in the workplace, viewing workers’ agreement and espousal of such managerial rules in these discussions highlights how a common sense ideology can become normative.

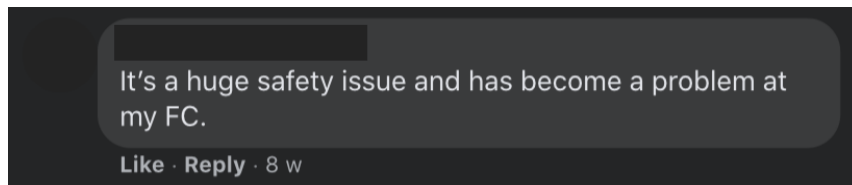


Fig. 4.67. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

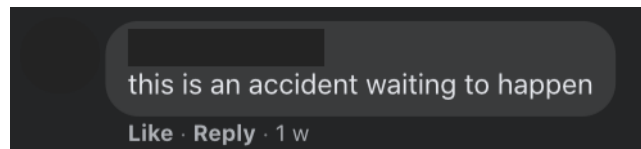


Fig. 4.68. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

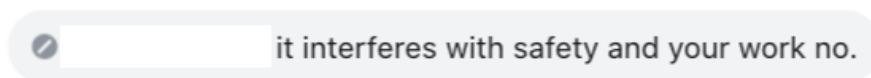


Fig. 4.69. Screenshot from USPS Friends Facebook group.

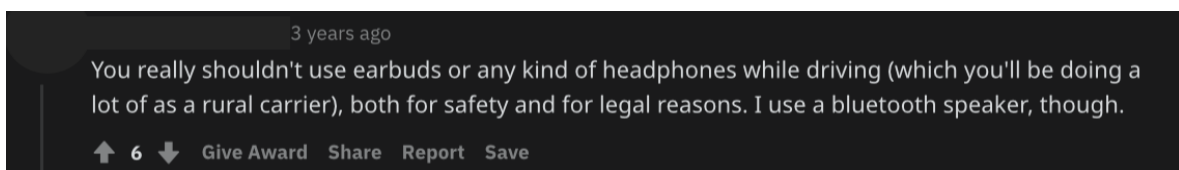


Fig. 4.70. Screenshot from r/USPS.

Amazon and postal workers both demonstrate agreement with management rules on the grounds of safety (figs.4.67-4.70). ‘It’s a huge safety issue and has become a problem’, claims one Amazon warehouse worker, ‘this is an accident waiting to happen’, writes another in reference to

headphone use on the job. 'It interferes with safety',<sup>14</sup> suggests a postal worker, while another argues that 'you really shouldn't use earbuds [...] both for safety and for legal reasons'. As seen in figs. 4.62-63, such comments are not uncommon: a significant percentage of workers often appear to agree with rules.

The above comments are relatively free of moral judgement, simply stating that it's 'health and safety'. It should be noted that agreeing with or encouraging certain elements of health and safety does not necessarily connote ideology: understandably, many people would be hesitant to listen to loud music while crossing a busy street, for example. Some workers, however, imbue these common sense health and safety rules with a weight of character or expectation:

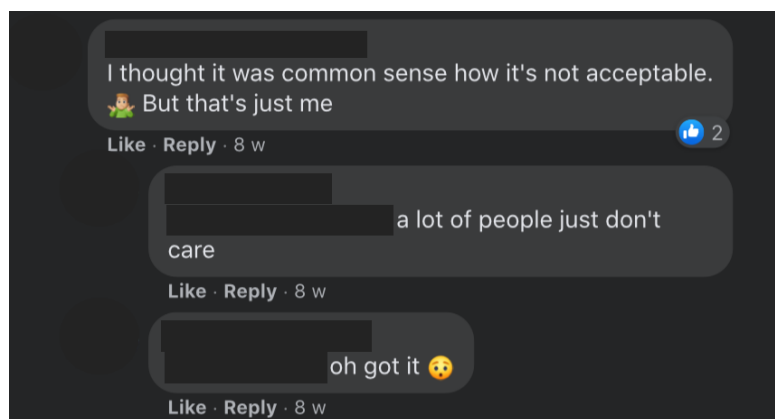


Fig. 4.71. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

In fig. 4.71, one Amazon warehouse worker writes, 'I thought it was common sense how it's [listening to music at work] not acceptable [shrugging emoji] But that's just me'. A fellow worker replies 'a lot of people just don't care', suggesting both agreement with the original comment (in addition to the two 'likes' given to it), and a judgement on those who do not 'follow the rules'. The original comment in fig. 4.71 is particularly enlightening as it makes a specific appeal to 'common sense', implying that those who do not share this person's thoughts and actions lack common sense, which can only be intended to be a negative thing. In addition, the shrugging emoji used by the commenter suggests a sense of sarcasm and distancing from other workers. Some workers

<sup>14</sup> No workers actually offer a supposed explanation for *how* music listening, and in particular headphone use interferes with 'safety'; it is presumably an issue of both being able to hear one's surroundings, and potential electronic interference that could distract workers. However, this lack of further explanation is merely indicative of the power of 'legitimising principles' and common sense ideology: management evidently do not need to provide extensive proof or justification for a rule regarding 'safety' to be widely-accepted, and thus its vagueness is directly connected to its power.

take a less off-hand approach, such as in fig. 4.72, qualifying that they ‘hate to be a downer, but you shouldn’t [...]’, however the same effect results: that it is responsible, and the right thing to do, to follow rules. In these instances, the concept of legitimacy is once again at play: to what extent is there a consensus that you ‘shouldn’t have your headset on while driving’, thus legitimising rules? In the case of postal workers, a good proportion of those discussing rules surrounding music listening at work perceive such health and safety issues as legitimate (41%), while some actively seek to delegitimise them (24%), leaving a significant percentage silent, neither outwardly perceiving the rules as legitimate or illegitimate. Those who at least ‘understand’ (and therefore legitimise) health and safety rules often express their position less than enthusiastically, as in fig. 4.72:

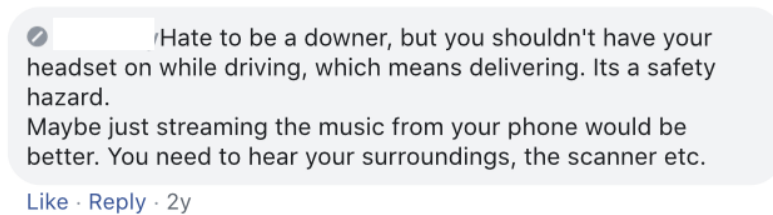


Fig. 4.72. Screenshot from USPS Facebook group.

Besides ‘safety’, the most notable justification given for agreeing with or espousing managerial ideology is perceived ‘unprofessionalism’, and the notion that listening to music at work makes individuals ‘antisocial’ or impolite where other people are involved (this is most common in the case of postal workers, accounting from 0.01% of the total data, while four comments in each of the cases of Amazon warehouse workers and trucker drivers reference a lack of professionalism). It is important to note that ‘professionalism’ is a distinct ideology to managerial ideology more broadly, and that although the resulting effects may often be similar, they might also clash. In many cases, however, notions of professionalism do indeed overlap with managerial ideology (see fig. 4.75 in particular):

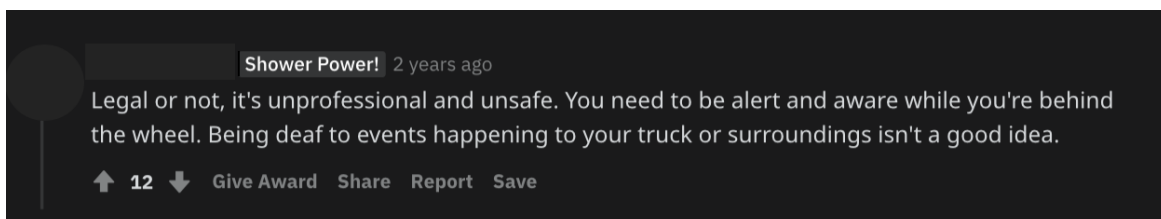


Fig. 4.73. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

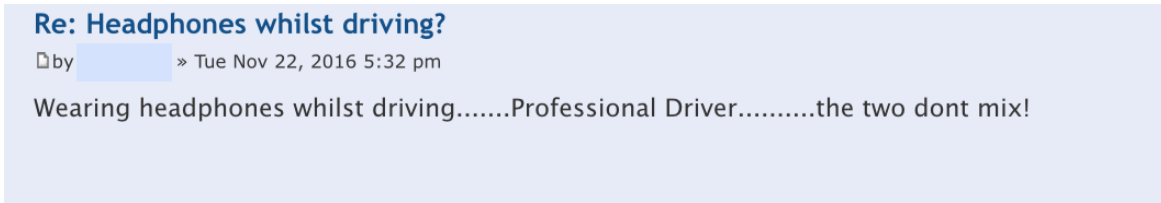


Fig. 4.74. Screenshot from TruckNet.

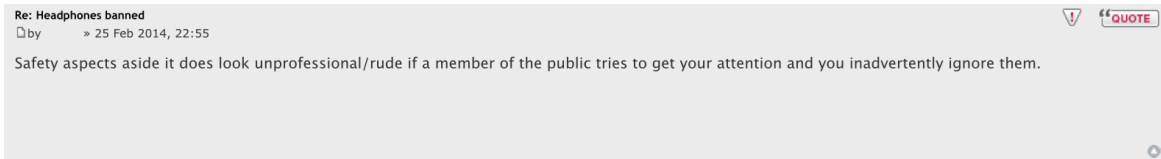


Fig. 4.75. Screenshot from Royal Mail Chat.

Truck drivers and postal workers in figs. 4.73-75 demonstrate the ideology of ‘professionalism’: ‘legal or not, it’s unprofessional’, writes one individual, for which they receive twelve upvotes (reddit reactions signalling agreement). Similarly, in fig. 4.74, a truck driver claims that ‘wearing headphones whilst driving’ and being a ‘professional driver’ do not ‘mix’. Once again, these appeal to not only common sense ideologies but also certain moral judgements, alluding to what it means, in their opinion, to be a ‘good’ professional (in both senses of the word). In fig. 4.75, a Royal Mail worker expresses the same belief, that ‘safety aspects aside it [listening to music while working] does look unprofessional/rude’; this is clearly more of a concern to those in customer-facing jobs, as the poster clarifies, however the notion that listening to music might ‘look bad’ is a common concern. The postal worker in fig. 4.76 elaborates on this implication, claiming that listening to music can be impolite:

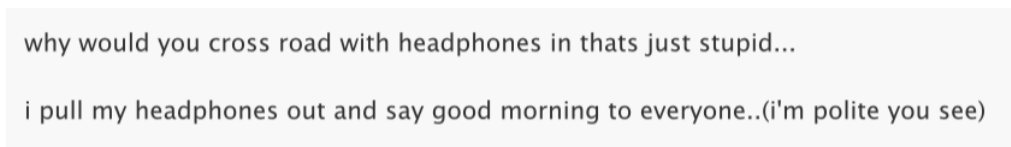


Fig. 4.76. Screenshot from Royal Mail Chat.

In the above example, though, it could be argued that here professionalism actually benefits the worker rather than managerial ideology: if communication between workers is necessarily in fostering solidarity and community (Taylor & Bain 2003: 1494), then feeling as though one ought not wear headphones while working may end up benefiting workers in this way. That is, of course, hypothetical, and any conclusions to this effect are beyond the scope of this project.

A stronger yet sentiment in favour of such ‘professional’ behaviours is expressed by one Royal Mail worker (fig. 4.77), who argues ‘in favour of a ban [on music listening]’, because those who use headphones or similar listening devices ‘are the most boring people to work with’ due to their lack of socialising with those around them. Actively campaigning for the banning of music listening at work because it makes coworkers antisocial may seem like an extreme position, and to an extent that is the case given its relative rarity in the data, however what this does is demonstrate the ways in which managerial ideology can be furthered by workers for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, although these beliefs are relatively rare, they are not entirely isolated (see fig. 4.78).

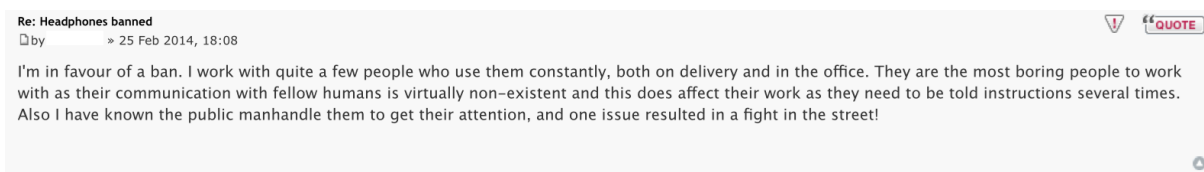


Fig. 4.77. Screenshot from Royal Mail Chat.

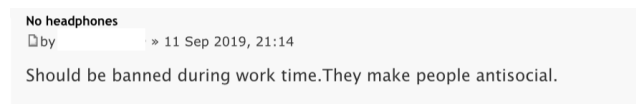


Fig. 4.78. Screenshot from Royal Mail Chat.

Concerns of ‘professionalism’ or ‘politeness’ are not as common in the example of Amazon warehouse workers; what is more frequently demonstrated in this case is what can be termed the ‘internalised logic of work’: the pervasion of managerial ideology depends not just on workers agreeing with and sharing rules and their ‘reasons’, but on a deeper level, the internalisation of a capitalist vision of work. Thus, workers take what is ‘expected’ of individuals in capitalism, and feel this belief to come from within themselves. Armstrong et al. view this through a Marxist lens: ‘most workers see their situation through some kind of false consciousness’ (1981: 83), which ‘limits the extent to which workers’ ideology reflects their own interests’ (39). In other words, people internalise the goals of ‘hard work’, and ‘earning’ wages, often at the expense of what might be best for them. Nowhere is this more clear than in the case of Amazon warehouse workers; as was seen in reference to fig. 4.3, a significant percentage of comments on posts relating to workplace music listening rules tend to agree with managerial ideology, however some go further and demonstrate this internalisation of work logic. They display an attitude consistent with the concept of Marxist alienation, whereby workers appear to claim that they deserve their unfavourable conditions (see in particular fig. 4.81):

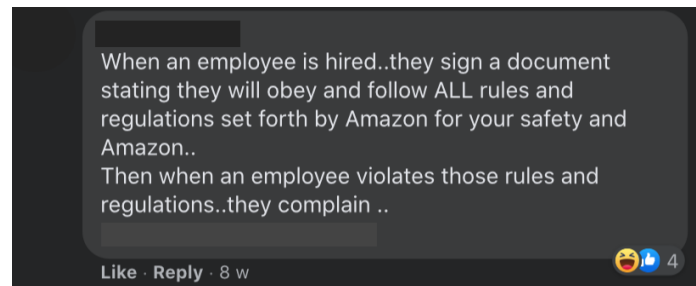


Fig. 4.79. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

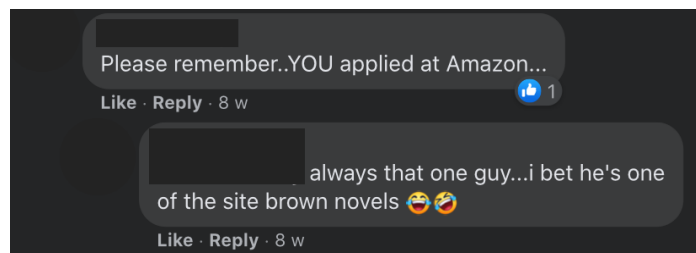


Fig. 4.80. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

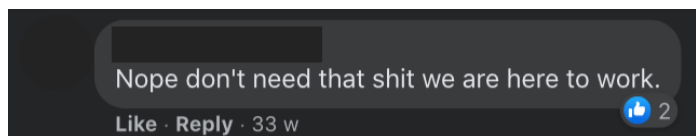


Fig. 4.81. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

One Amazon warehouse worker argues ‘nope don’t need that shit [music] we are here to work’ (fig. 4.81). This comment demonstrates an internalisation of managerial ideology, and appears to represent what Armstrong et al. define as false consciousness in the Marxist sense. In figs. 4.79-80, two Amazon warehouse workers discuss an instantiation of the internalised logic of work: in both examples, the comment is made that ‘YOU applied to Amazon [original capitalisation]’, and therefore workers agree to ‘obey and follow ALL rules [original capitalisation]’, with the implication being similar to that in fig. 4.81, namely that workers rightly forfeit their autonomy and control by partaking in employment. One Amazon employee replies in fig. 4.80, ‘always that one guy...i bet he’s one of the site brown novels [presumably ‘brown noses’]’, indicating that other workers are aware of this internalised logic of work, and reject it. However, it remains the case that multiple workers at Amazon demonstrate an internalisation of managerial ideology, and this may be a further way in which said ideology is disseminated.

In this case it is clear that ideologies and their perceived legitimacies are a key tool of control in the workplace, and arguably ensure that management maintains power over workers

even where they are not present. To a lesser or greater extent, workers may internalise and/or espouse these ideas of ‘proper behaviour’ and conduct in the workplace. In these ways, beliefs about music listening become part of said ideologies and thus act as tools of control.

## ii. Disagreement as refracting resistance at Amazon

When workers fight amongst themselves, they are not fighting management: therefore, the ideology that fellow workers are to blame—if not more so then equally—for negative experiences, hardships, or even minor inconveniences at work, is one which management stands to benefit from. In the case of Amazon warehouse workers, the tendency to blame other employees for others’ problems is particularly common. On the majority of threads discussing rules regarding music listening at work, there was at least one comment specifically blaming fellow workers for their experiences, and for the rules. Indeed, there were a total of 201 comments either directly blaming other employees, or disagreements between workers, for rules. Below is a sample of some of the most enlightening comments:

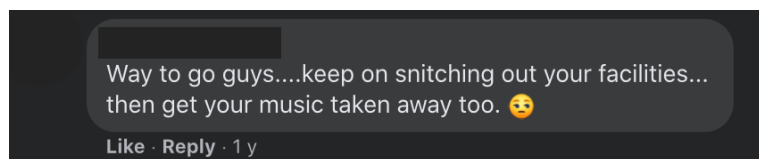


Fig. 4.82. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

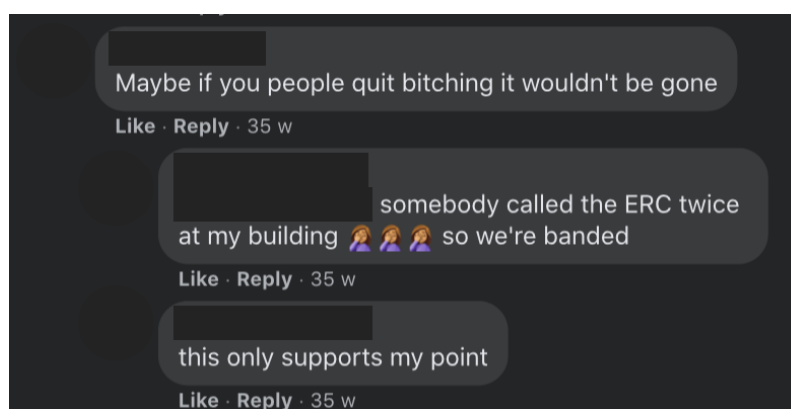


Fig. 4.83. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.



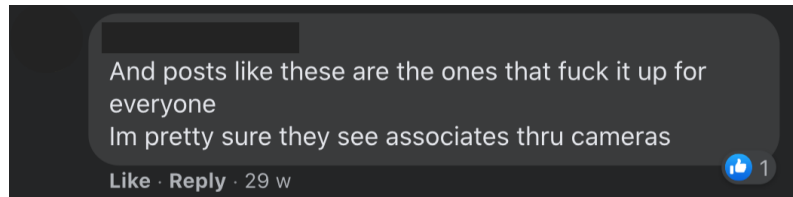


Fig. 4.84. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

In figs. 4.82-84, Amazon workers directly point the blame for managerial rules at their colleagues: 'keep on snitching [...] then get your music taken away', comments one individual, with the use of the irregular verb 'get' implying the music ban was a direct result of their actions. 'Maybe if you people quit bitching it wouldn't be gone', writes another, to which another worker replies, corroborating this theory. In fig. 4.84, an employee blames others' lack of discretion for music listening rules, claiming 'Im pretty sure they [management] see associates thru cameras'; therefore workers not following rules are cyclically to blame for the rules themselves. In fig. 4.85, one Amazon worker even claims colleagues have lied about their own ineptitude, 'blaming the music' for workplace accidents, and therefore rules:

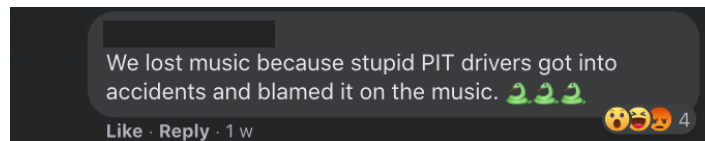


Fig. 4.85. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

The grounds for disagreement, however, was most frequently differing musical tastes (60%), a specific theme which is discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

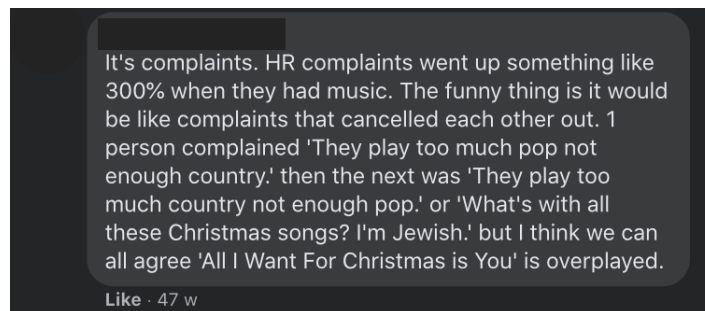


Fig. 4.86. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

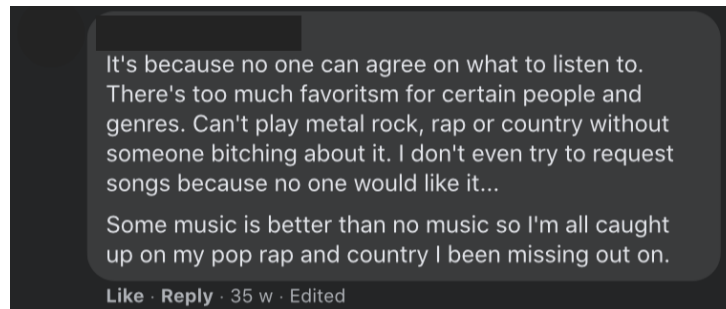


Fig. 4.87. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Both of the above examples (figs. 4.86-87) assert that music is banned from warehouses because of such disagreements between workers, particularly over genre. ‘Can’t play metal rock, rap or country without someone bitching about it’, one writes, while another gives examples of complaints to HR that ‘too much country and not enough pop’ is played, or vice versa, even claiming that complaints ‘went up 300%’ due to disagreements surrounding music listening. In fig. 4.10, a worker claims that individuals complaining about specific types of (not safe for work [NSFW]) songs led to music being banned, and it is clear that management can use ‘musical infighting’ as a reason for the prohibition of music in its entirety; it is therefore beneficial for management that workers fight amongst themselves regarding music, so that they either do not have to defend their rules, or others accept them as common sense.

As is alluded to by the commenter in fig. 4.86, many of these disagreements stem from fundamental beliefs or ideologies held by workers, which again help to turn focus from managerial ideology to disagreements. In the below example, another worker notes that ‘many ppl [people] complained’ due to ‘religious beliefs’ (fig. 4.87), to which multiple members of the group express their anger in the form of ‘angry react’ emojis:

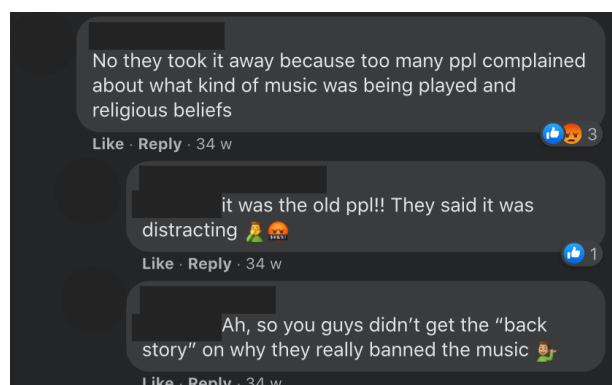


Fig. 4.87. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Some workers who share the view that disagreements are the reason for instantiations of managerial control take a more combative tone:

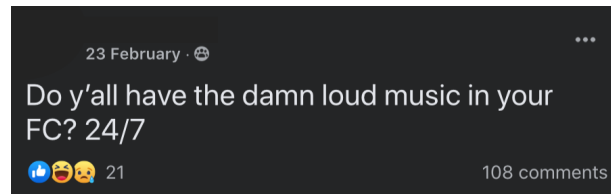


Fig. 4.88. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

The worker in fig. 4.89, responding to a prompt post complaining about music being ‘damn loud’ (fig. 4.88) displays their clear anger at colleagues, as do both commenters in fig. 4.90, while in fig. 4.91, one Amazon employee derides the ‘crybaby snowflakes’ who are the reason that ‘80-90% of people who like the music can’t enjoy it anymore’, to which eleven others react positively, with another commenting ‘couldn’t of said it better myself [clapping emojis]’.

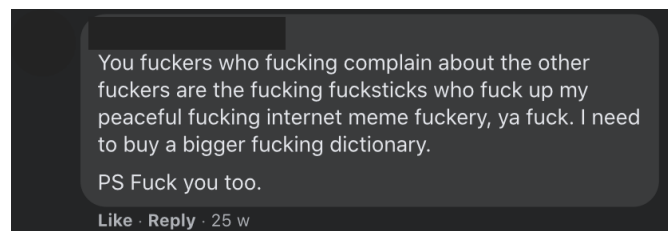


Fig. 4.89. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

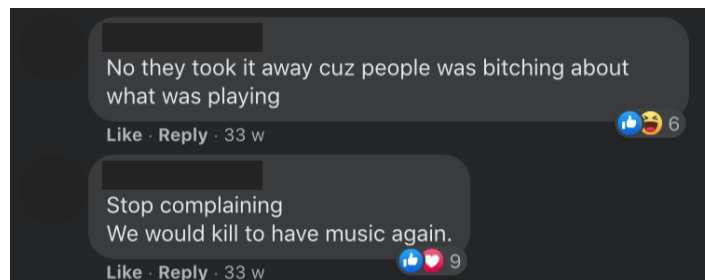


Fig. 4.90. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

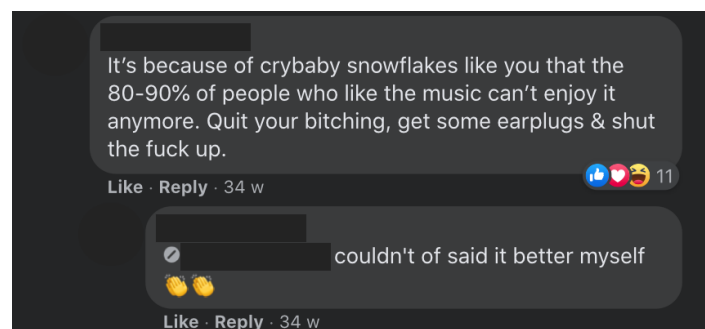


Fig. 4.91. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Again, workers are directly attributing managerial rules to the shortcomings of other workers, and by directing their blame at colleagues rather than management, they are indirectly entrenching a managerial ideology. One comment summarises the tendency to focus attention toward the wrongdoing of fellow workers and away from managerial ideology particularly well: ‘People found a reason to complain about [the music], to the point it was removed’, claims the OP in fig. 4.92, arguing that their fellow employees are unable to ‘learn a simple thing’. ‘We had a good thing’, they lament, before it was removed—due to the actions of other workers:

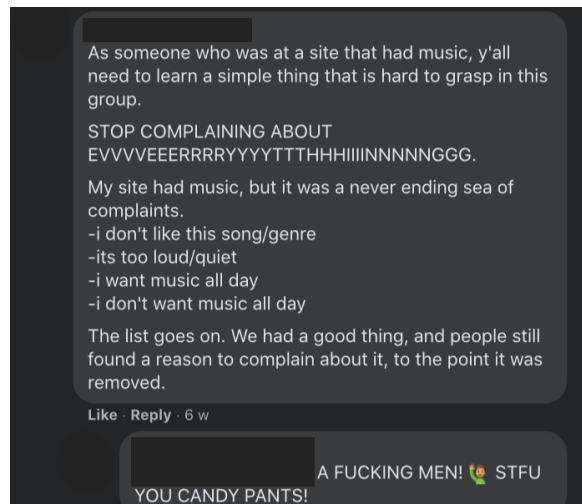


Fig. 4.92. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

It is important not to conflate these disagreements between workers with managerial ideology itself: they are not the same thing, although they may overlap and interact. In the examples above, worker disagreements contribute to a refraction of solidarity. That is to say the arguments between workers and ‘blame game’ often being played is not an example of managerial ideology, rather it can contribute to and strengthen managerial ideology: workers are not espousing a managerial ideology per se, but these examples demonstrate the ways in which potential oppositional consensus to control is weakened through arguing among themselves. This arguably indirectly strengthens managerial ideology and control through obfuscation: managerial control and power are allowed to bubble under the surface while workers are distracted by disagreements.

### iii. Customer service ideology among Uber drivers

What Leidner defines as the ‘customer—worker—management triangle’ (1993) gives rise to the ‘ideology’ of customer service, and ‘customer sovereignty’ (Bishop et al. 2005: 586). Although Bishop et al. use these concepts to investigate violence against service workers, they are equally applicable to broader issues of control: the relative ‘sovereignty’ of the Uber passenger means that pleasing them and acquiescing to all requests may be in the best interests of the driver; as such, in the data there is evidence of workers espousing what we can define as a ‘customer service ideology’ (although they may or may not subscribe to this ideology wholly, as is the case with ‘common sense ideologies’). The extent to which this customer service ideology is an aspect of control varies: it is arguably not a direct form of control, nonetheless it plays an important role in the work lives of Uber drivers.

‘Customer service’ as a term appears 66 times in this case study: it is evidently discussed frequently. In the below examples, multiple workers reference or express agreement with elements of customer service ideology: ‘your [sic] in customer service’, explains one driver in fig. 4.93, in response to a post titled ‘can you change the station, please?’, wherein another driver recounts the story of an ‘entitled’ passenger requesting control of the radio. In their response they clarify ‘yes they don’t have a right to suggest music, but you should know to play appropriate music for the rider at a[n] appropriate sound level’: the commanding ‘should’ in this instance indicates the obligation toward ‘customer sovereignty’, as well as a ‘common sense’ attitude.



Fig. 4.93. Screenshot from UberPeople.

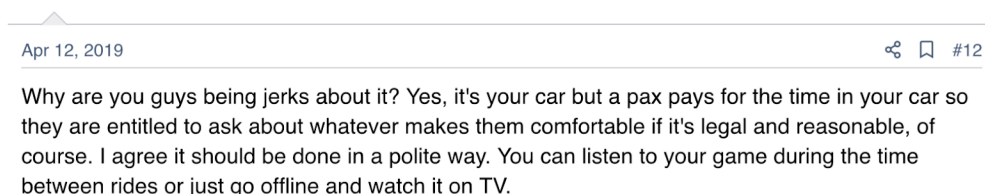


Fig. 4.94. Screenshot from UberPeople.

fellow workers, in response to the same thread, take a more impassioned approach in arguing for positions consistent with a customer service ideology: ‘why are you guys being jerks about it?’, asks the driver in fig. 4.94, arguing that ‘pax pays for the time in your car so they are entitled to ask about whatever makes them comfortable’. Again, a sense of responsibility and obligation is conveyed in the statement that passengers are ‘entitled’ to having their requests heard.

In fig. 4.95, another driver responds to a comment calling them a ‘wus’ for not making their own music listening rules by writing ‘it’s called ‘customer service’. It isn’t hard [...] I just live with it’. The appeal to common sense is a key aspect of positions congruent with customer service ideology, something which is apparent in this commenter’s tone: ‘Really?’, they ask. The second paragraph of the driver’s comment in fig. 4.95 also offers a fascinating glimpse into the preferences, feelings, and desires of the worker: ‘Why have drama? If i wanted drama I’d go back to my career and deal with ‘office politics’; here, the driver implies that working as an Uber driver avoids any ‘office politics’ altogether, certainly a true statement in that there is no need to navigate annoying coworkers. There is, however, the need—or ‘entitlement’—for passengers to be pleased. Clearly for the driver in fig. 4.95, however, this is less of an inconvenience or annoyance than the alternative; this final paragraph also suggests that the driver may not necessarily ‘subscribe’ fully to a customer service ideology, but rather makes acceptable allowances to make their work life ‘easy’.

As with ‘common sense’ and managerial ideologies, it is impossible to say (without asking directly) whether a particular worker subscribes to a customer service ideology, or whether they simply accept or do not challenge it: agreeing with the argument that passengers should be allowed to change the radio station does not necessarily mean entirely submitting to a customer service ideology that endorses ‘customer sovereignty’. Perhaps a good example of this ‘passive’ customer service ideology acquiescence is in fig. 4.96, whereby a driver replies to a prompt post in a thread entitled ‘what [do] you listen too [sic]?’ with the one-line response ‘whatever the PAX wants’. Here, the worker offers a neutral attitude which indicates customer service ideology will be enacted, but is not necessarily enthusiastically espoused.

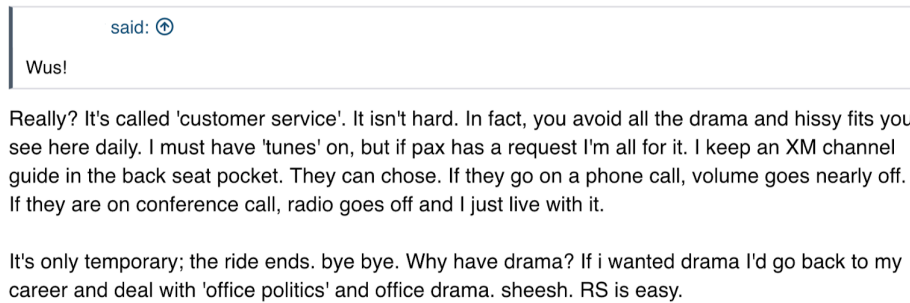


Fig. 4.95. Screenshot from UberPeople.



Fig. 4.96. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Although ‘common-sense ideology’, ‘managerial ideology’, and ‘customer-service ideology’ are all relatively distinct categories (that often overlap), their role, with regards to music listening, in control in the workplace is clear: workers in multiple different case studies experience control, and management exert power over them, through these various instantiations of ideology, of which music listening is a part of all. Whether it’s ‘listening to this kind of music isn’t professional’, or ‘you’re in customer service so should let the passenger choose the music’, these ideologies that inform and often dictate ‘proper behaviour’ are a part of workplace systems of control.

## 5. Organised resistance

---

The results of the data in two of the cases from this study (Amazon warehouse workers and postal workers) suggest that music listening has in certain instances been the catalyst for organised resistance, and an issue on which collective action focuses. It is worth noting that two of the case studies do—perhaps predictably—offer a total lack of organised resistance in relation to music listening: truckers, and particularly Uber drivers, as (controversially, and to a less-or-greater extent) relatively independent workers, make effectively no mention of collective action or intention to bargaining or organising. Music listening is still important in these case studies, as are concerns over quality of life and experience at work, however because of the nature of their work and status in relation to employers and customers, they are not concurrent factors. This is not to say they should not be, of course: with the recent legal cases regarding Uber drivers' status and workers' rights being brought to the UK Supreme Court (Russon 2021) and county court in California bringing positive updates (AP 2021), there is no reason why workers could not pursue more organised forms of resistance in relation to the frequent issues reported in my case studies regarding music listening.

This section, though, will focus on the evidence of various forms of (relatively) organised resistance with regards to music listening at work, in the cases of Amazon warehouse workers and postal workers.

### 5.1. Suggestion boxes and whiteboards: replacing unions at Amazon

Amazon is staunchly anti-union (Harney and Dundon 2020; Logan 2021; Rae 2021). Besides constant media coverage of working conditions inside their warehouses, in 2018 an official company 'training video' on union organising was leaked to the press by a source calling themselves 'Whole Worker' (Whole Worker 2018). In this employee video guide, the narrator states 'we do not believe unions are in the best interests of customers, shareholders, or most importantly, associates [workers]'. The video goes on to describe the 'warning signs associated with early union organising', describing ways to stop and report collective action, and essentially training employees to 'grass' on their coworkers. This dystopic training tool is merely further evidence of an already-acknowledged problem built into the foundations of Amazon as a company: as Cattero and D'Onofrio note (2018), 'no sort of union presence' could be found in European Amazon



warehouses, while Boewe and Schulten suggest the same to be the case in the US and South America (2017). Ultimately, Amazon’s hardline anti-union stance has always worked for them (and not for the workers).

Yet, even against the backdrop of forceful and global anti-organizing action on the part of Amazon, some evidence of collective bargaining with regards to music listening, however weak, still exists:

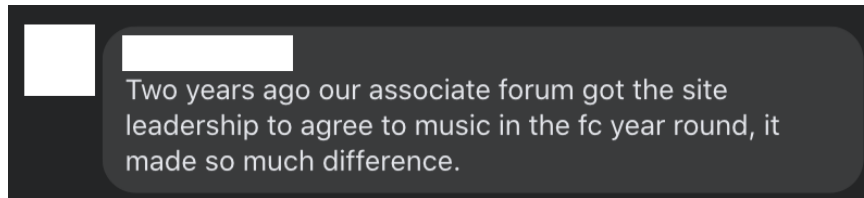


Fig. 5.1. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

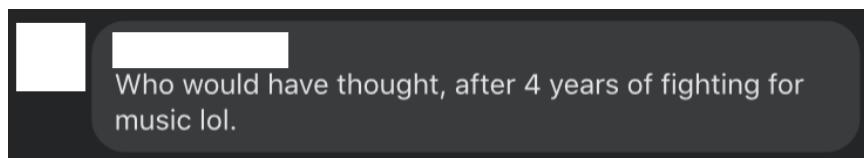


Fig. 5.2. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

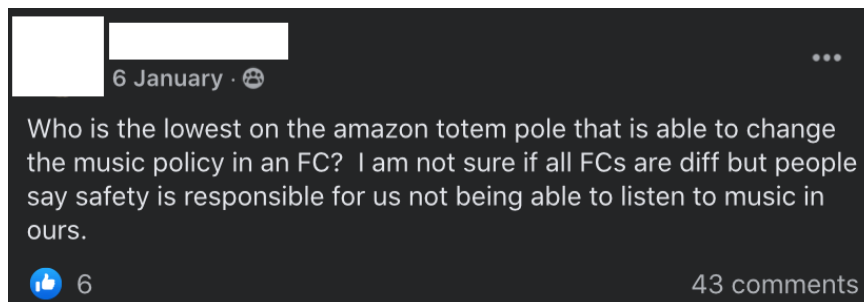


Fig. 5.3. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

In the first and second examples (figs. 5.1-2) evidence of collective bargaining is seen, albeit not in the form of organised union activity: fig. 5.1 demonstrates that associates (employees) get together in ‘forum’ with management and came to a collective decision to bargain for music in their warehouse ‘year round’, which implies a certain amount of organising and also resistance in the face of management—the worker says they ‘got’ management to agree to allowing music listening, indicating that this was not something ‘site leadership’ wanted. Similarly, the employee commenting in fig. 5.2 alludes to a relatively organised ‘fight’ for music in their warehouse over an extended period of time (4 years). The third example (fig. 5.3) alludes to similar, relatively

organised attempts to change conditions at work, in this case specifically their ‘music policy’ (which, as is remarked upon frequently in the data, does not exist as an official company-wide rule in any formal sense). Fig. 5.3 also indicates that social media platforms, to which many workers belong (the Amazon fulfilment centre Facebook page from which I gathered the majority of my data has over 37,000 members), might act as sites of potential organising and collective action. Many scholars in labour studies have remarked upon the organising potential of social media platforms (Bryson, et al. 2010; Canella 2017), with a common thread being that in some cases sites like Facebook offer novel potential for collective opinion sharing, solidarity and community building, while also representing weakened forms of organising and coinciding with the general decline in union membership and activity. Davide Però, in his study of precarious migrant workers in the US, posits the formation of ‘indie unions’—grassroots collectives of (in particular, foreign) workers, for whom social media platforms offer a site to develop solidarity in ‘communities of struggle’ and move toward gaining ‘collective industrial agency’ (2019: 900). What these accounts share is the suggestion that collective organising activity may begin on social media platforms, whether or not this progresses to action in the workplace or not: the factory floor still exists, but these platforms offer another space for discourse, potentially also with more of a sense of privacy than in person.

Besides allusions to a precedent of collective organising activity in relation to music listening, the case study of Amazon warehouse workers provides personal accounts of what can be considered the company’s ‘alternative’ to unions: ‘round tables’, whereby employees are invited to voice their opinions, and other similar examples like whiteboards in break rooms on which can be written ‘suggestions’. These are attempts by Amazon to appease workers and offer some semblance of power; they are certainly not examples of strong organising activity, but a certain amount of collective bargaining does occur, and there is evidence of group opinion-forming on the part of employees, in order to achieve a desired goal—in this case, being allowed to listen to music at work.

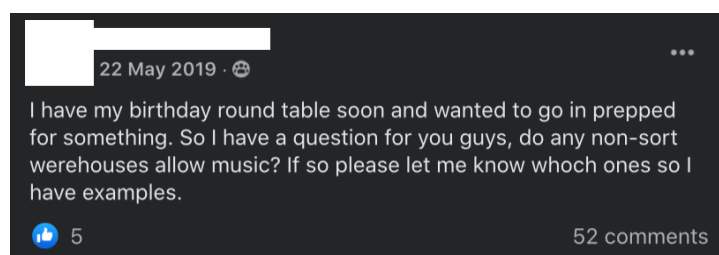


Fig. 5.4. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfillment Centre Memes Facebook group.

A ‘birthday round table’ is essentially a yearly discussion afforded to Amazon employees where they sit down with site leadership and can ask questions, give feedback, and make requests concerning their building. Clearly, a birthday round table is not exactly a union arbitration, and it seems to be a further attempt by management to individualise workers and dissuade them from taking part in collective organising. Yet, as is clear in fig. 5.4, certain forms of collective organising can occur. The warehouse worker ‘wanted to go in prepped’, indicating a desire for both forward planning and organisation. There is a collective element in the desire of the OP for collaboration: they believe that if an individual was able to come prepared to their meeting with evidence from multiple different sites regarding music being permitted and listened to in warehouses, they would be in a better bargaining position. This certainly shows an attempt at collective organisation, but perhaps more so it shows how the role of unions and traditional organisations has been weakened across the board and effectively replaced with new, weaker alternatives (if you can call them such), often utilising digital platforms. Thus there are (significant) negatives of this enforced shift away from traditional union organising. However advantages remain, not least the wide reach and scope of digital platform organising: in the case of the warehouse worker in fig. 5.4, they were able to utilise a base of over 37,000 Amazon workers in search of a collective goal. It is easy to dismiss the potential power of digital platforms in collective organising, however, even admitting the relative success with which Amazon and other corporations have suppressed traditional union activity, these ‘grassroots’ movements are often necessary precursors to ‘collective industrial agency’ (Pero 2019), particularly in the case of migrant workers, many of whom have been denied the same space and benefits within trade unions both historically and contemporarily (Wrench 1987; Jefferys 2007; Jefferys and Ouali 2007; Greer et al. 2013). In these cases, music listening can act as a tool for resistance, a key topic around which to coalesce and potentially organise collectively.

## **5.2. Music and union organising among postal workers**

Postal workers represent the only industry among the four case studies in which extant evidence exists of official union activity regarding music listening at work. In fact, the paper trail which remains in the case of United States postal workers is extensive, and weaves a complex, bureaucratic narrative—albeit one with a simple message: the American Postal Workers’ Union (APL-CIO) successfully bargained for the ‘privilege’ of workers being able to listen to ‘portable radios’ (including Walkmen) and headphones, with certain caveats. The earliest evidence of

organised action regarding music listening at work by the American postal workers union is 1982. In a letter dated 24th June 1982 (fig. 5.5), the labour relations department of the US national postal service mentions a 'grievance claim' involving whether 'local management was discriminatory' by denying a worker the use of his 'earphone radio' while working. A letter dated 22nd March 1983 (fig. 5.6) indicates that a 'headset settlement', brought to USPS by union representatives, was included in an employee newsletter.



M 00482

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE  
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  
Washington, DC 20260

June 24, 1982

Mr. Halline Overby  
Assistant Secretary-Treasurer  
National Association of Letter Carriers, AFL-CIO  
100 Indiana Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Re: P. Bryan  
Tulsa, OK 74101  
H8N-3T-C-36426

Dear Mr. Overby:

On June 9, 1982, we met on the above-captioned case at the fourth step of our contractual grievance procedure set forth in the 1978 National Agreement.

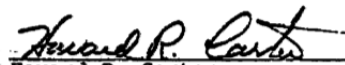
The question raised in this grievance involves whether local management was discriminatory by denying the employee the use of his earphone radio while casing mail.


After further review of this matter, we mutually agreed that no National interpretive issue is fairly presented in the particulars evidenced in this case. Whether this matter was properly handled can only be determined by applying the fact circumstances involved against the past practice in the local installation.

Accordingly, as we further agreed, this case is hereby remanded to the parties at Step 3 for further processing if necessary. Please sign the attached copy of this decision as your acknowledgment of agreement to remand this case.

Time limits were extended by mutual consent.

Sincerely,

  
Howard R. Carter  
Labor Relations Department

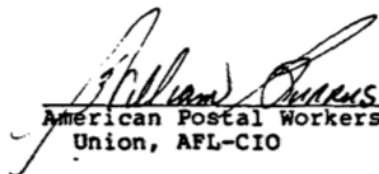
  
Halline Overby  
Assistant Secretary-Treasurer  
National Association of Letter  
Carriers, AFL-CIO

M-00786

The following constitutes full and complete settlement of all grievances and unfair labor practice charges initiated as a result of the "Policy on Personal Portable Radio or Tape Cassette Headphones" contained in Postal Bulletin #21379, dated November 25, 1982. All pending unfair labor practice charges concerning this matter, including 5-CA-14964-P, 1-CA-20635-P, 4-CA-13428-P, 9-CA-19165-P, 15-CA-8798-P, 19-CA-15344-P, 21-CA-21826-P, and 33-CA-6319-P, will be withdrawn.

The following applies to offices which permitted radio headset use prior to November 25, 1982:

The use of radio headsets is permissible only for employees who perform duties while seated and/or stationary and only where use of a headset will not interfere with performance of duties or constitute a safety hazard. Employees will not be permitted to wear or use radio headsets under other conditions, including but not limited to: while walking or driving; near moving machinery or equipment; while involved in oral business communications; while in contact with, or in view of, the public; or where the headset interferes with personal protective equipment.

  
 American Postal Workers  
 Union, AFL-CIO

  
 National Association of  
 Letter Carriers, AFL-CIO

  
 U.S. Postal Service

Fig. 5.5. Letter dated 24th June 1982.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> All letters retrieved from the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) online Materials Reference System (MRS), referenced in full with links in the bibliography (chapter 10).

This page left intentionally blank



M-00786

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE  
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  
Washington, DC 20260

March 22, 1983

Mr. William Burrus  
Executive Vice President  
American Postal Workers  
Union, AFL-CIO  
817 14th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20005-3399

Mr. Francis J. Conners  
Vice President  
National Association of  
Letter Carriers, AFL-CIO  
100 Indiana Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20001-2197

Gentlemen:

Enclosed is a signed copy of the headset settlement, as well as a copy of that portion which will appear in next week's Postal Bulletin.

Sincerely,

William J. Downes, Director  
Office of Programs & Policies  
Labor Relations Department

Enclosures (2)

M-00786

PERSONAL PORTABLE RADIO OR TAPE CASSETTE HEADPHONES

The following applies to offices which permitted radio headset use prior to November 25, 1982:

The use of radio headsets is permissible only for employees who perform duties while seated and/or stationary and only where use of a headset will not interfere with performance of duties or constitute a safety hazard. Employees will not be permitted to wear or use radio headsets under other conditions, including but not limited to: while walking or driving; near moving machinery or equipment; while involved in oral business communications; while in contact with, or in view of, the public; or where the headset interferes with personal protective equipment.

Employee & Labor Relations Group

Fig. 5.6. Letter dated 22nd March 1983.

As written in the letter dated the 22nd March 1983 (fig. 5.6), postal management appears keen to deal with such a matter of 'headset grievances' quickly and completely. USPS dictated that radio



headsets might be worn, but only when ‘seated and/or stationary’, and where this would not ‘interfere with performance of duties or constitute a safety hazard’. More specifically, headset use would not be allowed ‘while walking or driving’, or when machinery or customers were involved. These terms were accepted by the union and might even be considered common sense: however they do not reflect the reality of all postal workers’ actions and experiences. The matter was also far from settled: letters from the postal service to various branches in Texas, Alabama, Georgia, and Washington indicate continued ‘class action’ on the matter of music listening and headphone use throughout the decade. As a result, an extended arbitration occurred on 11th July 1989 in Douglas, Georgia, a letter copy of which is included as an appendix. In said arbitration, the AFL-CIO union brought the following grievance forward: ‘the service violated an established past practice by withdrawal of the privilege of Letter Carriers to use personal radios in assigned vehicles while on their routes’. The arbitration between the union and postal service concluded that ‘reinstatement of such opportunity is ordered, but within certain required guidelines’.

Given this arbitration provides us with one of the only extant detailed accounts of official union activity regarding music listening at work, it is worth considering their ‘official position’, as set out in the arbitration (fig. 5.7):

‘It had been an established past practice of at least ten years for employees to be allowed to use personal portable radios in their assigned vehicles. [...] No problem with the use of radios arose until [management] forced a Letter Carrier to remove a radio and antenna he had personally installed in his assigned postal vehicle.’

The position of the union is in direct contradiction to the agreement set out as of March 1983 (fig. 5.6), which stipulated that portable radios and headphones could only be used ‘while stationary’ and specifically not ‘while walking or driving’. This, as well as showing organised opposition to the management position on music listening on the behalf of the union, indicates the discrepancies which inevitably occur between the de jure and de facto nature of worker experience. ‘It had been an established past practice’, the union assert, regardless of existing rules and regulations.

## POSITION OF THE UNION

It had been an established past practice of at least ten years for employees to be allowed to use personal portable radios in their assigned vehicles. Prior to 1970-73 the Service at Douglas used leased vehicles, which all had radios. No problem with the use of radios arose until Peavy came to the Douglas facility in 1980, at which time he forced a Letter Carrier to remove a radio and antenna he had personally installed in his assigned postal vehicle; however, use of portable radios was not denied until the Savann-A-Gram was issued. The Service raised no claims of safety during issuance of the notice or handling of the grievance and should not be allowed to do so now. Also, no claim of untimely filing was forthcoming in the grievance handling. Other personal items such as lunch boxes and thermos bottles are routinely carried in an assigned vehicle without objection by the Service. The Service should be found to have violated the spirit and intent of the Agreement and the longstanding past practice of the use of portable radios by Letter Carriers at Douglas, Georgia and be directed to reinstate that right; furthermore, since it is obvious that the Service referred this matter to Step 4 in 1986 (rather than test the validity of its position via the arbitration procedure) in order to stall receipt of an adverse decision, punitive damages in the amount of \$250 should be paid to each Letter Carrier denied the right at Douglas, Georgia.

Fig. 5.7. 'Position of the union' dated 11th July 1989.

The union continues to argue their case for allowing portable radios and headsets: ‘other personal items such as lunch boxes and thermos bottles are routinely carried in an assigned vehicle without objection by the Service’ (fig. 5.7). This is arguably irrelevant given the focus of the arbitration is on the suitability and safety of specifically music listening devices while working, however it shows a desire to mount an argument in favour of the workers’ position. ‘The Service’, the union argues, ‘should be found to have violated the spirit and intent’ of ‘past practice of the use of portable radios’. Opposition to the managerial position is therefore not merely posited as a matter of rules, but also of respect: the union is attempting to validate their position and argument by appealing to ‘the spirit’ of working relationships and actions, seeking to strengthen their bargaining power with reference to what is right, ethically. In ‘punitive damages’, the union demands that each postal worker denied their ‘right’ to music listening in the relevant workplace be paid \$250, equivalent to over \$500 today.<sup>16</sup> Such a strong reference to the postal workers’ ‘right’ to music listening is in direct opposition to the frequent assertion by the service that it is ‘not a right; it is a privilege’ (original emphasis); by doing so the union challenges the managerial position again both in terms of rules and ethics.

Management, however, strongly refuted all claims made by the union. Yet as detailed in the arbitration (appendix), the union successfully challenged management on the key point that ‘the Service violated an established past practice by withdrawal of the privilege of Letter Carriers to use personal radios [and headsets] in assigned vehicles while on their routes’. As such, the union was successful in regaining this ‘privilege’ (note—not right) and in a small, but not insignificant way, defeating their employer. All other points brought before arbitration by the union were dismissed, in particular the demand for compensation.

As previously mentioned, these few decades-old documents are the only extant evidence of organised, union resistance to management on the subject of music listening. The lack of contemporary evidence is not necessarily indicative of lessening union activity: in fact, ‘unions’ are mentioned 147 times in this case study. In relation to organised resistance to music listening rules, however, there are very few relevant examples, and comments frequently refer colleagues back to the historical settlements as precedent (12/40 comments).

Two Facebook threads do however make mention of contemporary union activity with regards to music listening at work (figs. 5.8 and 5.9-10). In the first example, in response to one worker expressing frustration and annoyance at changing workplace rules surrounding

---

<sup>16</sup> Personal calculation based on the *U.S. Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics'* consumer price index.

‘radio/music/Bluetooth’, another replies that ‘both union say they working on it..’ Whether this is referring to multiple unions is unclear, however the postal worker is clearly stating here that organised resistance in relation to music listening (and specifically headphone use) is ongoing, regardless of how concerted or effective any efforts are.



Fig. 5.8. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

In the thread below (fig. 5.9), one postal worker recounts how management ‘took my badge’ and sent them home when ‘they got me with my headphones on while I was delivering’. In the post, they ask the online community ‘is this the right procedure?’, searching for advice on their labour rights. The post was in the top 1% in terms of engagement, amassing 193 comments and multiple tangential discussions about what rights individual workers have and how their unions might be able to help. In this thread alone, there were also 111 mentions of ‘union[s]’. As is evident in fig. 5.9, many postal workers give their colleague the simple advice to ‘call your union ASAP’, or ‘call your steward asap’. The second and last comments both argue that management may be in the wrong in terms of procedure, and therefore that their union may be able to provide greater help. One worker simply writes, ‘UNION’, while another provides a rather more positive and encouraging comment: ‘Call your union ASAP you will be back with pay [bag of money emoji] enjoy your time off’.

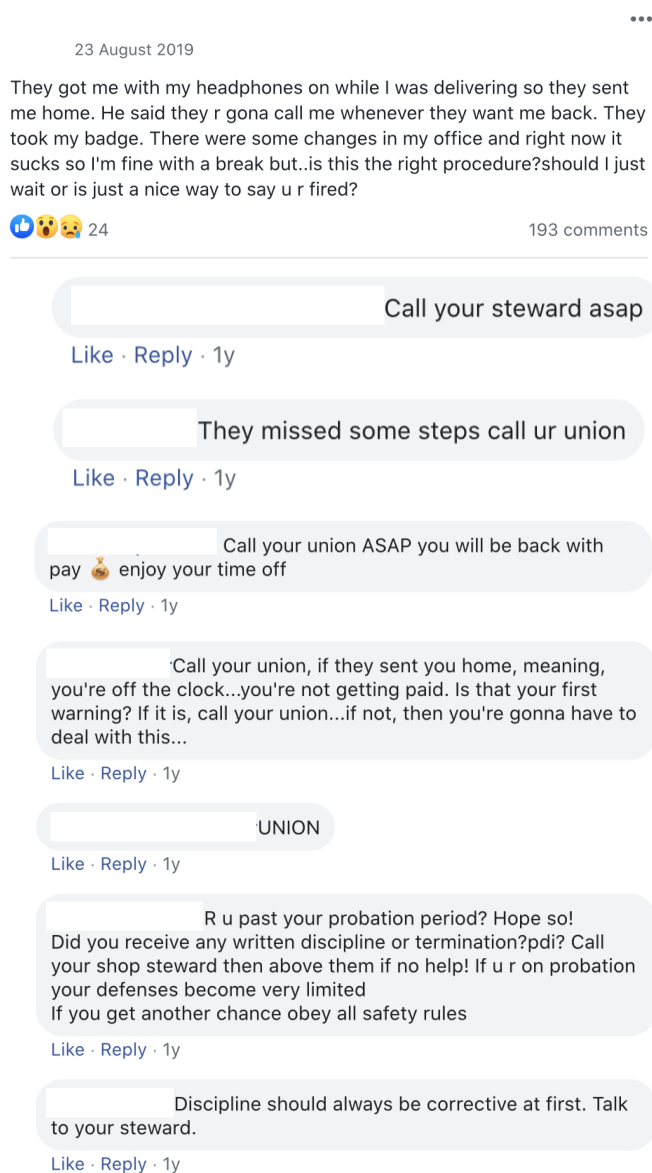


Fig. 5.9. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

Another reply to the original post in fig. 5.9 produces a fascinating discussion that reveals a sense of community and collective discussion that can be fostered through these digital platforms. In an apparent call for solidarity, one worker replies ‘can we say UNION UP!!! [fist bump emoji]’. What ensues is an illuminating discussion between this worker, and a third: the third worker remarks that any organising power on the part of the union might be stymied depending on the context and warnings, while the first commenter replies ‘have to prove there’s a rule and he is aware of the rule, burden of proof is on sup[ervision], not him’. To this, the third commenter replies, ‘good luck to you’, with a ‘one hundred’ emoji demonstrating agreement and encouragement.

The conversation concludes with the two workers coming to a happy agreement, and the third wishing their colleague ‘good luck and fight the good fight’:

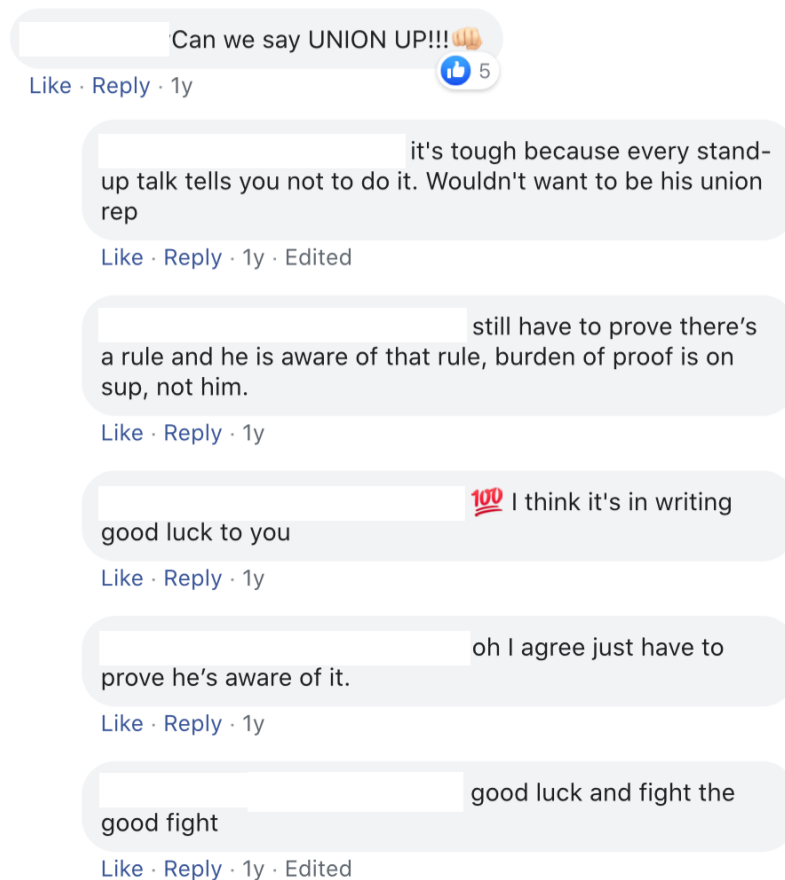


Fig. 5.10. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

As is clear in the examples above, then, music listening, and often headphone use in particular, can represent a key issue around which organised resistance occurs. Although the union case seen in fig. 5.1-4 is historical and somewhat disparate from the following cases of union discussion with regards to music listening, it is one that was often cited by workers in online forums even as recently as 2021. The idea among those who point to this union case appears to be that it might act as a precedent for resisting further or unjust management control—for example, a worker might be able to point to these documents as a defence for their music listening and headphone use. In this sense, the fact that multiple workers share the documents within these online forums is a significant one and demonstrates a desire to inform others and thereby create or maintain solidarity. Evidently it would be beneficial to workers if more contemporary examples existed of material union organising around music listening, and this is something for readers and

researchers to consider. Potentialities for utilising music listening as a point around which music listening might be used to lay the groundwork for collective action are explored further in chapter 8 (see especially chapter 8.2), but it should be noted that discourse surrounding the use of online spaces in this way (see figs. 5.8-10) remains contested within employment relations literature. What material difference does a Facebook post from a coworker encouraging ‘unioning up’ because of music listening-related workplace issues have? Frangi et al. note that ‘digital platforms can empower unions’ (2019: 302); yet the unknown remains a key factor here—they *can*, but *do* they? The data presented in this study demonstrates contemporary enthusiasm for such music listening-related organising, however it is unable to provide evidence of this translating into action: further research is needed.

## 6. Non-organised resistance and misbehaviour

---

Three of the case studies provide multifaceted and often quite successful examples of ‘non-organised’ resistance. In the case of Uber, multiple threads found on UberPeople and r/UberDrivers ask questions such as ‘What’s a creative way to tell people I don’t want to play their flipping music?’, wherein fellow workers share their tips and tricks used to avoid customer music requests, including technological sabotage and outright lying:

Forums > Geographical > US Cities > Northeast : 23 Cities > **New Jersey** >

### What's a creative way to tell people I don't want to play their flipping music?

Fig. 6.1. Screenshot from UberPeople.

In chapter 6.1, the three key ways in which Uber drivers resist customer requests are explored: first, many drivers actively choose not to provide certain listening equipment; second, drivers may actually sabotage their own equipment toward the same goal; finally, some choose to lie in a way that both prevents passengers from choosing music, and improves their own experience.

In the case of Amazon warehouses, workers describe ingenious ways in which they continue to listen to music even where it is officially disallowed, such as creating makeshift speakers, and share tips on how to bypass security and managerial control:

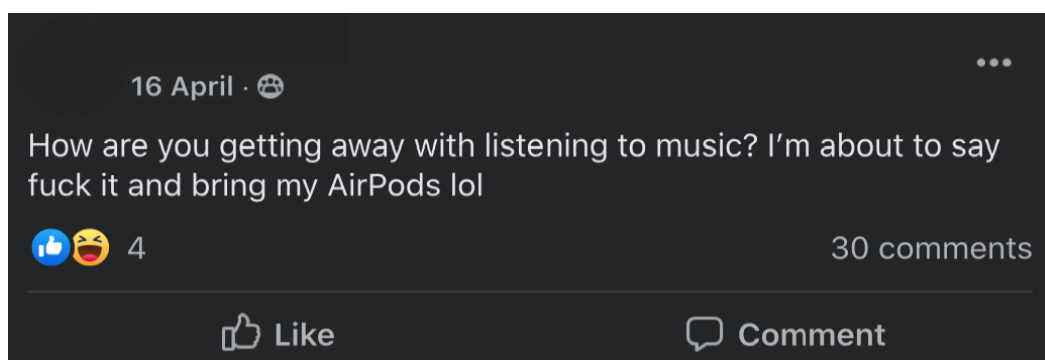


Fig. 6.2. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.



In the case of postal workers, non-organised resistance comes in the form of ‘don’t ask don’t tell’ type social conventions among staff members, where discreetness is valued highly in an effort to continue listening to music with devices like headphones and wireless speakers:

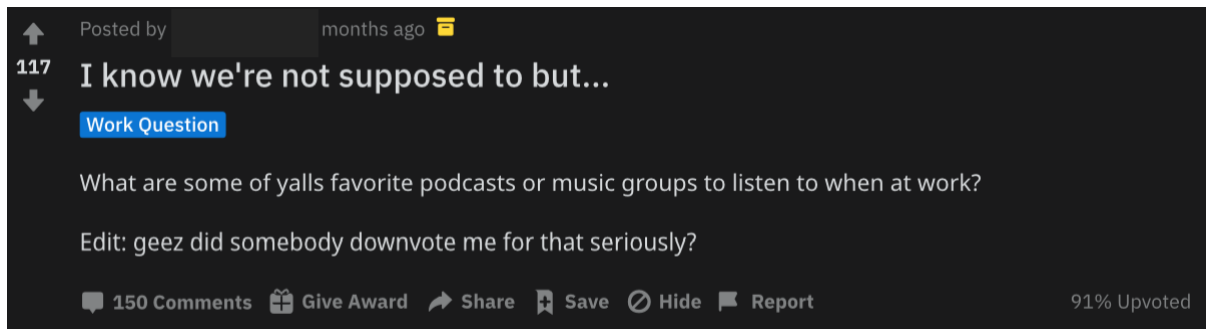


Fig. 6.3. Screenshot from r/USPS.

In the following section I will discuss these instances of non-organised resistance in the aforementioned case studies, exploring the significance of such examples, and asking how music might act as a conduit for resistance.

### 6.1. ‘Sorry boss, no aux’: resisting passenger recommendations

The case of Ben Hamper and his account of work at General Motors’ automobile factories (1992), as discussed in chapters 2.4 and 2.10, represents important context in the following section. In what could be defined as ‘non-organised’ acts of resistance, Hamper recounts ‘blasting the radios’ to disrupt, irritate, and inconvenience management (334). This inappropriate and disruptively loud use of music listening technology was accompanied by more viscerally physical acts of non-organised resistance such as shouting at their managers and throwing ‘rivets’. Korczynski sees acts like this as small but significant acts of resistance, especially when many workforces were further stymied in organising and union activity (2003: 324).

Uber drivers, along with Amazon warehouse workers, are comparable to such mid-20th-century instances of non-organised resistance: Uber has long maintained that their drivers are ‘independent contractors’ rather than employees, and therefore not entitled to the same work and employment protections and benefits afforded to contracted employees. In the US, workers have campaigned tirelessly for their recognition as employees, however the victory of ‘Proposition 22’ in 2020 ensured companies such as Uber and Lyft would be able to continue treating drivers as ‘independent contractors’ (Conger 2020); many labour activists, and even state

judiciaries, viewed Proposition 22 as ‘unconstitutional’, protecting only ‘the economic interest of the network companies in having a divided, unionised workforce’ (Li 2021). Regardless, Uber drivers remain disadvantaged in the US. In the UK, a landmark Supreme Court judgement was handed down in 2021 (Uber BV v Aslam), holding that ‘drivers were not independent contractors, but that they worked for Uber and were therefore entitled to certain employment rights’. Nine months later, however, Uber was back in court and accused of ‘undermining’ this ruling (Milligan 2021): Yaseen Aslam, president of the App Drivers and Couriers Union derides ‘Uber’s army of slick corporate lawyers who are determined to strip us of our rights’.

It is undeniably the case, then, that Uber drivers globally maintain a precarious position with regards to employment and workplace rights. This leads to a change in workplace dynamics and the burden of responsibility: service sector employees are generally expected to act in certain ways conducive to ‘good service’ and positive customer experience—they may do so for the very good reason that failure to act in such a way might result in getting fired or facing penalties; Uber drivers, however, must navigate a wholly unequal and ever-shifting dynamic between them as a service provider, the customer, and Uber as a company. The effect of this different workplace dynamic is twofold: first, Uber drivers, as I have observed, do not generally have guarantees of certain workplace rights and protections afforded to typical employees, and thus in the face of ‘unfair’ treatment by customers (for example unjustified poor ratings, offensive behaviour, abuse, damage to themselves or personal belongings), cannot rely on any support; furthermore, Uber drivers must negotiate and shoulder the burden of customer relations solely by themselves—it is up to the driver how exactly to treat the passenger, what to provide them with or how to act interpersonally, and only they are responsible for this and any resulting effect, with Uber as a company essentially remaining aloof, and immune.

The nuances of this difficult situation in which Uber drivers exist is not lost on them. In fig. 6.4, a ‘well-known member’ of discussion board UberPeople ponders the nature of the driver-customer relationship, and how Uber fails to shoulder any reasonable responsibility. ‘If Uber wants to provide water and snacks and aux cords to customers’, they argue, then Uber should provide these. It is not the responsibility of the driver, in their opinion, to provide this level of service to the customer. Specifically, the driver states that ‘it isn’t *your* customer’ (my emphasis), in opposition to a previous contributor who argued that ‘basic customer service’ should dictate certain ways of acting and allowances for passengers. Technically, the original poster (OP) in fig. 6.4 is not correct: it is the driver’s customer, as has been observed, due to their (ambiguous) status as ‘independent contractors’. Uber is effectively acting only as a ‘middle-man’ between driver and

passenger and therefore how drivers treat passengers, and whatever luxuries they might choose to provide them, is their responsibility, regardless of how unjust this may seem. In this particular case, the object of contention is the aux cable, and the argument being whether drivers are responsible for providing this to passengers. This is disputed in fig. 6.4 between drivers themselves, and individual passengers may have different expectations in addition to this; furthermore, because Uber does not control these variables nor do they provide rules regarding aux cables to either passengers or drivers, this will remain a point of contention for which the burden of responsibility will likely fall on the driver.

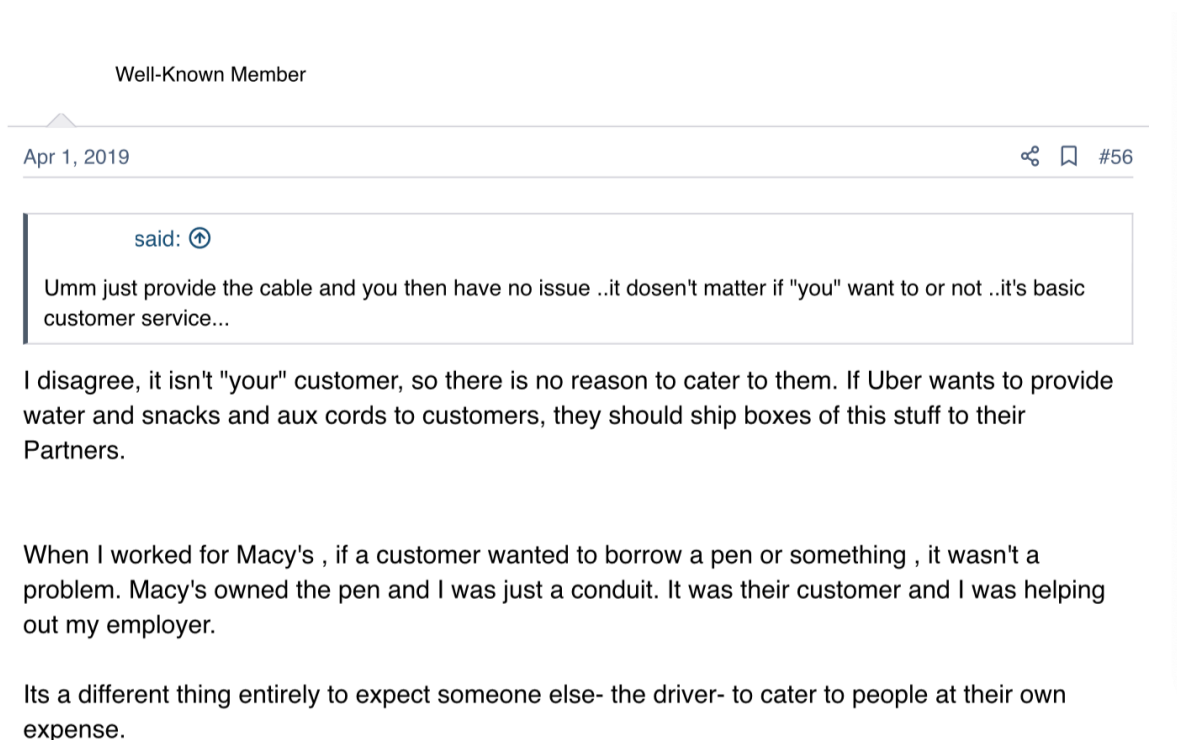


Fig. 6.4 Screenshot from UberPeople.

Confusion regarding the roles and positions of drivers, company, and customer, is a common theme on Uber messageboards, and should be kept in mind when considering driver experience. As can be observed in Fig. 6.5, drivers are often wary of this themselves, and remain suspicious of the intent of Uber as a company, arguing that they are ‘trying to gamify the drivers’:

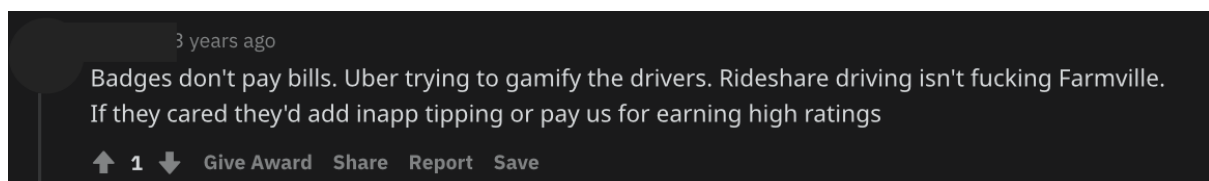


Fig. 6.5. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Such ambiguity regarding the burden of responsibility results in understandable resentment on the part of drivers, who can be seen lamenting the ways Uber ‘spend all day creating reasons for paxholes [a portmanteau combining pax/passenger, and asshole] to downrating [sic] us’:

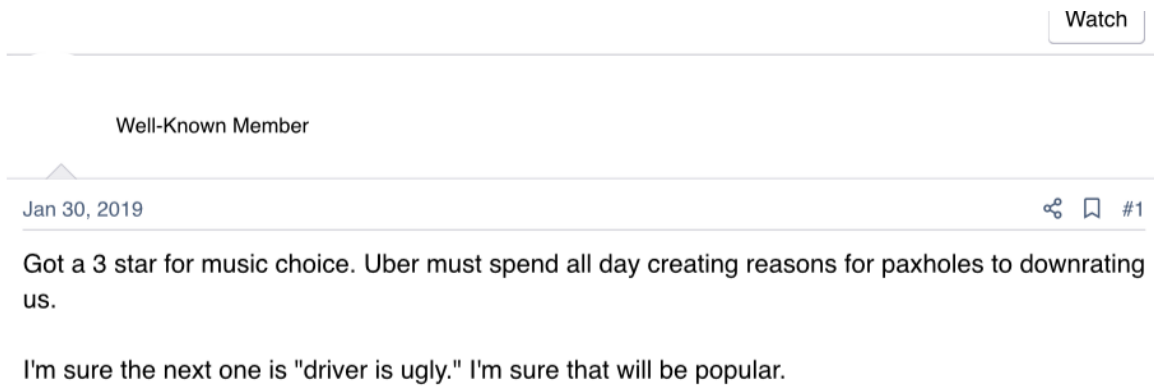


Fig. 6.6. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Some drivers are more blunt in their assessment of the driver-customer-company relationship:

Aug 14, 2019

When I first started being an Uber (slave),

Fig. 6.7. Screenshot from UberPeople.

In fig. 6.4, the driver describes how aux cables, together with more ‘traditional’ listening technologies such as the humble car stereo, have become a central site of dispute and confusion with regards to drivers’ rights and responsibilities, as well as those of the passenger. It is no surprise that upon combing the messageboards of UberPeople and r/UberDrivers, a common theme arising is non-organised resistance in relation to aux cables, radios and stereos: while some drivers might take the position that providing an aux cable for passengers to listen to their own music is ‘basic customer service’ (fig. 6.4), others may approach this area of contention with the aim of challenging and resisting perceived threats to power and control.

In my data three main ways in which Uber drivers seek to wrest back control from passengers in acts of non-organised resistance appear, as they attempt to assert some level of power in their workplace through relatively antagonistic behaviour: first, some drivers simply choose to not provide an aux cable or similar, circumventing any points of contention entirely; second, drivers sabotage their own equipment in order to not have to negotiate with passengers or deal with eventualities; finally, some drivers simply lie about the nature of their listening devices, making up stories about other passengers damaging speakers or stealing aux cables. In all cases a common theme arises: the desire to avoid a passenger controlling their music listening while at work.

## 6.2. 'Just get rid'

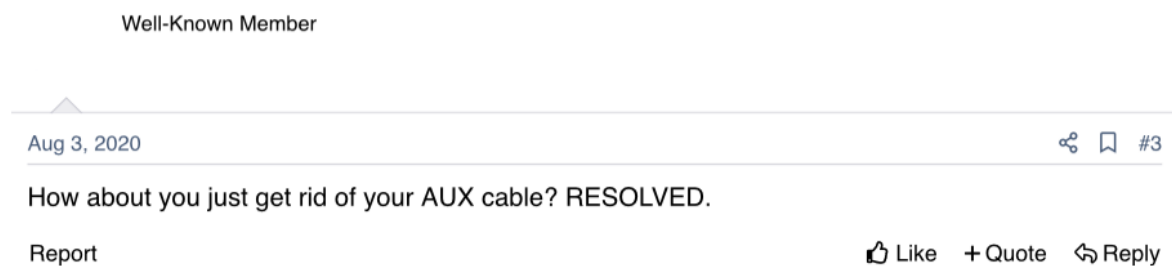


Fig. 6.8. Screenshot from UberPeople.

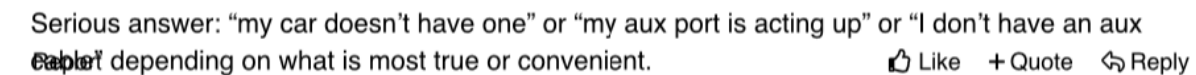


Fig. 6.9. Screenshot from UberPeople.

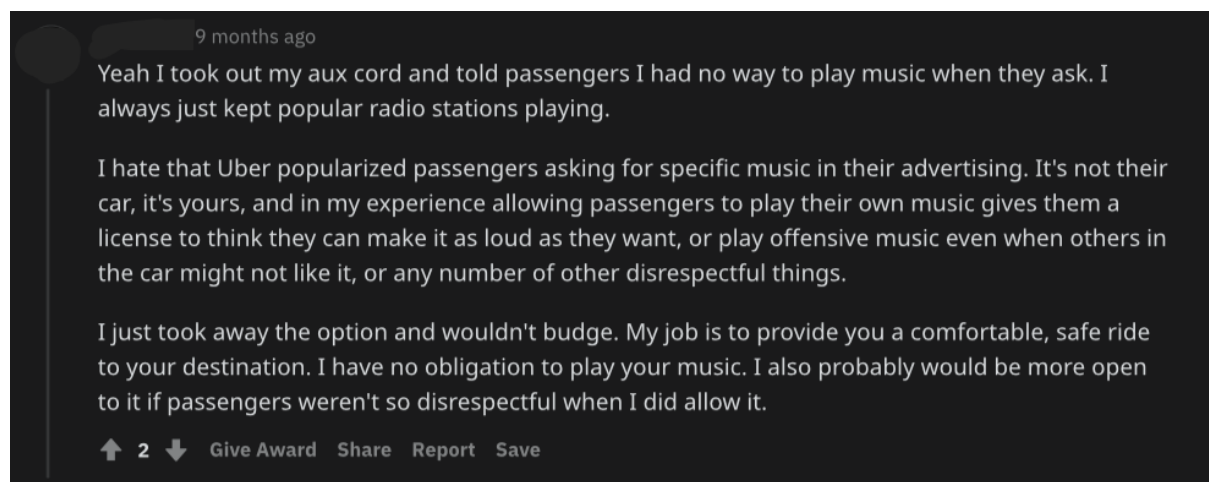


Fig. 6.10. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

In figs. 6.8-10, three different Uber drivers explain the ways in which they avoid the question of 'pass the aux, boss?' by simply not having one. As is indicated by the somewhat curt tone of the

poster in fig. 6.8, this solution to the issue of who controls the music is not necessarily aimed either at maintaining any amount of power, nor of pleasure on the part of the driver: even if the driver themselves enjoys listening to music through their phone using an aux cable, the suggestion here is that their problem is 'resolved' most easily by getting rid of the cable entirely, meaning the driver may have to sacrifice their own experience in order to 'beat' the passenger.

Drivers in both fig. 6.9 and fig. 6.10 allude to the second common tactic of workers to avoid unwanted customer control (lying), however the description of their justification for simply removing music listening options in fig. 6.10 is extensive and worth noting. 'I took out my aux cord', and 'I just took away the option', the driver explains. The driver has clearly had bad experiences with customers requesting and playing their own sometimes 'offensive' music, and 'as loud as they want', for which they blame Uber: 'I hate that Uber popularized passengers asking for specific music'; this again reflects on the fact that drivers often bear the burden of responsibility in accommodating passengers regardless of what Uber promotes or encourages. The comment in fig. 6.10 also clearly provides the driver's perspective on their responsibility and role: 'to provide a safe, comfortable ride', with 'no obligation to play your music'. The problem for Uber drivers is that while they do not have any legal obligation to provide certain accommodations such as music listening devices to passengers, certain things may be expected (and indeed encouraged by Uber), and their absence will reflect not on Uber as a company, but solely on the drivers themselves. Regardless, the opinions expressed in fig. 6.10 are shared across many of the threads gathered for this project.

### **6.3. 'Machine sabotage'**

Non-organised acts of machine sabotage can represent what Hodson describes as 'small but significant acts of resistance' (2001: 60). Sabotage is defined by Jermier as 'a subversive means to create advantage out of the disadvantageous position', namely that assigned to workers (2001: 27). While this does not always involve physical sabotage, technology and machines used in the workplace are often key sites of such actions. Instances of technological sabotage are perhaps more associated with workplaces of the industrial revolution and Fordist factory lines (Hodson 1997, 2015): the deliberate disruption of factory equipment in textile factories and automobile plants was commonplace for centuries. In the case study of Uber drivers, multiple examples offer a contemporary parallel; a modern instantiation of machine sabotage:

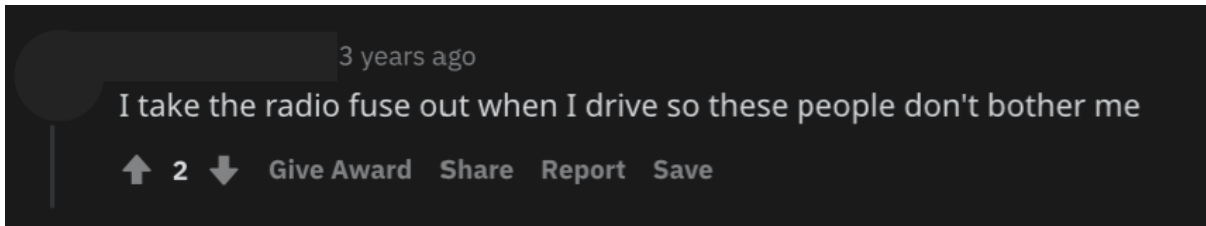


Fig. 6.11. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

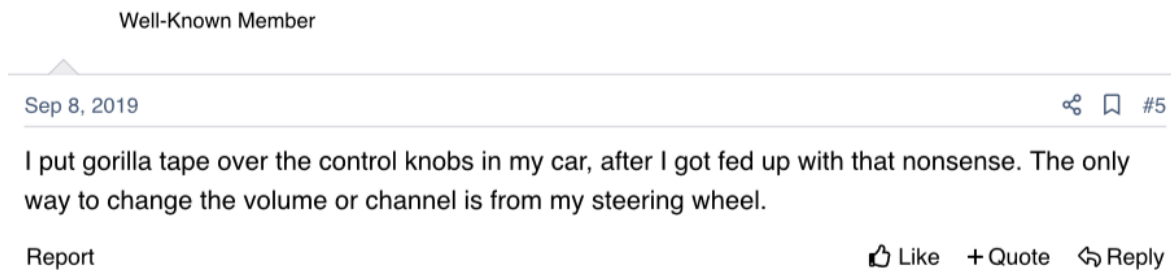


Fig. 6.12. Screenshot from UberPeople.

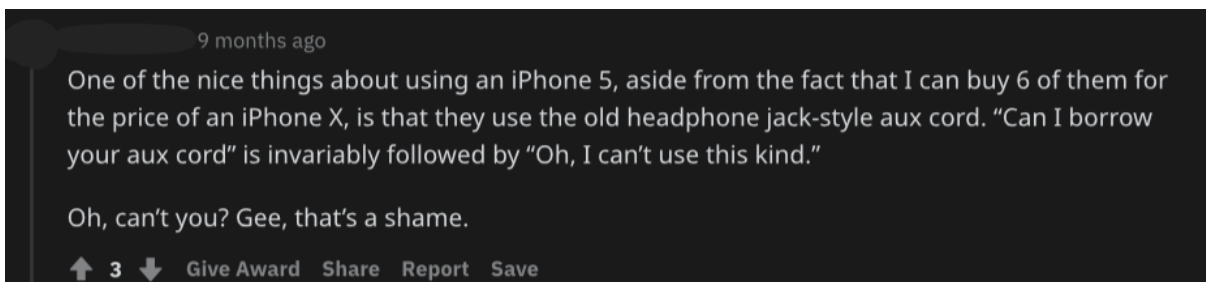


Fig. 6.13. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Many drivers choose to actively sabotage the music listening technology in their own vehicles in order to prevent passengers from playing their own tunes: Figs. 6.11-12 show two such instances. An individual posting on r/UberDrivers responds to a question about stopping passengers from asking to control the music in the car by explaining that they ‘take the radio fuse out’ entirely, meaning customers do not ‘bother’ them. This is an example of very simple machine ‘sabotage’ (unplugging the fuse) that is also easily reversible (reconnecting the fuse). In a thread on a similar topic on UberPeople (fig. 6.12), one commenter describes putting ‘gorilla tape [duct tape] over the control knobs’; this way no one would be able to control the stereo from the central panel, only from the steering wheel. Clearly in this instance the driver maintains more control than in fig. 6.11, as they are able to choose and control sound themselves while driving, however this still represents a form of technological sabotage with the goal of preventing passenger control. Finally, in fig. 6.13 we see a driver who effectively sabotages music listening by maintaining an ‘old headphone jack’ in their automobile, a technology which does not allow most modern iPhones to connect to the

car stereo; in this case, the driver once again retains the ability to connect their own phone for music listening, but passengers are often unable to—this is perhaps one of the occasions when Uber not providing official rules or guidelines is beneficial to the driver, as they are afforded a certain amount of leeway which might otherwise not be available.

Do these instances of machine sabotage represent what Jermier defines as this ‘subversive means to create advantage out of the disadvantageous position’ (2001: 60)? They are certainly subversive actions, with drivers sharing and discussing such means on internet forums with the express goal of not telling their passengers. These acts of non-organised resistance also come from ‘disadvantageous positions’, in the eyes of the drivers: it is an inconvenience to them when passengers control the music, describing this as ‘a bother’, and ‘nonsense’ (figs. 6.11-12). Do these actions create an ‘advantage’ for the driver? The statements selected would suggest so, more-or-less: ‘Gee, that’s a shame’, remarks the commenter sarcastically in fig. 6.13, indicating that the end result of this sabotage is more positive than otherwise for the driver. These small acts of non-organised resistance are perhaps less about creating significant advantages and more to do with, following Hodson (2001), creating a sense of ‘dignity at work’.

#### **6.4. ‘I flat out lie’: deceiving the customer**

Tampering with one’s own listening equipment has a significant downside: it may prevent the driver from playing music when they do actually want to hear it. For some, ripping out the stereo due to annoying customers, or not owning an aux cord on the off-chance a rider requests to use it are too drastic as solutions. Instead, it is easy just to lie: in the data collected from Uber message boards, there were 29 instances of drivers explicitly explaining how they ‘lie’ to customers about aux cords or stereos, and ten additional instances where ‘made up’ excuses are mentioned.

Where drivers describe lying to riders in order to ‘resist’ their music requests, two main themes arise: first, some workers appeal to either software or hardware issues—for example, ‘my car is too old to connect to the new iPhone’, or similar excuses; secondly, they may blame previous passengers for their lack of music—in fig. 6.15, one driver describes how they explain a customer ‘busted’ their speakers (a lie on this occasion). In all instances of drivers lying to passengers in order not to have to play unwanted music, two thirds offered a broad technological justification, while a third simply blamed damage caused by previous passengers. In figs. 6.14-21, multiple drivers describe how they use the failings of technology to prevent having to acquiesce to riders’ requests. The driver in fig. 6.14 admits to lying ‘flat out’, but qualifies this as lying ‘nicely’.



In fig. 6.16, one Uber driver places choice scare quotes around 'don't have', in relation to an aux cord, highlighting their deception. In figs. 6.18-20, drivers explain how they claim that either their aux cord, stereo, or speakers do not work. In fig. 6.20, the driver alludes to how the increasingly prevalent and often complex nature of new listening technologies can afford them new ways to avoid responsibility: 'I make up an excuse [where] : i connect to [the] car via bluetooth and that is too long a process to worry about'. In this instance, new ways in which to share and listen to music provide excuses to prevent annoying customers from exerting control over drivers:

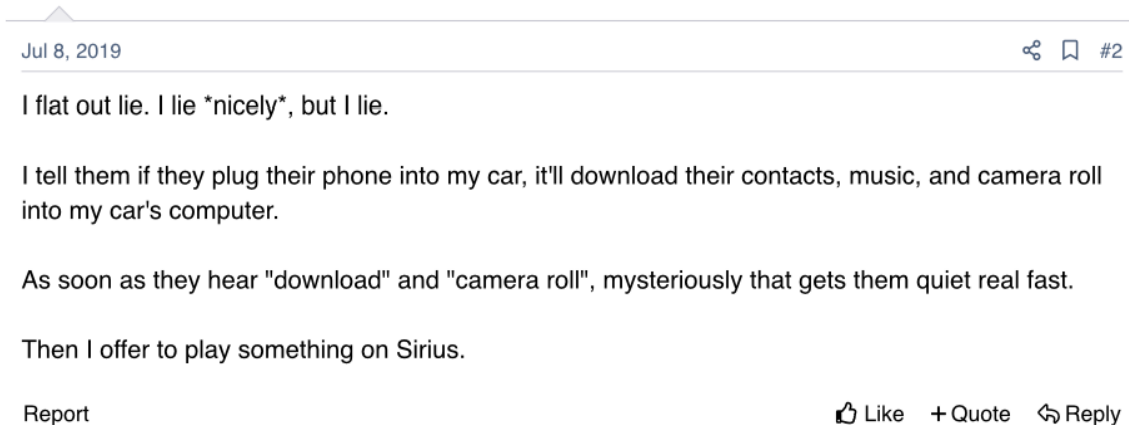


Fig. 6.14. Screenshot from UberPeople.

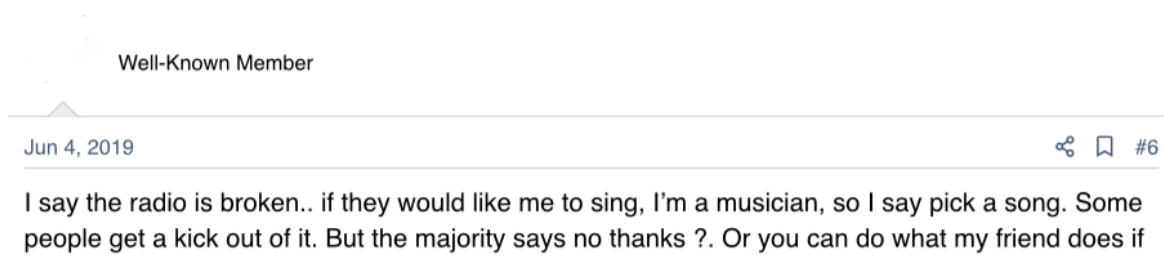


Fig. 6.15. Screenshot from UberPeople.

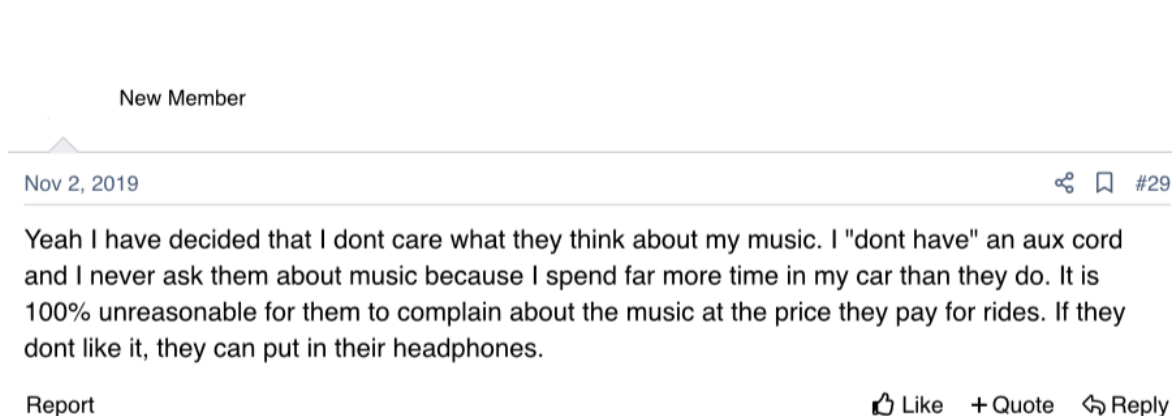


Fig. 6.16. Screenshot from UberPeople.

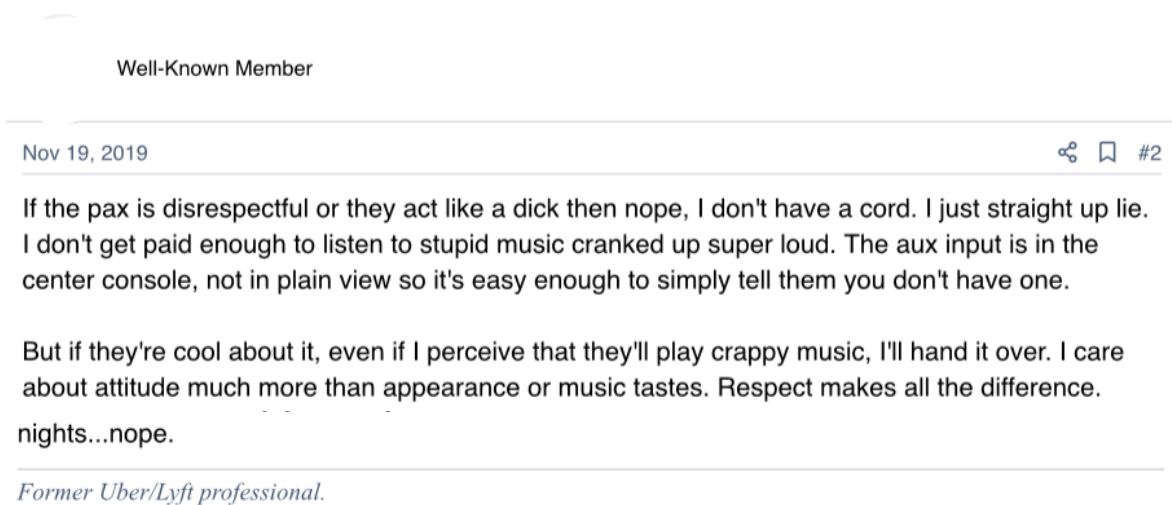


Fig. 6.17. Screenshot from UberPeople..

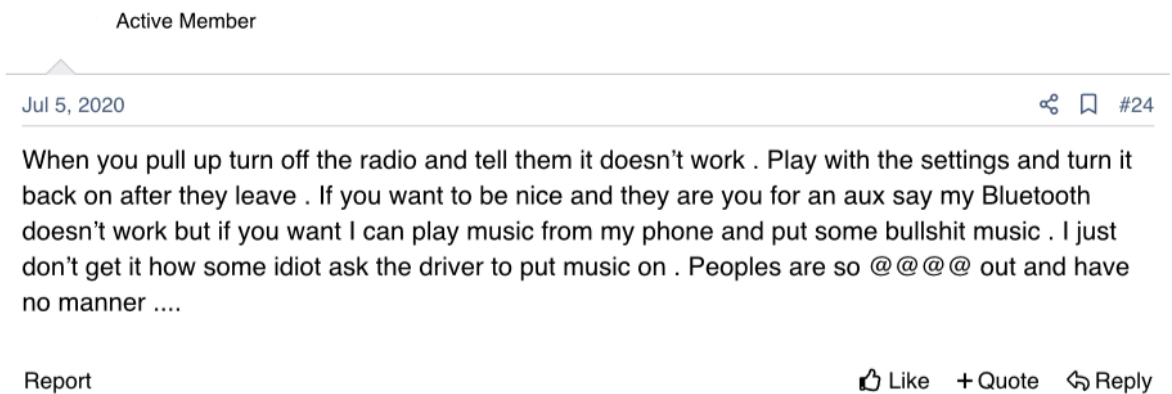


Fig. 6.18. Screenshot from UberPeople.

I used to make stuff up like, I lost the aux cord, or it doesn't work. But they might bring their own cable, and then you have to up your lie. So now I just tell them flat out. I don't do the aux cord thing. If they ask why, I tell them it creates too much trouble in the car. I just stick with the truth and while they don't like it, they go along with it. It's non-negotiable. They ultimately settle for picking out a Sirius XM channel, and I change it to whatever they want. They will always ask repeatedly to have it turned up, and I respectfully decline and explain to them I need to hear what's going on around me, and the noise is too distracting. They like to use the loud music to cover up things like vaping and popping a beer open. I see all kinds of stuff when I look back at the video. It usually ends in a 1\* both ways, unless I can identify them before they get in the car and preemptively cancel. And I'm getting pretty good at that. They always give warning signs. The party crowd is annoying, but stupid.

Fig. 6.19. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

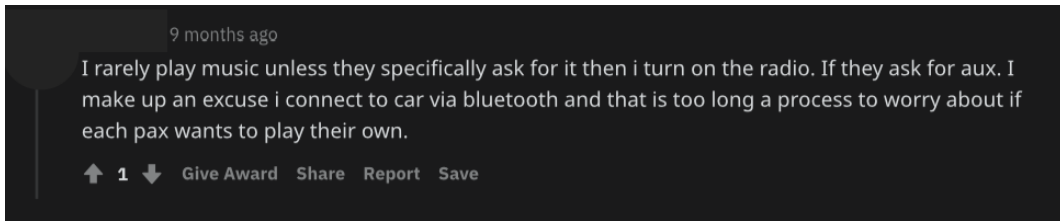


Fig. 6.20. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

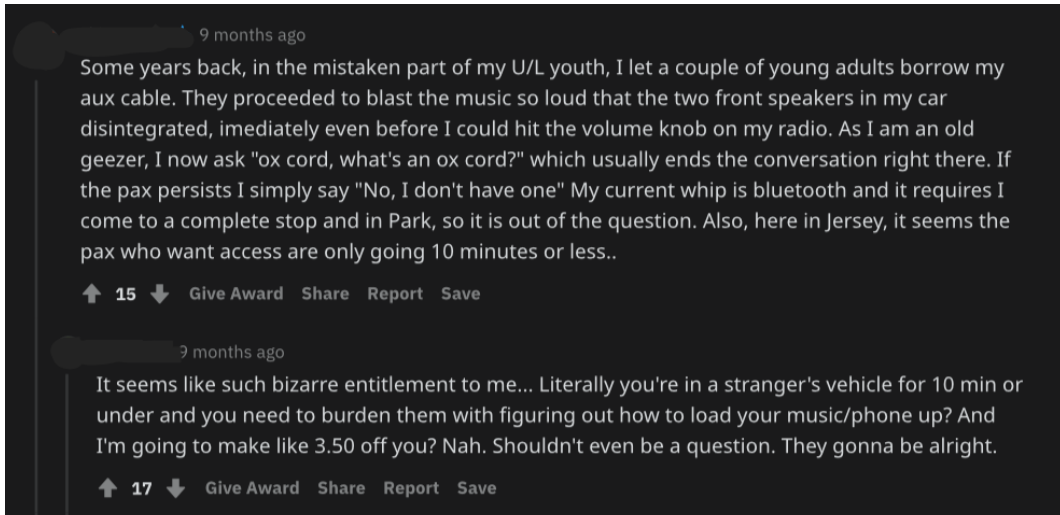


Fig. 6.21. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

While figs. 6.21-22 offer similar descriptions of the use of technology to prevent passengers requesting music on an Uber trip, they also highlight another unique way in which drivers resist control: pretending not to understand. ‘As I am an old geezer, I now ask ‘ox cord, what’s an ox cord?’ which usually ends the conversation right there’: here in fig. 6.21, the driver uses their age to their advantage, tapping into the perception that older adults are less capable at using, and literate in technology (Heinz et al 2013). The deliberate mispronunciation adds to this effect, as is the case in fig. 6.22, where ‘aux’ is intentionally misspelt ‘awx’. In this way, drivers can utilise wilful ignorance in order to keep control, or at least not cede it.

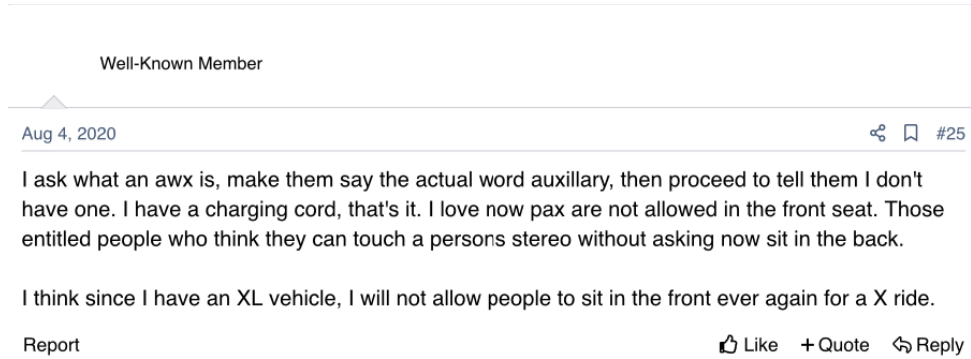


Fig. 6.22. Screenshot from UberPeople.

A third of drivers who report lying to passengers in order to refuse requests for music do so by blaming other passengers. For example, in fig. 6.23, one worker suggests a script for talking to demanding customers: 'Sorry, a previous rider blew out my speakers'. Another driver explains that they 'always tell them my speakers were busted by previous pax bec of loud music [sideways laughing emoji]' (fig. 6.24); here the use of the whimsical emoji alludes to a common awareness of such schemes. In figs. 6.25-27, multiple other drivers explain how they justify refusing requests, including claiming that 'someone stole my aux cord' (fig. 6.26). In all these cases, the non-existence of top-down rules (for example, Uber does not require drivers to carry music listening technologies) and the fluid and unclear dynamic between customer, employee/driver, and employer, actually provide workers with certain loopholes through which to navigate their work life and resist the 'sovereignty' of the customer:

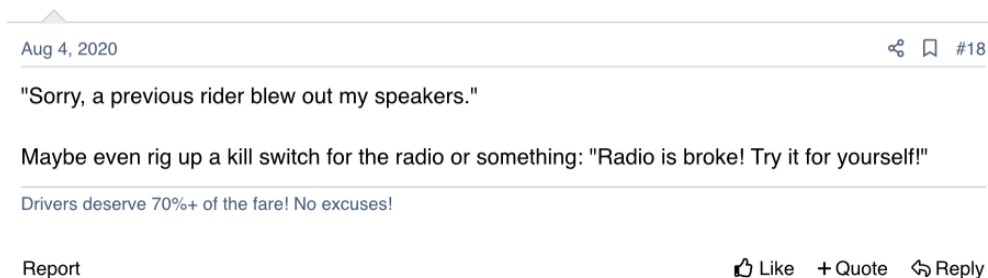


Fig. 6.23. Screenshot from UberPeople.



Fig. 6.24. Screenshot from UberPeople.

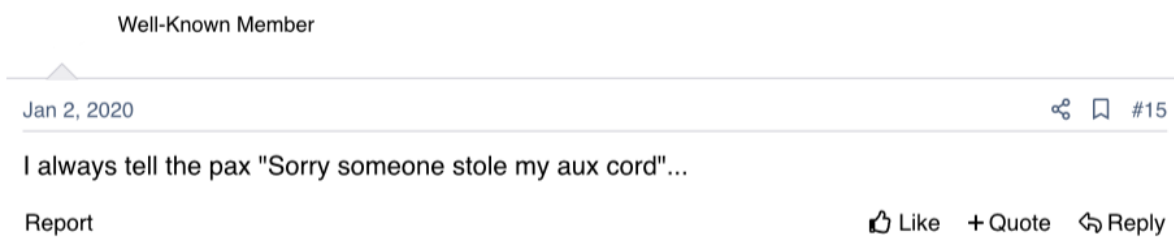


Fig. 6.25. Screenshot from UberPeople.

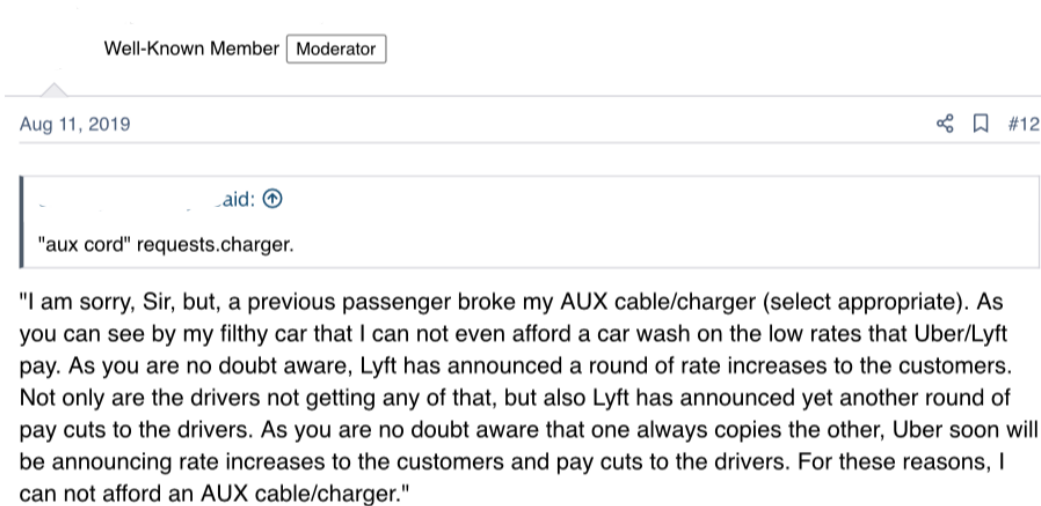


Fig. 6.26. Screenshot from UberPeople.

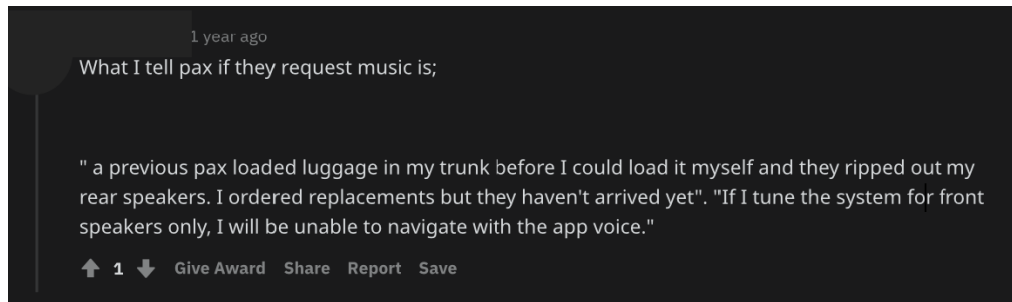


Fig. 6.27. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Returning briefly to the original research question set out for this chapter: what role does music listening play in resistance in the workplace? In the examples above, non-organised methods and misbehaviour take on this character of resistance against passenger ‘sovereignty’, and once again music listening becomes a tool through which workers can attempt to claw back control of their work environment. While such acts may seem disparate or even insignificant, they should be contextualised within Hodson’s concept of ‘dignity at work’ (2001), wherein ‘countless small acts of resistance against abuse’ (or customer sovereignty) play an important role in improving their lives (2001: 49). As is evident in the cases shown above, even as small an act as lying to a customer about their speakers working in order to prevent themselves from having to listen to displeasurable music at work is a net positive, and still represents a tool of resistance.<sup>17</sup>

### 6.5. ‘Cell phone & make-shift boombox’—misbehaviour and resistance in Amazon workers

In contradiction to organised strategies of resistance, non-organised or small acts of resistance often require significant levels of secrecy and discretion: workers describe how to ‘sneak’ music into the workplace in twenty cases, and mention ‘hiding’ devices such as earphones or mp3 players

<sup>17</sup> Fleming and Sewell (2002) note that ‘traditional avenues of resistance have become disconcertingly difficult to perform’, and that sociologists ought to broaden their conceptions of what might be deemed ‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful’ forms of resistance (870). They offer one such alternative form of resistance, namely ‘švejkism’ (referring to a fictional individual from anthropologist F.G. Bailey’s book *The Kingdom of Individuals* (1993)), whereby workers do ‘just enough’ so as to appear to be ‘doing their duty’, while also serving their own ‘interests’ without ‘drawing sufficient attention toward’ themselves (846). Such a theoretical term could be applied to numerous examples within the case studies in this research, from lying about aux cables, to sneaking earbuds into the workplace.

fifteen times throughout the threads. The need to be discreet is highlighted by a worker in fig. 6.28, who is replying to a question about how best to sneak headphones into the warehouse to listen to music:

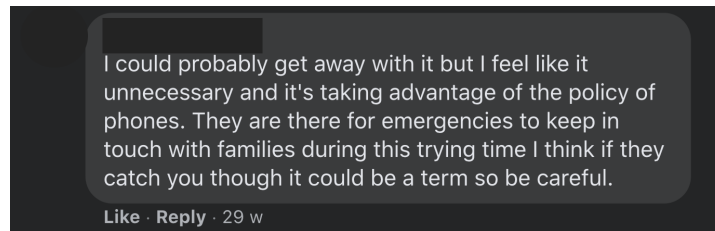


Fig. 6.28. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

In the examples below, the ingenious ways in which Amazon workers both bypass security and sneak in technology such as earbuds and headphones, and the novel solutions some employees come up with in order to be able to listen to music will be discussed.

It should first be stressed that threads on sneaking music listening devices in and by passing security generated significant engagement, relative to posts relating to other subjects. For example, the post that begins a thread in fig. 6.29 produced thirty comments in response, as well as a variety of reactions.

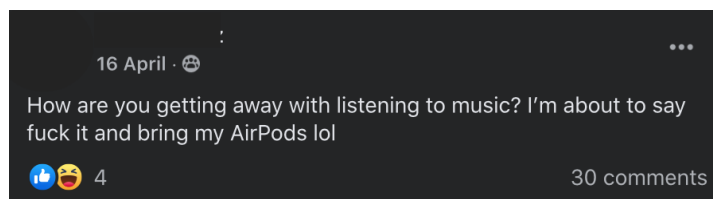


Fig. 6.29. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Another post on the Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes utilised image-text, and gained 37 reactions and a substantial number of comments:



Fig. 6.30. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Similarly, on the Amazon warehouse workers' SubReddit, two posts on similar subjects gained significant traction:

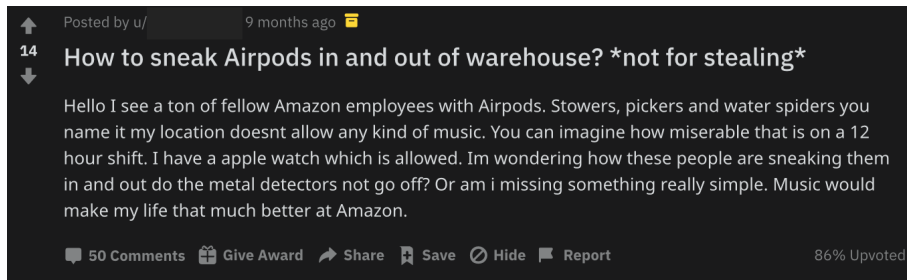


Fig. 6.31. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

The worker looking for solutions to bypassing security in fig. 6.32 also alludes to the ways in which some Amazon employees go about sneaking music listening devices into warehouses: 'So recently I've been sneaking music thru with a beanie with headphones in them and an mp3 player inside the same beanie':



Fig. 6.32. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

The specific term 'beanie' is mentioned a total of 25 times throughout the threads, indicating that this is not an isolated incident. In face, multiple other workers in both the Amazon Facebook group and the SubReddit expand on the use of the 'beanie' to bring music listening devices into the workplace:



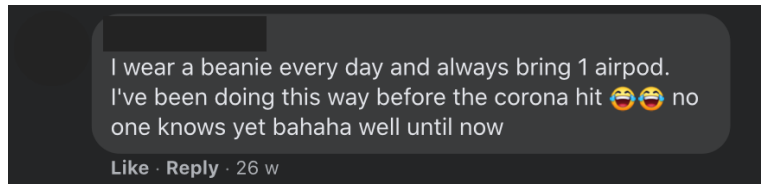


Fig. 6.33. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

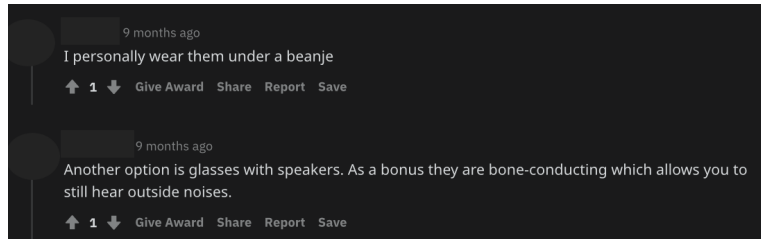


Fig. 6.34. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.



Fig. 6.35. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

The examples above explicitly mention beanies, with the worker in fig. 6.33 alluding to the secrecy which comes with such a technique: ‘no one knows yet’, they claim, ‘until now’. In fig. 6.35, one employee also refers to the frequency with which this occurs: ‘airpods and a hat like everyone else [author’s emphasis]’. The beanie is not the only clothing accessory utilised by workers to sneak in headphones and other listening devices:

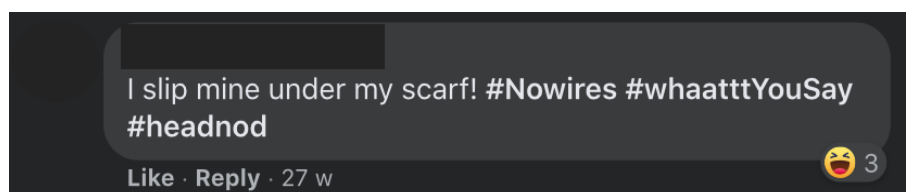


Fig. 6.36. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

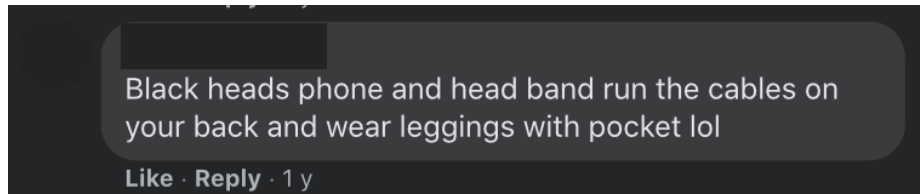


Fig. 6.37. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

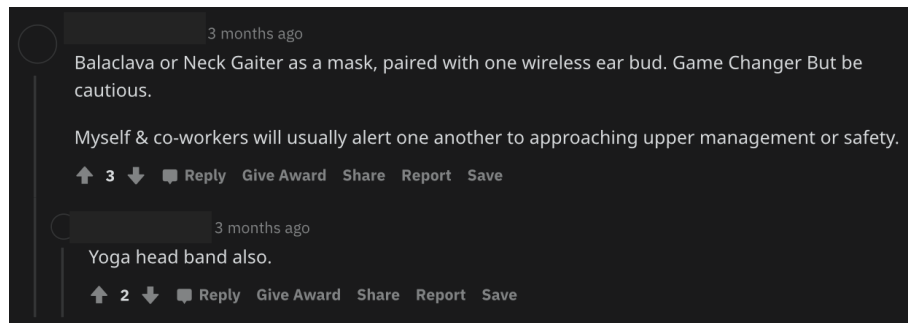


Fig. 6.38. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

In fig. 6.36, one Amazon worker explains how they ‘slip’ their earbuds under their scarf, after which they again make reference to the need for secrecy and discretion: ‘#headnod’ implies a mutual understanding between employees that others will not ‘rat them out’. The commenter in fig. 6.37 describes an equally discreet solution, utilising black headphones and a ‘head band’. Similarly, workers in fig. 6.38 suggest using both a ‘yoga head band’ and a ‘Neck Gaiter’ (scarf-like neck warmer) to disguise listening devices, or even a ‘balaclava’. The commenter positively describes this solution as a ‘game changer’, but warns others to ‘be cautious’ of surveillance, explaining that ‘co-workers will usually alert one another to approaching upper management or safety’: this not only shows the need for secrecy and discretion when ‘misbehaving’ by ignoring managerial rules, but also the way in which employees may help each other avoid and resist control by working together; the description offered by the worker in fig. 6.38 bears similarities to the way in which groups of individuals might alert each other to approaching predators. In fig. 6.38, the first comment also highlights another way, unique to the development of the Covid-19 pandemic, in which workers may conceal listening devices: masks.

Although the data gathered in each case study covers only the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, there are still a total of 34 mentions of ‘masks’ in threads specifically relating to music: again, this is not an isolated incident. While not all discussions of masks in

threads related to music are specifically related to sneaking in music listening devices, or referenced positively (see fig. 6.39), many are.

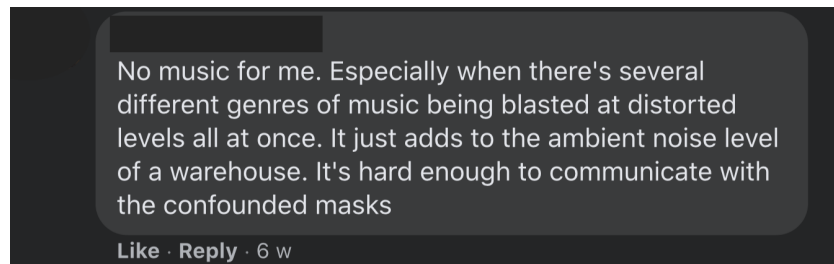


Fig. 6.39. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

The requirement for workers to wear masks inside warehouses was introduced during the pandemic, in early 2020 (although the status of mask ‘mandates’ are currently unclear and vary between locations). This seems to have had the unintentional side-effect of providing workers with a new way of concealing their headphones and other listening devices: in fig. 6.40, for example, one worker says ‘I got a mask that cover my ears fully’, with another commenting ‘I do the same thing with my neck gaiter [...] no one said anything’; both comments received positive upvotes, and a third Amazon worker even comments ‘I didn’t even think of that!’, indicating both enthusiasm and approval.



Fig. 6.40. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

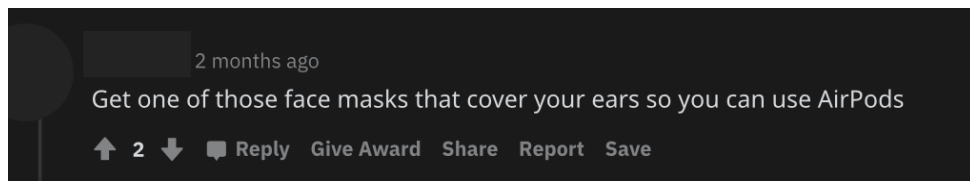


Fig. 6.41. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

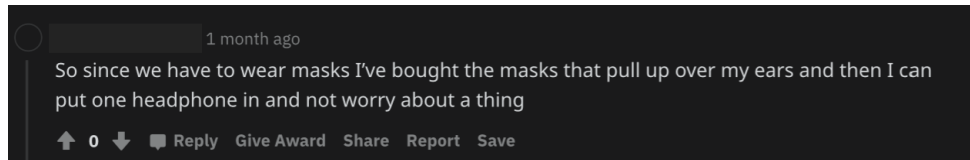


Fig. 6.42. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

The poster in fig. 6.41 offers similar advice: ‘get one of those face masks that cover your ears so you can use AirPods’. In fig. 6.42, one Amazon worker explains with clarity how the pandemic, and introduction of masks has, in their view, provided a benefit: ‘since we have to wear masks I’ve bought the masks that pull up over my ears and then I can put one headphone in and not worry about a thing’. In this way, the mask mandate has provided not only one—reducing virus transmission—but two safety nets, in providing cover for music listening.

Some workers also offer highly unique and individual ways through which to resist managerial control and secretly listen to music:

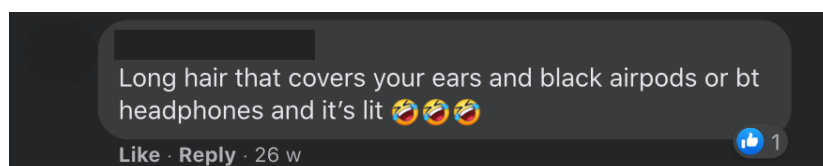


Fig. 6.43. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

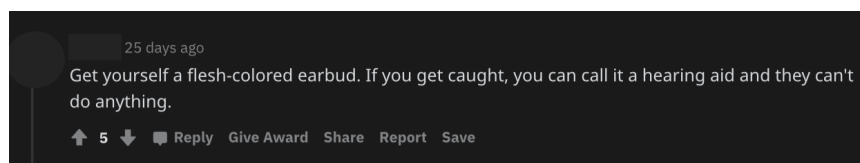


Fig. 6.44. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC

The worker in fig. 6.43 finds both humour and utility in having ‘long hair that covers your ears’, which can be paired with ‘black airpods or bt [bluetooth] headphones’ in order to avert the

managerial gaze. In fig. 6.44, one worker recommends others to ‘get yourself a flesh-colored earbud’; not only is this advised for secrecy and discretion, but also with the reasoning that ‘if you get caught, you can call it a hearing aid and they [management] can’t do anything’. Although this comment receives five upvotes, it is unclear whether pretending one’s earbud is a hearing aid is an accepted, let alone practised excuse.

In addition to hiding or disguising earbuds and headphones, another way workers resist managerial control and enable themselves to listen to music is through technological innovation. In fig. 6.34, the second comment suggests using ‘glasses with speakers’. Another worker suggests similar ‘eyeglasses that have built in bone conduction’, enabling them to listen to music in ‘noisy environments’:

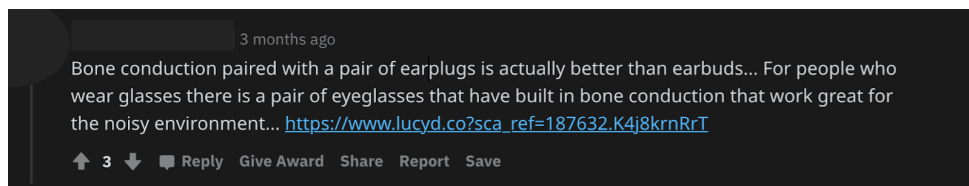


Fig. 6.45. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

The benefits of this relatively new technological innovation is not limited to the efficacy or quality of its music listening capabilities: in a similar way to how workers may use masks to disguise earbuds or other bluetooth listening devices, ‘glasses with speakers’ provide a way to bypass the rules and security through subterfuge. In fig. 6.46, one Amazon worker describes how these glasses ‘have clear lenses’, meaning they ‘should be able to pass it off as regular glasses’. The commenter in fig. 6.47 also acknowledges that their workplace normally allows ‘sunglasses’, so ‘if sunglasses are allowed I don’t see why you can[’t] listen to music with them’. Both of these examples illustrate if not deliberate deceit, then an antagonism toward managerial ideology in order to achieve the desired goal (being able to listen to music at work).

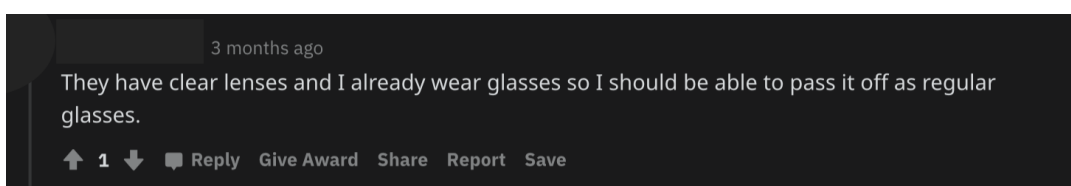


Fig. 6.46. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

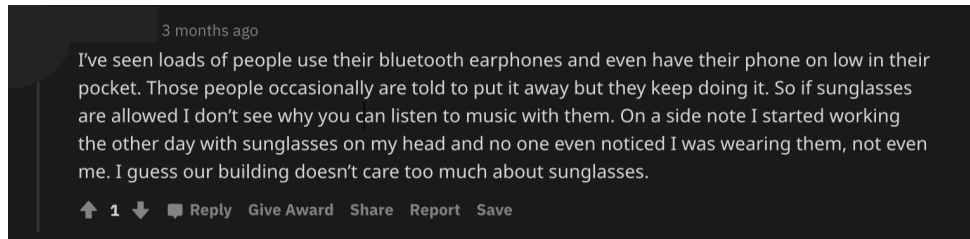


Fig. 6.47. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

Some uses of technology are more inventive on the part of the user, rather than simply making use of advances already available to them: in fig. 6.48, for example, one worker suggests creating a ‘make-shift boombox’ using a mobile phone in order to listen to music—the winking emoji indicates a certain tongue-in-cheek tone to the comment, which could refer either to the secrecy of such music listening solutions, or simply a light-hearted unseriousness.

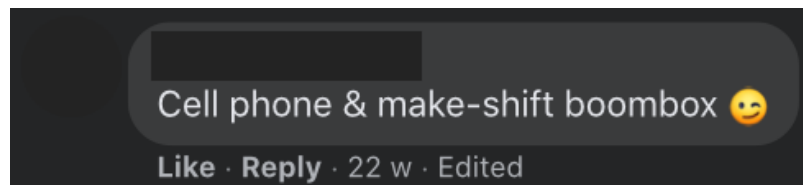


Fig. 6.48. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

One worker, however, offers a more unusual suggestion: scanners. ‘Just use a scanner to listen to music’, the commenter suggests in a reply to a post asking how to sneak headphones through Amazon security (fig. 6.49). When sorting products in the warehouse, Amazon workers use an electronic ‘scanner’ similar to that in a supermarket.

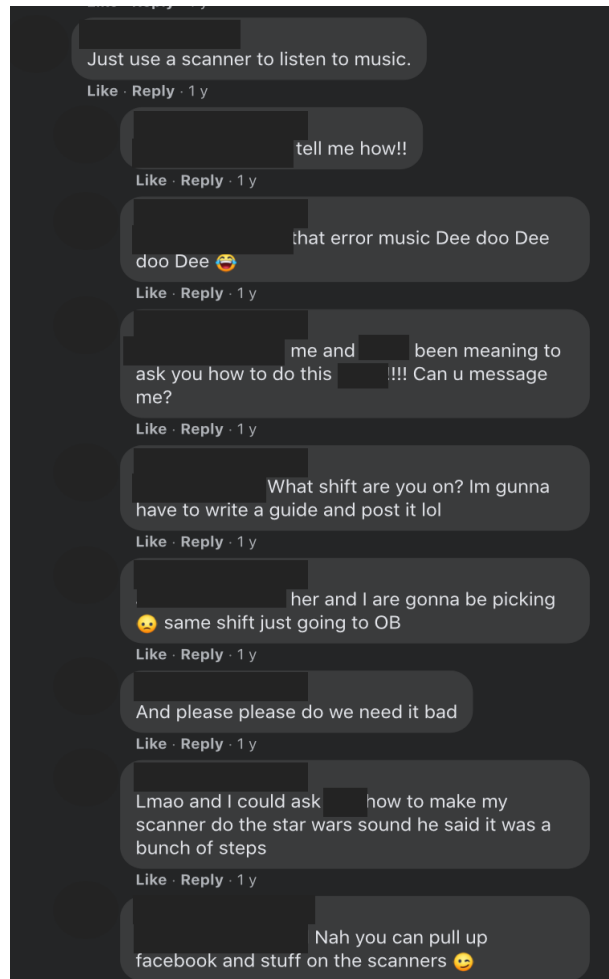


Fig. 6.49. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

The scanners used by Amazon warehouse workers run software necessary for recording and tracking items bought and sold by the company, however they are also required to connect to the internet in order to fulfil customer requirements such as online updates. As such, it is clearly possible to ‘hack’ the devices for one’s own use: ‘you can pull up facebook and stuff on the scanners’, comments one worker in fig. 6.49. Others are aware of the music-listening capabilities of these scanners, with another replying that they could ask a coworker ‘how to make my scanner do the star wars sound [...] he said it was a bunch of steps’. Other employees are clearly surprised and express a desire to learn how to use their scanners to play music: ‘tell me how!!’, comments one, while another replies ‘been meaning to ask you how to do this [...] can u message me?’. Clearly, then, this novel music listening technique is of interest to multiple Amazon workers. An original thread on the same topic gains significant interaction, including shocked-face emoji reactions:

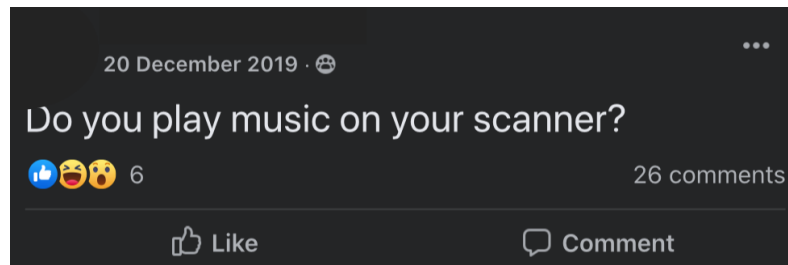


Fig. 6.50. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

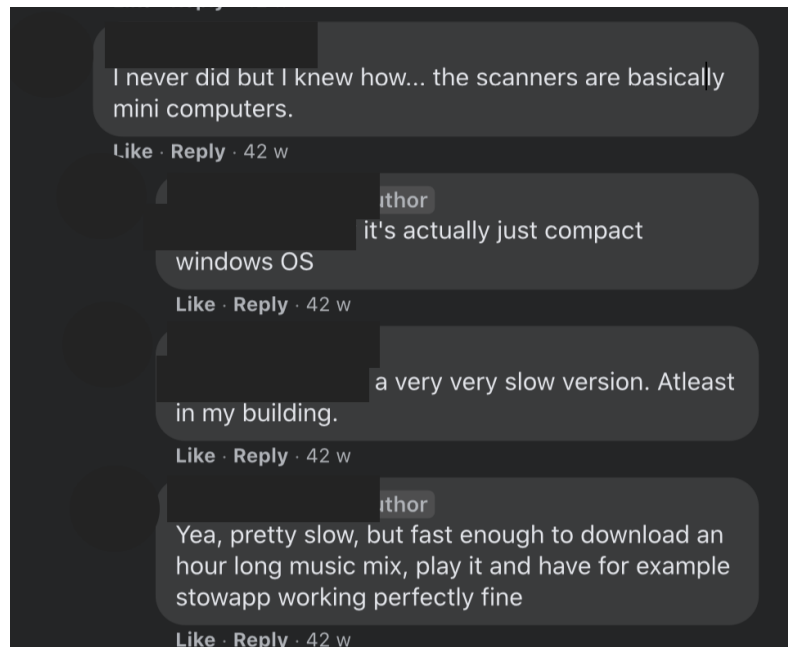


Fig. 6.51. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

In fig. 6.51, the author of the original post and a coworker discuss in greater detail the specifics of the scanners and how they function: ‘the scanners are basically mini computers’, they comment in the replies, to which the author responds ‘it’s actually just compact windows OS [...] pretty slow, but fast enough to download an hour long music mix, play it and have for example stowapp [the app used by Amazon warehouse workers to scan and track items] working perfectly fine’. Another employee comments below their equally ingenious method of working around managerial rules and control in order to access music and other facilities on company devices:

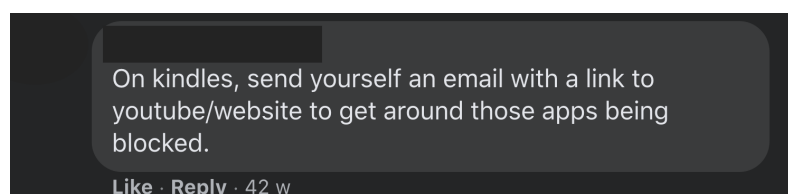


Fig. 6.52. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.



Although the original poster in fig. 6.49 does not outline, step-by-step, exactly how to use the scanners to play music, they do state ‘I’m gonna have to write a guide and post it’: this is another example of individual workers using social media platforms to pool their ideas together and aid each other, even in such ‘small acts of resistance’ (Hodson 2001: 49).

The answer to the question ‘how does music act as a tool of resistance in the workplace’ seems quite clear—and indeed literal—in the cases shown above: the Amazon scanner, ‘hacked’ (or at least commandeered) in order to allow the worker to listen to music where they would not normally be permitted to, or have access to the requisite listening technologies, becomes in itself a tool of resistance, at least against relatively minor workplace rules. While the methods discussed by workers of how to ‘smuggle’ traditional listening technologies such as earbuds into work and past the metal detectors may not represent such perfect and material manifestations of resistance, they nonetheless can be seen as a ‘small act of resistance’ in the Hodsonian sense. The use of these internet message-boards through which to share such tips for avoiding control is also of significance for workers: individuals have access to information that they might not previously have had, allowing them to more effectively conduct these ‘small acts of resistance’.

## 6.6. Don’t ask don’t tell: misbehaviour among postal workers

Although this study has previously considered ‘common sense ideology’ as affecting workers in a generally negative way, reinforcing managerial ideology and control, there are other ‘common sense ideologies’ at work which help consolidate and defend misbehaviour and non-organized resistance. In the case of postal workers, for example, a prevailing theme within the data is a common acceptance of the ‘official rules’, and their reality:

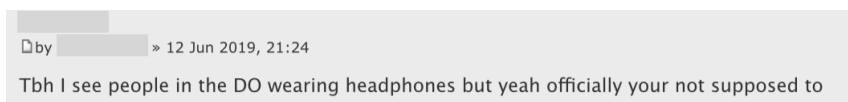


Fig. 6.53. Screenshot from Royal Mail Chat.

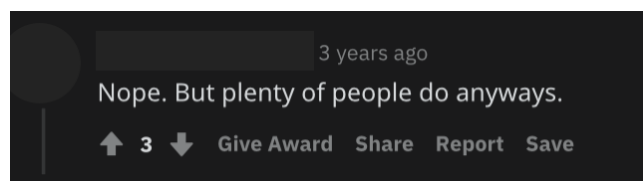


Fig. 6.54. Screenshot from r/USPS.

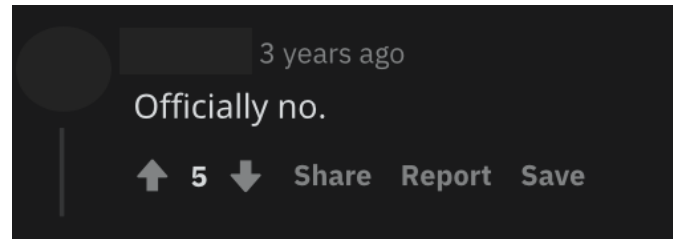


Fig. 6.55. Screenshot from r/USPS.

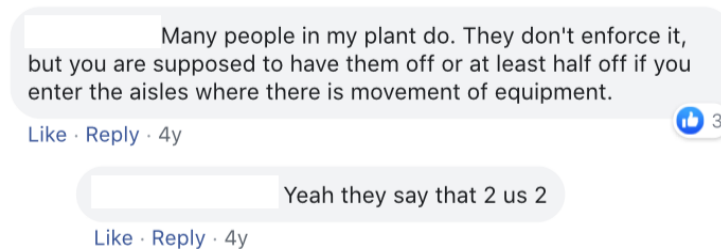


Fig. 6.56 Screenshot from USPS Friends Facebook group.

'I see people [...] wearing headphones but yeah officially your not supposed to' comments one postal worker (fig. 6.53), 'many people in my plant do' concurs another (fig. 6.56). In response to a question regarding whether music listening is allowed while working, a commenter on the USPS SubReddit claims 'Nope. But plenty of people do anyways', suggesting misbehaviour is a common occurrence, while another response specifies 'officially no', implying again that official rules and those in practice often differ. Evidence of both such common misbehaviour and a 'don't ask don't tell' attitude can be seen in the below thread which garnered 117 upvotes (91%), indicating significant approval, as well as 150 comments, demonstrating clear engagement:

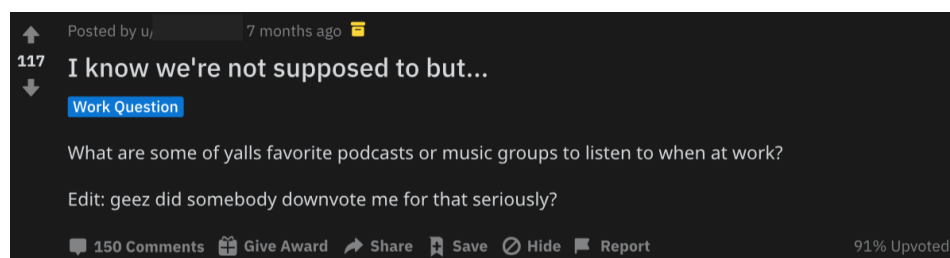


Fig. 6.57. Screenshot from r/USPS.

'I know we're not supposed to but...' begins the thread in fig. 6.57: this demonstrates an awareness of the disallowed behaviour, but also the fact that this is commonly accepted behaviour. The OP later edited their post, saying 'geez did somebody downvote me for that seriously?', indicating

disagreement but also a belief that any objection is unfair. In addition, the majority of the 150 comments (92.7%) on the post in fig. 6.57 are either partially or entirely in agreement with the common sense ideology demonstrated in the original post, with only eleven comments indicating that not all workers subscribe to this idea (furthermore, all of these eleven comments are from two individual accounts).

What these examples demonstrate is a common theme in this particular case study: the knowledge among workers of unspoken, informal rules—social ‘rules’ made up by the workers themselves in order to preserve their behaviours and practices. In fig. 6.58, one postal worker replies to a Facebook thread asking for music-listening recommendations, writing in a tongue-in-cheek tone, ‘\*cough cough\* We never listen to music on delivery’. The obviously sarcastic claim about never listening to music at work is underlined both by the imitated coughing, and the zipped-mouth and ‘shushing’ emoji. Here, the worker hints at two important conclusions: first, it is common knowledge that employees do listen to music; and secondly that a sense of secrecy and discretion is customary.

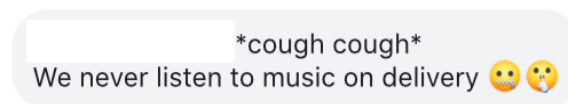


Fig. 6.58. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook page.

In this instance, the common rule among fellow workers is that individuals do listen to music and use headphones etc., but that they never speak of it: thus a shared belief—or ideology—enables workers to misbehave, together; this is not an ‘organised’ form of resistance in the same way that union activity is, however it represents something of a middle ground between collective and individual resistance. Following Hodson (2001: 49), this could be seen as a collective or shared ‘small act of resistance’.

It is again evident in this case that music listening, and particularly shared interest and ideology surrounding its use, is a manifestation of relatively non-organised resistance at work, and in particular misbehaviour. From Uber drivers actively sabotaging their own music listening equipment, to Amazon warehouse workers ‘hacking’ their scanners’, and postal workers adopting an approach characterised by the importance of discretion, it is clear that such cases are important for the workers themselves; whether or not researchers classify them as ‘small acts of resistance’, or elements of antagonistic resistance against ‘managerial control’ ultimately matter

less than the experiences of the individual workers. Following Coulter (2014: 47), much of researchers' attention should be in advancing the position of the worker.

In the examples presented within this chapter it is also clear that online forums and message-boards are key spaces in which methods of misbehaviour are discussed and shared with fellow workers. The impact of these small acts may appear small and disparate, however these case studies demonstrate their importance to workers. Finally, it should be noted that these online platforms can play a role in influencing the behaviours of other workers: accounts of misbehaviour and 'small acts' of resistance are not merely passively observed by others—instead, as Frangi et al. suggest (2019: 302), they 'affect the attitudes and behaviours of others online [...] beyond [the] dissemination of information'. Certainly, more research would be required to ascertain the extent to which a single Amazon worker sharing how they contravene management (by using earbuds on the factory floor) might result in others taking up this position, thereby furthering resistance in the workplace; the examples contained within this section represent only the beginning.

## 7. Musical experience

---

This chapter considers the empirical data as it relates to three key areas of music studies: mood (and emotions), bodily affect, and taste. The reason for grouping these findings together, separately from the topics of control and resistance, is because these two categories represent two sides of the same coin: in the latter, approaches from sociology of work are explored through the lens of music, while in the former, musical experience at work is studied with a critical music studies approach; both sides contribute to a greater understanding of workplace politics and music. In other words, studying control and resistance tells us how music is reflected in workplace politics, while this current section will explore how workplace politics are reflected in music.

This chapter aims to explore the key research questions deriving from a music studies perspective, which include:

- How do control and resistance manifest through musical experience at work?
- How do aspects of music (e.g. genre, taste) affect social relations at work? And
- How do workers experience music at work in ways that might contribute to dignity at work?

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), music as it affects mood, emotions, and the body are central foci of critical music studies, and particularly the psychology of music (Gabrielsson 1988; Juslin & Sloboda 2001; Lesiuk 2010; Sloboda 2011). These effects are of clear importance to workers across each case study: in the case of Amazon warehouse workers, there are 243 occurrences of codes specifically referencing emotions, moods or feelings; for postal workers, mood in relation to music was coded 132 times; in truck driver threads, 112 times; and in the case of Uber drivers, mood was discussed in relation to music 160 times. The empirical data discussed immediately below will be separated into two broad categories: ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ effects of music listening at work on mood.

The second section will be dedicated to empirical data relating to bodily affect: ‘emotions, feelings and moods’ are all within ‘the realm of affect’ (Hesmondhalgh 2013:11). The constraints of this study make it impossible to analyse the so-called affective turn in musicology and social theory in-depth, as well as the oft-critiqued ‘mind/body dualism’ predicated in much previous theory (Walker 2007), so focus is turned directly to the important issue of material bodily affect: how music listening at work impacts workers’ bodies, as well as their movement, rhythm, and

perception of time. In existing psychological work frequently cited in music studies, Csikszentmihalyi theorises 'flow' in musical performance (2009), or how individuals' bodies feel, move, flow, as well as perceive time while playing. Listening to music is clearly a different activity to performing it, however the body is never a passive observer. Music can, as DeNora suggests (2000), influence how people 'compose their bodies' and how they 'conduct themselves'; crucially, she also discusses how music may affect 'how they experience the passage of time' (2000: 17). Historical precedents exist in the realm of bodily affect and music listening at work: for example work songs 'informing the rhythm and pace' of labour (Korczynski 2013: 317). The importance of developing a better understanding of bodily affect through music is emphasised by Prichard et al. (2007). Codes relating to rhythm, music and other bodily affect occur 146 times in the case of Amazon, 77 times among Uber drivers, 66 times among truckers, and 60 times in postal workers' threads; its importance can therefore not be understated.

For the purposes of this research, 'taste' is categorised within musical experience, as it is a central theme in workers' discussions of their listening behaviours and effects therein: as is set out previously, the key question which should be asked is how workers talk about music taste, and what effect it has on social capital and power relations in the context of workplace politics. Musical taste, as well as having potential positive effects such as community building and aggregating those with certain social identities (Born 2011), can have significant implications for issues of control, resistance, and often power: not wanting 'someone else's music to invade our space' (Frith 2011: 24), or the desire to control music types and genres when listening at work are common themes within the data. The example of Uber drivers is one in which musical taste is important to workers, both because of the location and nature of their work, but also their relatively unique relationship to customers, or 'passengers': 'taste' was, in the case of Uber, the most common code, occurring a total of 1161 times within the threads. Taste was also the second most common code in the case of truck drivers, occurring 529 times; in the cases of Amazon warehouse workers and postal workers, taste was also frequently discussed, 364 and 252 times respectively. Furthermore, 'taste' as a code appears in concurrence with 'control' frequently in two of the case studies: 212 times for Uber and 197 times for Amazon (the concurrence was 39 and six for postal workers and truck drivers respectively). It is clear, then, that musical taste is both of importance to workers in their listening, and in workplace politics and power dynamics.

## 7.1. Mood—positive: music as therapy

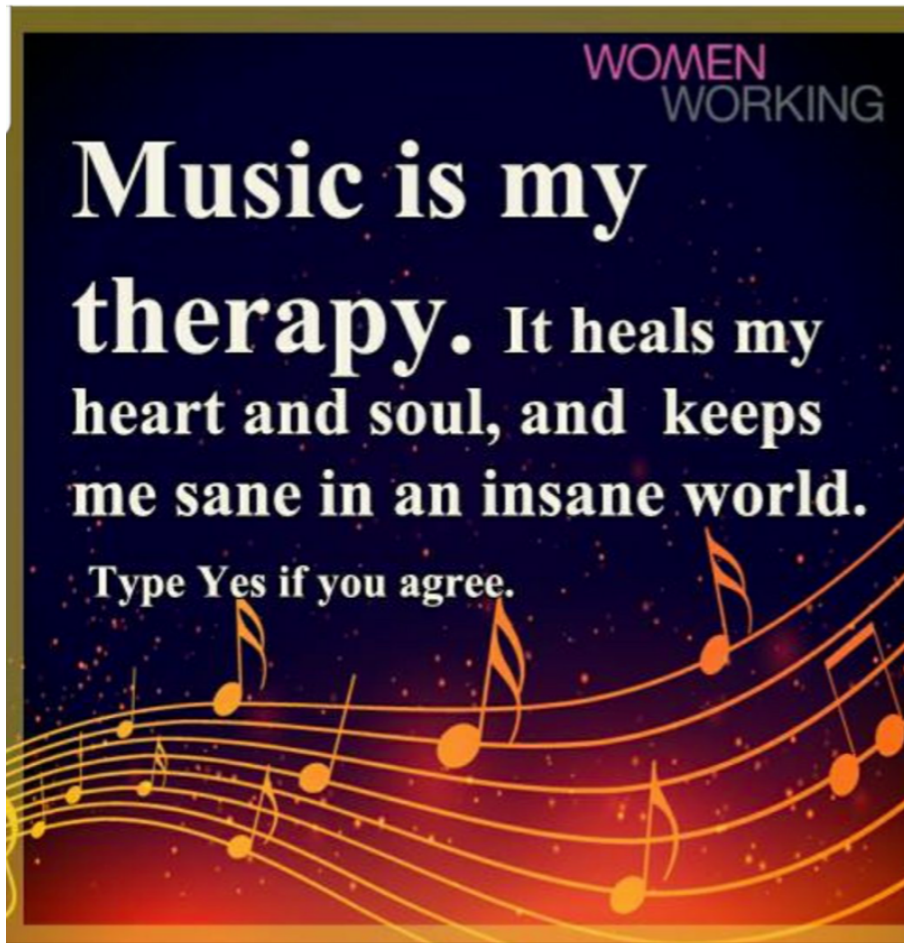
Suppose you could not afford therapy, and consequently relied on music (among other remedies) to get you through hard times: what then, if someone told you that you were no longer allowed to listen to music? This is, of course, a reality for many people in different lines of work—the court case discussed in Chapter 1, *M. Hanif v Department for Work and Pensions*, May 2021, documents a clear example of this: in their ruling, the judge concluded that ‘listening to music helped [Hanif] to cope with stress and counter feelings of anxiety’, and that when her manager prohibited her from using headphones at work, her ‘mood’ was affected due to being ‘deprived of a coping mechanism’ (*M. Hanif v Department for Work and Pensions*, May 2021). As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), there is significant theoretical precedence for music as positively affecting mood (DeNora 2000; Juslin & Sloboda 2001; Higgins 2011; Hesmondhalgh 2013), and there has even been research into its ‘positive’ effects *specifically at work* (Oldham et al. 1995; Hagen & Bryant 2003; Reybrouck 2004; Lesiuk 2005; Haake 2011; Hagen 2015): Anneli Haake’s 2011 study of office workers found that a majority of workers agreed that ‘music improves your mood’ and ‘helps you relax’ (2011: 116). Lesiuk’s studies in 2000 and 2005 also reported ‘decreased levels of states of anxiety when music was used’ (2000: 50), with workers describing that ‘music evokes pleasant mood’ (2005: 174).

Although some discussions of mood as relating to music listening at work across the case studies refer to potential negative effects, the majority (93% among postal workers, 87% in Amazon, 81% among truck drivers, and 76% in the case of Uber) describe its positive effects, many of which specifically mention using it to ‘relax’, ‘chill’, and in some cases more bluntly to help ‘you not go insane’. Some workers across multiple case studies do even directly refer to music as ‘my therapy’.

These effects should be considered in the context of the relevant research questions: do the mood-effects of music listening in the workplace represent manifestations of resistance, or control? And does the way workers experience music at work—in this case as therapy or a mental tool—contribute to their dignity at work? While workers may not use specific words such as ‘dignity’ or ‘agency’ in their descriptions of musical experience and listening, it is certainly possible to make connections and demonstrate how music helps improve their lives at work.

3 July 2017 ·

Gotta have music in the Postal world...



10

3 comments

Fig. 7.1. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

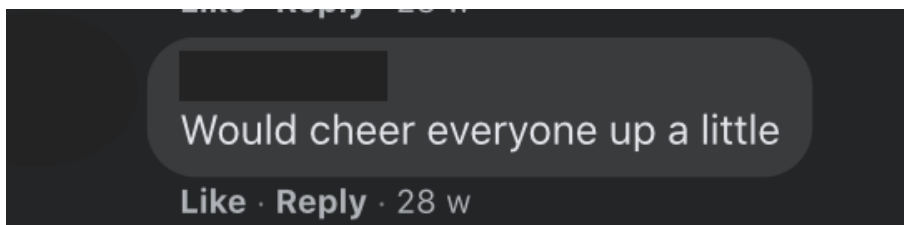


Fig. 7.2. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

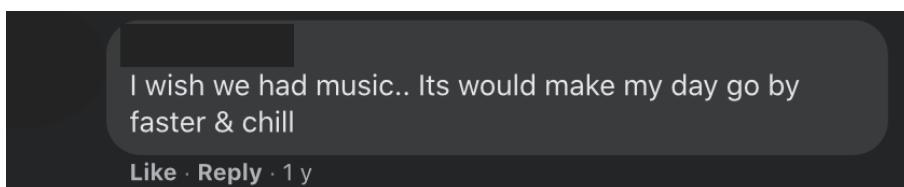


Fig. 7.3. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.



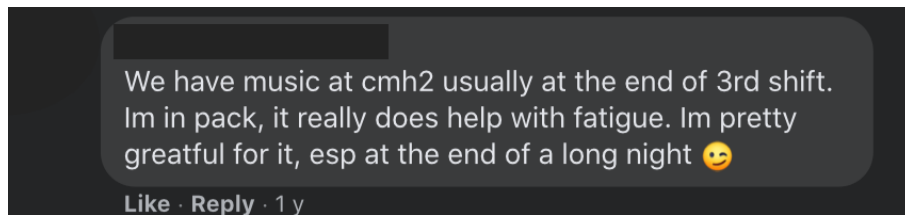


Fig. 7.4. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfillment Centre Memes Facebook group.

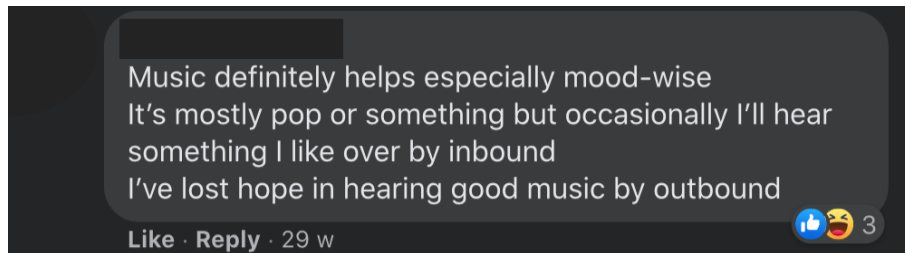


Fig. 7.5. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfillment Centre Memes Facebook group.

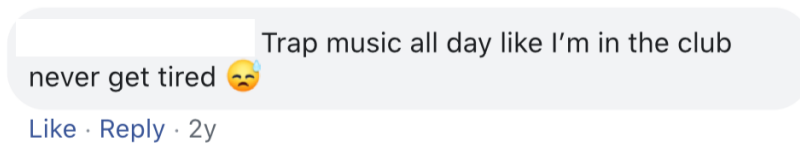


Fig. 7.6. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

I'm working at the processing center jamming to a band called Skillet, and Mercy Me as well. Helps keep me motivated and inspired. What's your band you love to listen to while working?



50 comments

Fig. 7.7. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

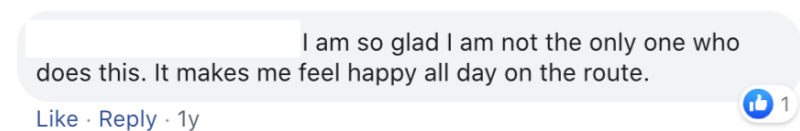


Fig. 7.8. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

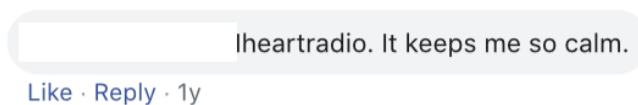


Fig. 7.9. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

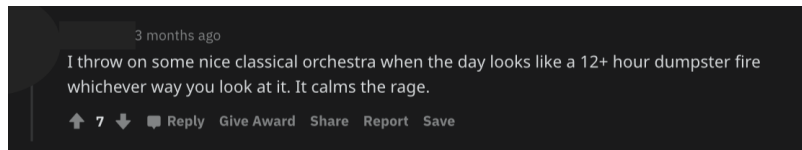


Fig. 7.10. Screenshot from r/USPS.

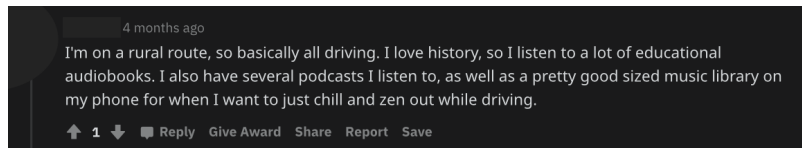


Fig. 7.11. Screenshot from r/USPS.

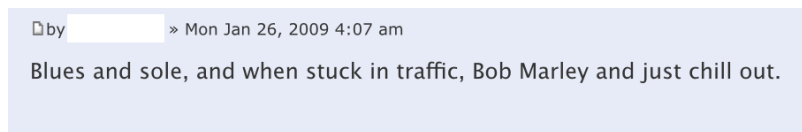


Fig. 7.12. Screenshot from TruckNet.

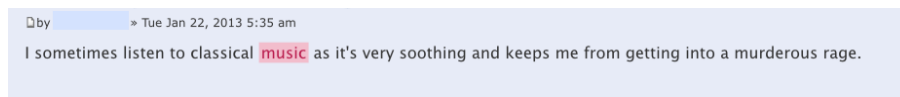


Fig. 7.13. Screenshot from TruckNet.

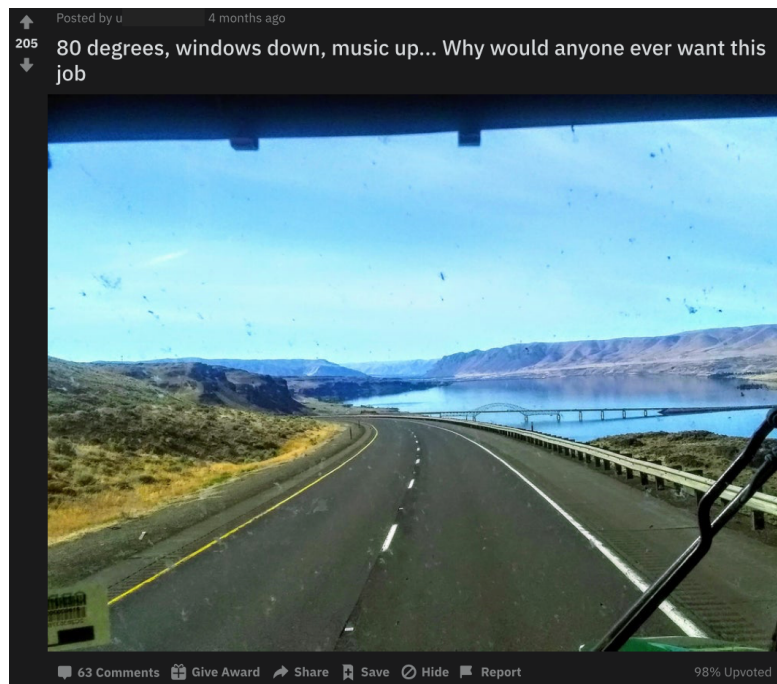


Fig. 7.14. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

Across all case studies, a common perspective is apparent: that music helps workers to ‘chill’ (see fig. 7.3, 7.12). Postal workers and truck drivers expand further on this aspect: ‘it keeps me so calm’, describes a USPS worker in fig. 7.9. ‘I have a pretty good sized music library on my phone for when I just want to chill and zen out while driving’, explains a further postal worker. In fig. 7.13, a truck driver explains that the calming effect of music serves a very important purpose: ‘I sometimes listen to classical music as it’s very soothing and keeps me from getting into a murderous rage’; as a truck driver spending many consecutive hours on the road, one can imagine how such a tool is indispensable. A postal worker expresses a very similar sentiment in fig. 7.10: ‘I throw on some nice classical music [...] it calms the rage.’ Not every example of music’s calming influence specifies classical music per se, although there is a common thread between case studies that might be contextualised by existing psychology of music studies into the ‘calming’ nature of classical music (Collingwood 2016; Thompson 2017).

Workers across the case studies also refer to music listening quite simply as making them ‘happy’: it ‘would cheer everyone up’, states an Amazon worker in fig. 7.2; ‘it makes me feel happy all day on the route’ says a postal worker in fig. 7.8. Although ‘happy’ is something of a broad emotional category, it should not be understated that there is evidence across multiple case studies that ‘music listening has a positive effect in the work environment’, where it is permitted (Lesiuk 2005: 188). This general positive effect on mood is referred to in fig. 7.14, where one truck driver provides a photo of a sweeping, open road, with mountains and water in the background and clear blue sky, with the caption, ‘80 degrees, windows down, music up...Why would anyone ever want this job? the sarcastic tone of this comment implies that driving with the ‘music up’ in such an environment is a highly pleasant experience; the 205 (98%) upvote figure indicates agreement among their community.

Individuals also allude to the positive ‘motivational’ and ‘inspirational’ mood-effects of music: ‘trap music all day [...] never get tired’, writes one postal worker in fig. 7.6, ‘helps keep me motivated and inspired’, explains another; and in the case of the Amazon worker in fig. 7.4, music ‘really does help with fatigue [...] I’m pretty grateful for it’, they say. The more physical, embodied effects of music listening at work will be discussed subsequently, however these examples highlight the positive effect music can have on the mind in terms of motivating workers. Although Lesiuk refers to the potential positive effects as aiding workers in ‘performing better on non-musical tasks’ (2005: 173)—ie. in being more productive at work—one might instead focus on how in these cases music helps ‘enrich people’s lives’ (Higgins 2011: 114), as opposed to merely making them tools of labour: a sense of ‘constrained agency’ is required, appreciating the ‘social

and psychological dynamics that might limit people's freedom' while also acknowledging the ways 'humans can act on their environment and themselves' in positive ways (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 40). Regardless, many workers assert clearly the case for music's positive effects: 'music definitely helps, especially mood-wise', writes one Amazon employee in fig. 7.5, to the approval of their colleagues.

Returning momentarily to the research questions—do these examples represent ways in which dignity (and agency) at work are realised through music listening? Can we even categorise simply 'being happy' at work, through music listening, as 'resistance'? Arguably not in any way as currently conceptualised within employment relations literature. Certainly, workers using music listening to help 'motivate' themselves could in fact represent the opposite of resistance: with music aiding the completion of tasks (Lesiuk 2005: 173), as demonstrated in the examples herein, it might be more accurate to define music listening in these instances as a form of 'indirect control', ensuring workers perform well in their jobs while also distracting from other material workplace issues or potential organising. It is more difficult to deny, however, the importance of being able to 'feel happy', to 'chill', or to simply not go mad at work, for which music is a key solution in these cases. Viewing these examples within Hodson's theory of 'dignity at work' (2001) underscores their significance.

The case of Uber drivers and the effect of music on mood is somewhat different to those previously covered: the majority of comments discussing this subject referred either solely or in addition to the positive mood effect of music on passengers, rather than the worker themselves (64%). In these cases, music was discussed in terms of either having a positive impact on the passenger's mood directly, or the driver indirectly, due to its positive effect on the passenger—both in the form of receiving compliments, tips, and of having a better overall experience for all.

This is not to say Uber drivers do not refer to music's positive effect on their own mood: in fig. 7.15, for example, one worker describes 'something about driving on the road lost in your own thoughts while music plays in the background [...] is very relaxing'; the description given here is similar to that of the truck driver in fig. 7.14, whereby music, driving, and the environment combine to provide a pleasurable experience and 'relaxing' mood. Similarly, drivers in figs. 7.20-23 refer to the 'calming' and 'chill' effect of music while working. In fig. 7.18, another Uber driver concurs, 'relaxing ambient piano music is my favourite'. Each of these examples foregrounds a similar kind of music which can perhaps be best described as 'ambient', but is sometimes also referred to as 'neo-Muzak' (Anderson 2015: 839): part of what Anderson describes as 'algorithmic and curated

musical moodscapes' which are designed toward 'moodagement' (2015: 812). The potential critical interpretation of this so-called neo-Muzak will be explored subsequently in the context of what Anderson terms the 'business of mood' (2015: 833). Some Uber drivers do directly refer to 'Muzak', particularly as having a positive impact on the mood and experience of passengers: in fig. 7.17, for example, one worker writes, 'One word dude: MUZAK'.

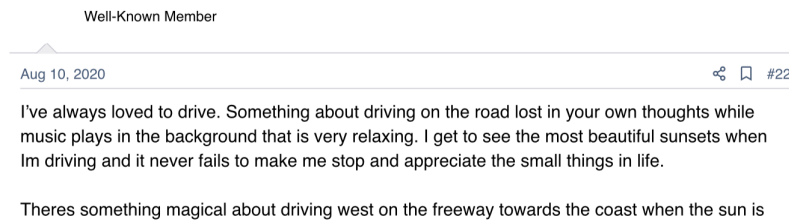


Fig. 7.15. Screenshot from UberPeople.

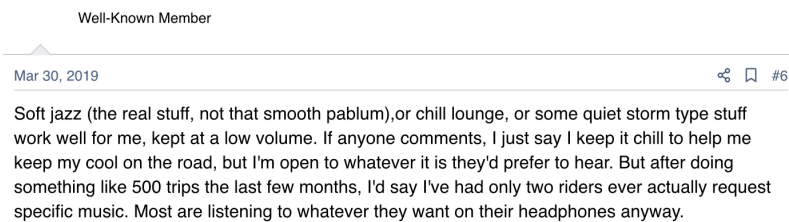


Fig. 7.16. Screenshot from UberPeople.

One word dude:  
MUZAK

I capture recorded to MP3 an online stream of 2+ hours of instrumental MUZAK, otherwise known as elevator music. It's relaxing, comfortable light background music and everyone loves it because it provides a soothing, chilled ambience in the cabin. Chinese tourists love it, just like everyone else. And touch wood, I seem not to get speeding tickets since I've started playing it. Though occasionally I like to rock out. Me and a dude about my age cranked to Gary Clark Jr.

Fig. 7.17. Screenshot from UberPeople.

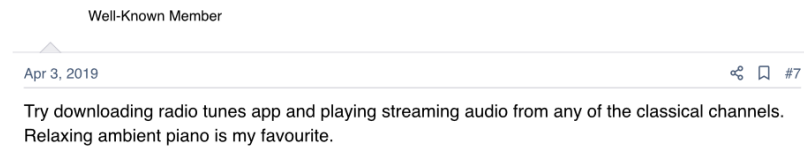


Fig. 7.18. Screenshot from UberPeople.

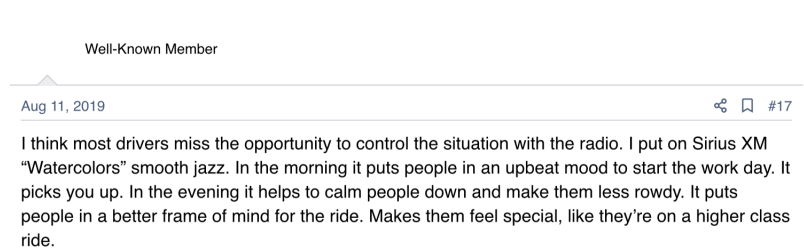


Fig. 7.19. Screenshot from UberPeople.

The driver explains in fig. 7.17 that Muzak, ‘otherwise known as elevator music’ is ‘relaxing, comfortable light background music and everyone loves it because it provides a soothing, chilled ambience in the cabin’. They even claim that, specifically, ‘Chinese tourists love it’. While the claimed positive mood effect of Muzak is well-documented (MacLeod 1979; Lesiuk 2005; Anderson 2015; Plourde 2017), so is its potential power (Jones & Schumacher 1992; Johnson & Cloonan 2008): while the progenitors of Muzak were quick to emphasise its calming and mood-stabilising effects, many scholars have identified it as being used to structure social action, particularly in public spaces (Johnson & Cloonan 2008; Hirsch 2012). The role of Muzak in the case of the Uber drive is yet more complex: while many consider Muzak as a tool of power (Hirsch 2012: 165), allowing authorities to territorialize space, an Uber driver utilising music for a similar effect does not represent so much of a power-imbalance. The driver is still the worker, the passenger occupies a quasi-authoritative role, and they answer, indirectly, to Uber as a company; in this way, the use of Muzak to ‘control’ passengers (through effects such as mood-stabilisation) by Uber drivers should not be likened to its ‘exploitatively manipulative’ use in public spaces by authorities (Johnson & Cloonan 2008: 185). Furthermore, its use is popular among drivers: in figs. 7.16, 7.18-19, and 7.21-23, different workers all make reference to the use of Muzak (or neo-Muzak) for similar reasons.

Muzak as one may imagine it—soft, inoffensive, and jazzy music—is not always contemporary: ‘never underestimate’, argues one driver in fig. 7.24, ‘the power of classical music’. In this Reddit post, which received 32 (92%) upvotes and significant engagement in 33 comments, the driver references a specific Los Angeles-based radio station (KUSC), that ‘plays classical all the

time', an equivalent of ClassicFM in the UK. The Uber driver describes its effects on mood, both their own, and passengers: 'other than me genuinely enjoying it', they say, 'it's a small secret weapon [...] help[s] quiet down and relax some drunk people, get the stressed out business (wo)man to take a breather, fill up the quiet air for the silent ones in a calm way'. Once again one sees reference to the calming and relaxing mood-effects of music, and in this case, specifically classical music. The benefits in this instance are twofold: first, a more pleasurable experience is had by the worker, and second, the music effects passengers in such a way as to make the driver's job easier. The scholarly literature previously mentioned generally sees classical music considered as the primary genre of choice for authorities in order to control others (in those cases, in public spaces): by choosing classical music, Lily Hersch argues, people are 'choosing the world of classical music and not just the music itself' (2012:22), leading to, as Jonathan Sterne observes, 'the class-polarisation of public space' (2005: 5). In this sense it is important to critique the use of classical music specifically as a 'civilising force', an attitude reinforced within music scholarship itself (Scruton 1999; Taruskin 2008; Ramnarine 2011). Similarly to previous uses of Muzak by Uber drivers, however, it should be stressed that the use of classical music in these cases is not the same as when it is employed in public spaces, for example to deter 'unwanted' individuals (Sterne 2005: 127). In this case, the explicit references made by the driver to the 'power' of classical music, and its use as a 'secret weapon' (fig. 7.24) may be seen as less of an insidious force as in the research of Johnson and Cloonan (2008), and more like a tool of resistance: although Uber drivers possess relatively little power from an industrial relations perspective, as well as in relation to customers/passengers, they can make use of the 'secret weapon' of Muzak in order to exert some level of 'power'.

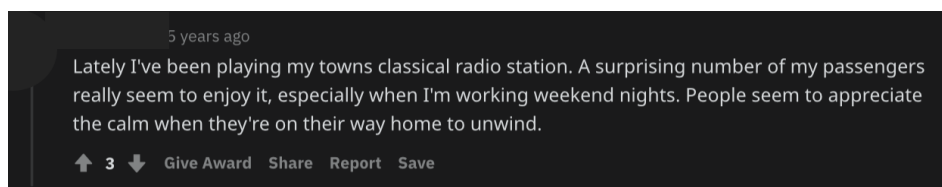


Fig. 7.20. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

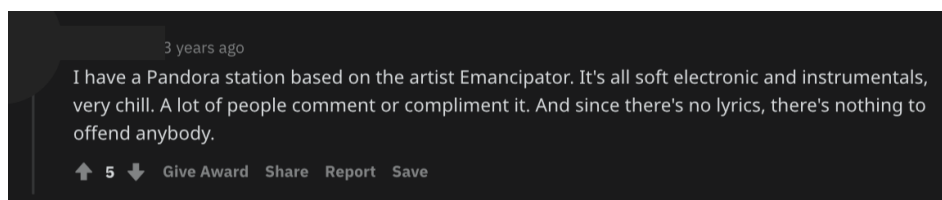


Fig. 7.21. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

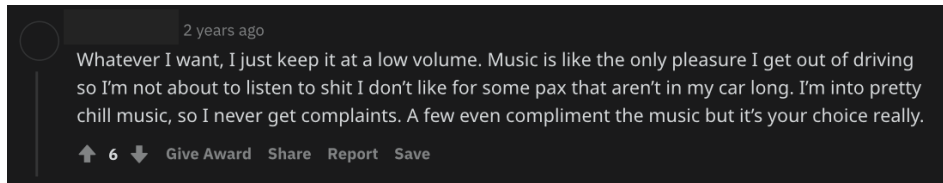


Fig. 7.22. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

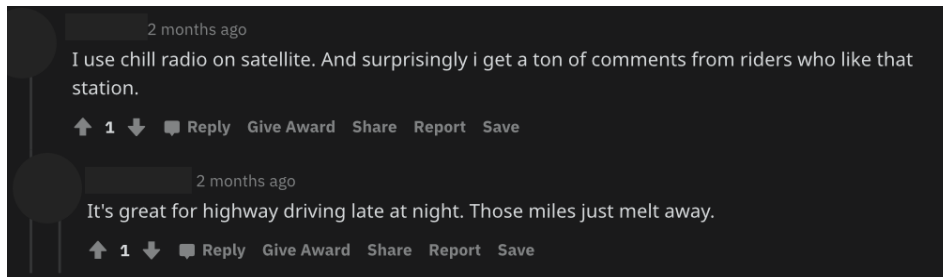


Fig. 7.23. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

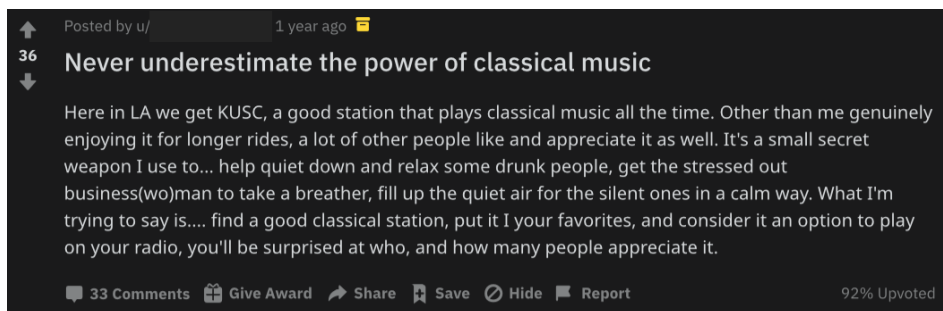


Fig. 7.24. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

What is evident in these examples is the potential for using ‘Muzak’, and potentially other types of music, as tools of control—this time by the workers themselves. If I am to return to one of the key original research questions for these case studies, it might be concluded that in this way, control does manifest itself through music listening at work, with an increasing agency afforded to workers via their ability to control and dictate the moods of others in their own environment. To consider how different aspects of music (for example genre and taste) affect social relations at work, in the context of the above examples, is to reveal that certain types of music and its uses can impact, and intervene in these social relations, often to the benefit of the driver (worker). The cases considered in this section also highlight aspects of agency and dignity at work that might be missed in traditional employment relations approaches: the use of Muzak, for example, does not represent any sort of organised resistance or control in that it does not improve the employment



position of the worker; it does, however, have a great impact on their daily life at work. Thus, again, I return to the importance of combining and applying both employment relations and critical music studies approaches in order to fully understand the effect of music on social relations at work.

## **7.2. Mood—negative: music as an irritant**

Music's effect on the mood of the worker is not always positive. Across three of the case studies, three key negative effects on mood by music can be identified: first, common across each (Amazon, postal workers, and truck drivers), but particularly present among Amazon warehouse workers, is the role of music as an irritant—put simply, music at work can be annoying; second, music at work can contribute to feelings of anger, and importantly in the case of truck drivers, 'road rage'; third, workers across the case studies comment on music as causing an 'unaware' state of mind, and therefore not allowing one to concentrate on important occurrences, be they on the road or on the factory floor. In the case of the Amazon warehouse workers, it could be said that the negative effects of music listening represent a form of 'indirect control' in the same way as disputes over musical taste (see section iv.), with workers preoccupied with each others' listening habits being annoying, as opposed to with other material workplace issues. It might also be argued that the annoyance and irritation sometimes caused by music in the workplace impacts on workers' dignity at work as with any other negative factor. Rather than talking about the negative effects of music listening in the workplace in these terms, however, many of the cases below focus primarily on the immediate impact; it is therefore up to the researcher (and the reader) to extract meaning from them.

Four Amazon warehouse workers in figs. 7.25-27 discuss how 'annoying' music can be while at work: 'old ass music shit gets on my damn nerves', complains one employee in fig. 7.26, accompanied by an eye-roll emoji. Similarly, in fig. 7.25, music is described as 'annoying' and 'headache'-inducing.

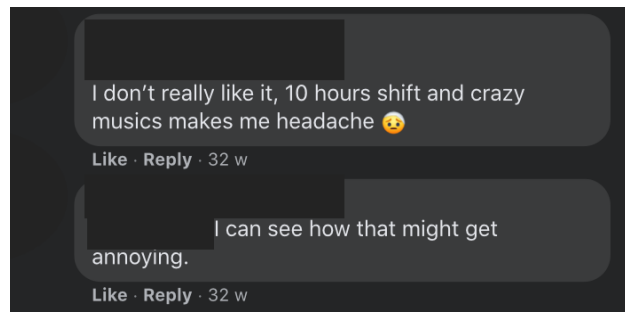


Fig. 7.25. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

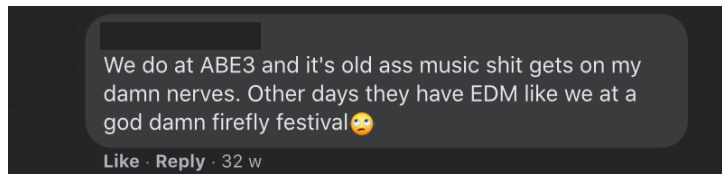


Fig. 7.26. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

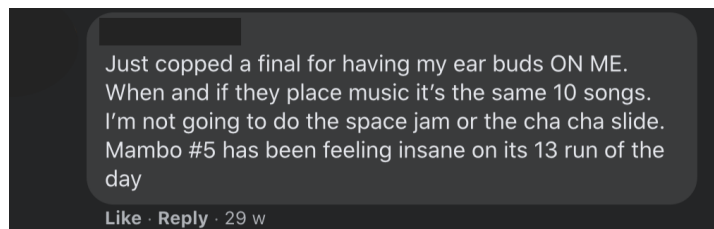


Fig. 7.27. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

In fig. 7.27, the worker writes that ‘Mambo #5 has been feeling insane on its 13 [th] run of the day’. In a similar diagnosis, another worker explains in a lengthy paragraph reply (fig. 7.29), that they ‘go insane’ listening to ‘the same handful of songs, over and over’; it is ‘unbearable’, they say. The same worker also claims that ‘pop music/hiphop drivel [...] kills my soul’: here, we see not only another account of music having a negative effect on mood (and mental state), but also a value-judgement on taste and genre. A reply to the original comment in fig. 7.29 concurs with the first worker: ‘same at EMA1 [warehouse] in the UK [...] all [...] Eurotrash’. What can be concluded from this is that perceived negative mood-effects arising from music are often closely linked to taste and genre. Some responses display an extreme reaction to this effect: in fig. 7.28, one worker describes that their location ‘played hip hop and rap all day [...] made me want to slice my wrist with my box knife’; although likely hyperbole, this indicates the strength of negative mood-effect music can have in the workplace. These reactions are clearly not isolated either: a total of 22 comments describe music at work as ‘annoying’.

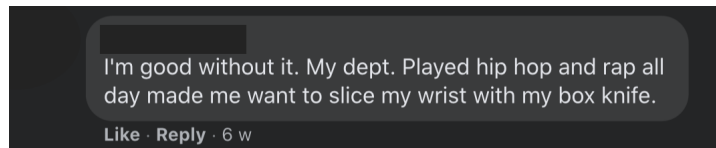


Fig. 7.28. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Furthermore, the discussion seen in fig. 7.29 consolidates a defining feature of negative mood-effect observations described by Amazon warehouse workers: where the music being heard is not their own—and therefore already perceived as more-or-less of an annoyance—workers are more likely to express discontent and ill-effect. The above examples appear to fit with Frith's hypothesis that associating music with negative mood-effect and annoyance is less to do with music being played at work in principle, and more to do with 'the feeling that someone else's music is invading our space' (2011: 24); being effectively forced to listen to someone else's music pushes some people to become unable 'to listen to it as music, a pleasurable organisation of sound, but only as noise'. This is seemingly confirmed in fig. 7.29, where the Amazon worker claims that, 'If they would provide a variety of music, and also play some instrumental music I'd be ok with it'; a reply agrees that 'I would like it if they had like a jukebox system'. So in this case, the ill-effects of music are once again closely linked to power and control.

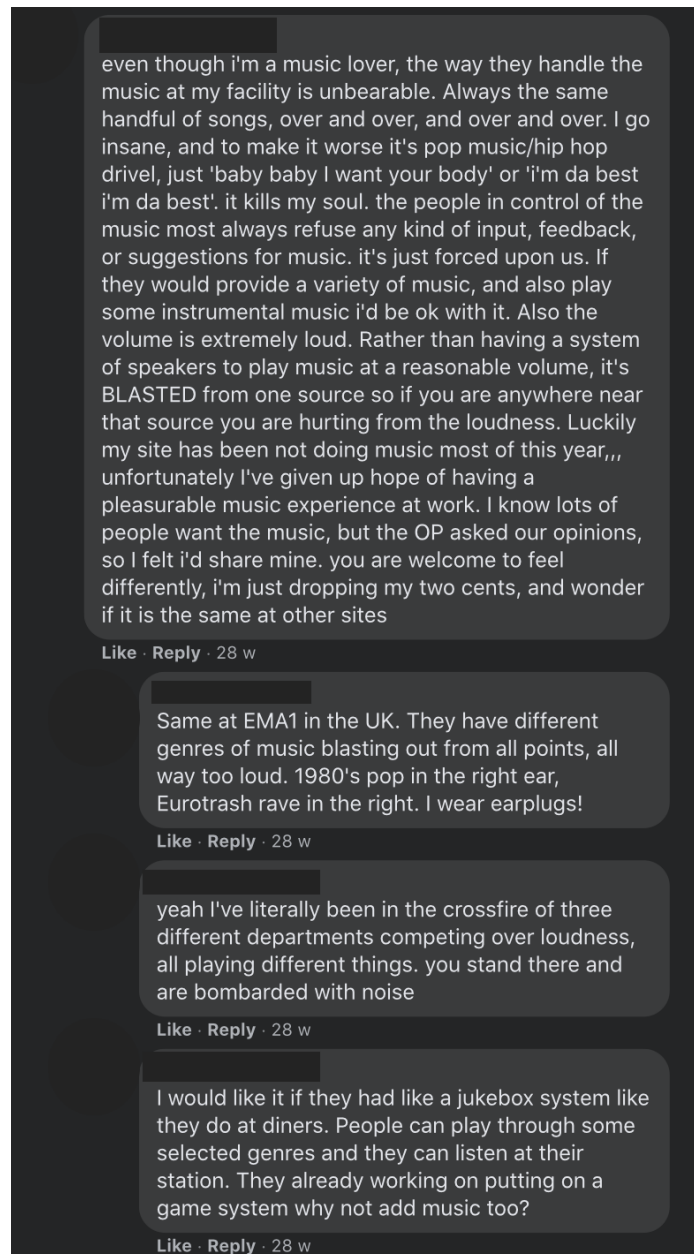


Fig. 7.29. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

A second negative mood-effect of music described by workers in the case studies is the potential for it to cause anger, which might be conceived of as being a stage up from annoyance. Although the above comments from Amazon warehouse workers allude to music potentially causing anger, the clearest examples are in the case of truck drivers—also the industry in which music listening causing anger issues might pose the most risk and danger. Nowhere is this more explicit than in fig. 7.30: ‘all that heavy metal would give me road rage’, claims a truck driver; the potential consequences of music in this case are glaringly obvious.

All that heavy metal would give me road rage.

Fig. 7.30. Screenshot from TruckNet.

**Songs You Cannot Drive To** QUOTE

by » Sat Aug 02, 2014 9:52 pm

Instead of trucking anthems, what songs make you want to rip the radio out, squash a cyclist or not let someone out at a junction?

For me (in no order) it's

That Sarah Bareilles song about being "brave" (used in crap phone adverts)

That sickening John Legend song where he sings "all of you" in a way like he's being raped by a rhino.

"Happy" by Pharell Williams. Makes me anything but bloody happy when I hear it. 😞

Fig. 7.31. Screenshot from TruckNet.

**Re: Songs You Cannot Drive To**

by » Wed Aug 20, 2014 8:05 pm

We're all going on a summer holiday by Cliff, just makes me want to ram a caravan or 4.

Fig. 7.32. Screenshot from TruckNet.

**Re: What radio station do you listen to?** QUOTE

by » Thu Nov 30, 2017 9:46 pm

“ wrote:  
Radio 2, Smoothextra, Heart80's, Nostalgie (Belgium) Sky (Netherlands)

Also Nostalgie (Belgium) and Sky radio (Netherlands). However, Sky started playing xmas songs two weeks ago, and I think I'm going to smash the windscreen if I have to hear Michael Buble singing one more time about 'popping his corn', or Slade for the fifth time in one shift !

Fig. 7.33. Screenshot from TruckNet.

**Driver** 2 years ago

Audible audiobooks for an hour, silence for an hour, podcasts for an hour, silence for an hour, Spotify for an hour, and so on.

Can't listen to metal anymore. Makes me too angry at the wheel.

↑ 3 ↓ Give Award Share Report Save

Fig. 7.34. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

2 years ago

I paid for Pandora premium so I get to listen to what I want and have ZERO commercials. I can't listen to the radio anymore. My temper goes through the roof whenever a commercial comes on

↑ 3 ↓ Give Award Share Report Save

Fig. 7.35. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

The issue of music causing an anger response and potentially ‘road rage’ of common interest to truck drivers, with an entire thread found titled ‘Songs You Cannot Drive To’, garnering significant engagement (72 responses). In the opening post of the thread, a truck driver asks ‘what songs make you want to rip the radio out, squash a cyclist, or not let someone out of a junction?’ The description provided by OP of a personally aggravating John Legend song will not be repeated here, however strong and visceral reactions are present and obvious: in a reply, another trucker complains about the song ‘Summer Holiday’ by Cliff Richard, which ‘makes me want to ram a caravan or 4’. Similarly strong, aroused moods of anger are described in other threads: for example, one truck driver in fig. 7.33 writes that ‘I think I’m going to smash the windscreen if I have to hear Michael Buble singing one more time about ‘popping his corn’’. Similarly to the example of the Amazon warehouse worker in fig. 7.28, hyperbolic comments betray very real emotional reactions regardless of any exaggeration that may occur. Many scholars have noted that the relative anonymity and informality of internet message boards frequently engender more strong and hyperbolic comments than would normally be voiced in ‘real life’ (Graf et al. 2017; Insler 2018). While this can have potentially negative effects (for example in the cases of ‘incel’ culture and white supremacist radicalisation [Labaf 2019]), it can also enable outside observers to view reactions and opinions that might otherwise be unavailable, thereby allowing a greater understanding of certain sub-cultures.

From the SubReddit r/Truckers, figs. 7.34-35 provide further examples of music negatively affecting ‘temper’, and mood. In fig. 7.34, the commenter specifically singles out metal music again, as in fig. 7.30: ‘Can’t listen to metal anymore. Makes me too angry at the wheel’. Multiple statements across different message boards therefore attest to the potentially harmful effect of music on mood, metal in particular. Although some scholars within the psychology of music have claimed that metal music specifically can lead to ‘significantly higher levels of anger’ in comparison with other genres (Gowensmith & Bloom 1997; Sharman & Dingle 2015), the varying contexts of music listening in the workplace should give caution when attempting to draw conclusions. Claiming otherwise might unintentionally result in discrimination around what is allowed at work: Hirsch’s claim that the ‘potential for discrimination is rarely acknowledged’ by those who utilise such arguments and psychological studies to implement policy should be heeded as a warning (2012: 27).

It would be, I suggest, something of an overstretch to see any of the above examples as manifestations of control or resistance, however again there are implications for dignity at work in these cases: if certain music makes a worker angry or (negatively) emotional in their workplace,

then their dignity at work is certainly affected; if it causes them road rage or embarrassment, perhaps even more so.

The final negative mood-effect commonly described throughout the case studies is the propensity of music to result in a lack of focus, and in distraction. From a critical perspective, the potential of music listening to distract from work may not necessarily be a negative thing: it can allow workers to ‘escape’ displeasurable experiences; however, in the moment this effect can be as annoying to the individual as it is inconvenient for the employer.

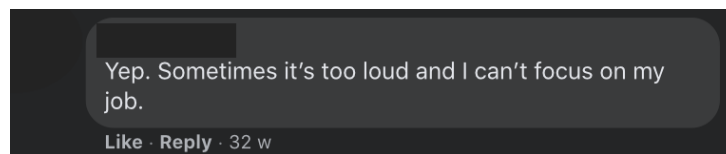


Fig. 7.36. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

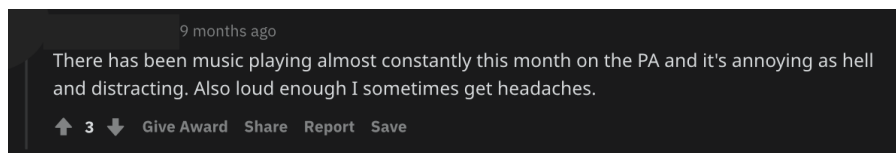


Fig. 7.37. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

In fig. 7.36, one Amazon warehouse worker specifically describes music in their workplace as being ‘sometimes [...] too loud and I can’t focus on my job’; this comment is in agreement with a colleague expressing annoyance at music at work. A worker in fig. 7.37 makes the link between ‘distracting’ and ‘annoying’ with regards to music listening at work: it is clear that the ‘distracting’ effect of music is not in this case a positive one, as they complain that it is ‘loud enough I sometimes get headaches’. These accounts corroborate Furnham and Strbac’s conclusion that music listening at work ‘can negatively impact task performance’ (2002: 215), with Haake further explaining that although some ‘cognitive tasks generally benefit from moderate levels of arousal’, they can be ‘impaired by extreme levels’ (2011: 110), for example any genre, format or volume of music which engenders too high a level of arousal in a given individual (which is likely highly subjective and may vary between workers).

The ‘distracting’ nature of music listening at work is of particular concern to postal workers, for many of whom work involves significant customer or environmental interaction. Figs. 7.38-39 describe both hypothetical and real scenarios in which the effect of music can make the listener ‘less aware’ and therefore lead them to be in danger of being ‘bit by a dog’, or worse

‘mauled by pitbulls’. While the postal workers in these examples offer general beliefs and suppositions, in fig. 7.40 one Royal Mail employee provides a direct account: ‘I find my mind wanders too much if I listen to music. Whoops half a street of misdeliveries’. In this case, the distracting qualities of music are evidently an inconvenience to the worker. Another Royal Mail worker goes further in fig. 7.41, arguing that ‘Music is a bad idea’, based on similar reasoning regarding being unaware of one’s surroundings. Although the worker in fig. 7.42 explains that they ‘couldn’t do the job without listening to something’, they suggest that listening to music, particularly in this case with ‘two headphones’ might cause you to ‘lose senses around you’. Again, these accounts align with Furnham and Strbac (2002) and Haake’s (2011) findings that music listening can cause overstimulation detrimental to work performance.

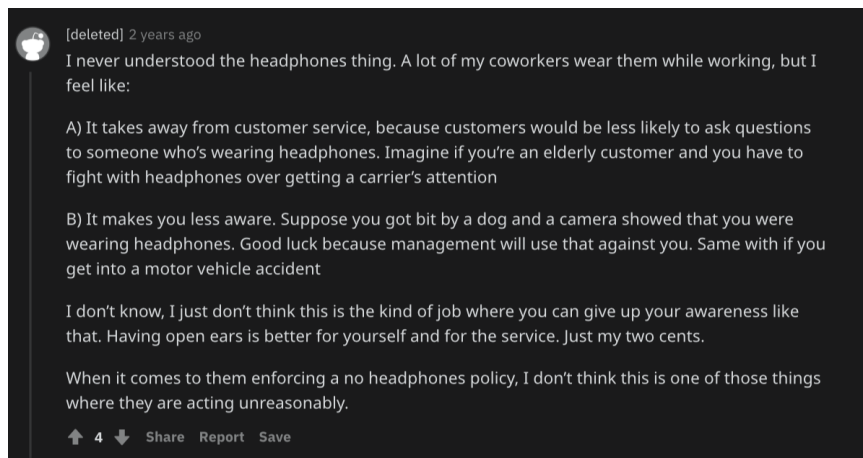


Fig. 7.38. Screenshot from r/USPS.

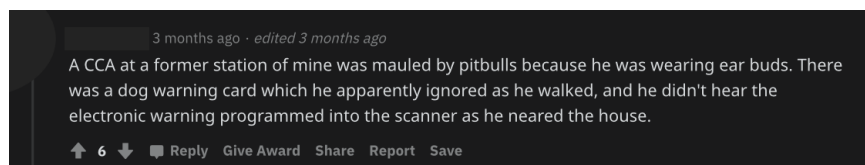


Fig. 7.39. Screenshot from r/USPS.

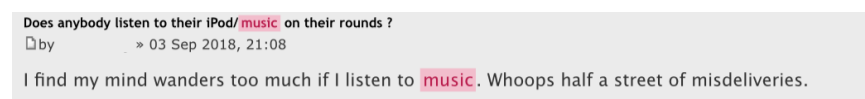


Fig. 7.40. Screenshot from RoyalMailChat.

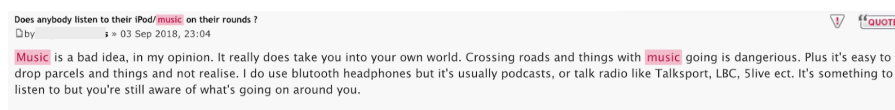


Fig. 7.41. Screenshot from RoyalMailChat.



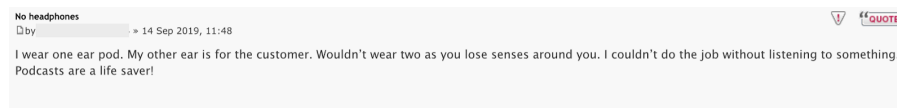


Fig. 7.42. Screenshot from RoyalMailChat.

### 7.3. Bodily affect: setting the pace

The regulating function of music on the body, as well as its ability to affect perceptions of ‘time and space’ are well documented (Jones & Schumacher 1992; Hoskin 2004; Korczynski & Jones 2006). This effect can be divided into two parts: first, as Prichard et al. suggest, ‘individuals tune in to rhythms’ in music (2007: 16), providing energy and movement. In the tradition of work songs and ‘Music While You Work’ radio broadcasts (Jones & Schumacher 1992; Korczynski & Jones 2006), music listening at work continues to have the potential to ‘inform the rhythm and pace’ of labour (Korczynski 2013: 317)—this is evident across the case studies: there were 48 separate comments referencing rhythm, pace, and bodily affect in the case of postal workers, 37 total in the case of Amazon warehouse workers, and 28 and 21 comments in the cases of truck and Uber drivers respectively. The higher frequency of comments regarding the effect of music on energy, rhythm and movement in the cases of postal workers and Amazon warehouse workers, as opposed to truck and Uber drivers, might be seen as a reflection of the nature of their work: it could be argued that those packing and stowing at Amazon and walking and delivering post require more energy and positive bodily affect, being relatively physically demanding, in comparison to drivers.

The regulation of time and space is also a common feature across the case studies: as Hoskin notes, music listening can create ‘an embodied sense of timing and spacing’, representing an organisational tool through which to help in ‘how to navigate around routines’ (2004: 50). In other words, listening to music at work might make your day seem to go quicker—as is evidenced frequently throughout the psychology of music (Kellaris & Kent 1992; North & Hargreaves 1998; Sanders & Cairns 2010; Droit-Volet et al 2013). In the case of Amazon warehouse workers, there are 39 direct references to music appearing to make time go more quickly, 38 in the case of Uber drivers, and 31 and 19 in the cases of truck drivers and postal workers respectively. It is perhaps no surprise that references to the (generally positive) effect of music on time perception occur most frequently in the work environment where individuals face the most direct control and relatively little autonomy—as is the case with Amazon workers, as opposed to truck drivers.

Music affects ‘bodily rhythms’ (Jarman 2013: 184). In work settings, this means that music can ‘provide biological, social [...] psychological and organisational well-being to workers’ (El-Aouar et al. 2016). Such a bodily impact can be seen across the case studies, and is particularly common in the case of postal workers. However in the case of Amazon warehouse workers there are also multiple references to music’s effect on bodily movement, rhythm and energy. The extent to which the bodily affect of music listening represents control or resistance is up to interpretation; Korczynski, for example, notes that music listening in the workplace ‘opens up space for agentic rather than structured movements’ (2016: 18), with individuals being able to resist the monotony and routine of work, through their movement and experience of music. In other words, music ‘offered the opportunity for workers’ bodies to resist being dominated by Taylorism’ (Korczynski 2022: 19). One might consider the following cases in this context:

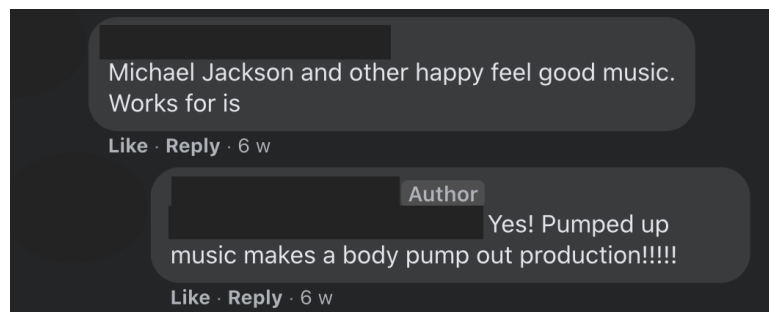


Fig. 7.43. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.



Fig. 7.44. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

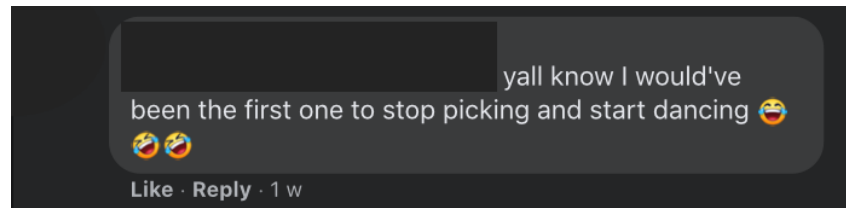


Fig. 7.45. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Although the reply in fig. 7.43 refers to the emotive and mood effect of music at work ('happy feel good music'), OP specifically describes how 'pumped up music makes a body pump out production!!!!!!' Although this is clearly a desirable effect for the company in terms of boosting productivity, it is also evidently beneficial for the worker themselves. Multiple other posts and comments refer to the way in which music listening at work can promote 'dancing', moving, and 'jamming' at work, which can both have the effect of boosting energy and enjoyment, as well as potentially productivity. In fig. 7.44, one worker says 'you can see everybody get all ratchet when the beat starts', referring to the song 'WAP' by Cardi B (ft. Nicki Minaj).<sup>18</sup> This text-image post was one of the most engaged-with threads collected for this case study, amassing 604 reactions and 177 comments. In a reply to this post, one Amazon worker comments, 'yall know I would've been the first to stop picking and start dancing': in other words, music can provide energy and rhythm, not necessarily directed toward work or productivity—and as in fig. 7.45, specifically against this. In this case, music has a bodily affect in 'stimulating' (Anderson 2015: 816), but purely for the benefit of the worker, not the work task productivity. It is revealing that the original post begins with the observation from OP that 'I never seen my manager go so quick to change the music when WAP starts to play', providing an account of both control and resistance through music listening at work and its bodily affect. In a similar account seen below (fig. 7.46), multiple Amazon workers discuss the benefit of 'rockin on the dock' to music, enabling them to 'be moving faster', with one reply even explicitly stating 'music is my motivation':

<sup>18</sup> For context, 'ratchet' is AAE (African American English) slang meaning 'out of control', unruly, uncouth or overly promiscuous and in this instance it is easy to imagine the dancing reaction to Cardi B's hip hop track.

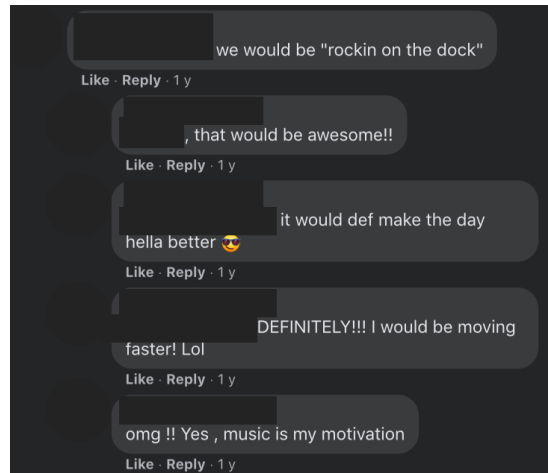


Fig. 7.46. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

The awareness of workers across the case studies in relation not only to music aiding movement, rhythm, and productivity, but also the managerial implications of these effects, is notable. Amazon warehouse and postal workers in figs. 7.47-48 refer specifically to the bodily affect of music in relation to productivity: ‘Music equals more productivity [...] keeps you moving’, and ‘even makes you quicker when you build a rhythm’, claims the Amazon worker in fig. 7.47 in a comment which received the highest number of upvotes in its original thread; the effect is clearly known by many workers. In fig. 7.48, a postal worker refers similarly to this bodily affect: ‘I tend to move faster [...] I put on my headphones [...] and plow through it’. This worker makes the deliberate qualification that they are not listening to music for this effect ‘to benefit management’, explaining instead ‘it’s just how I’m built’ (i.e it works for them). Here, the individual demonstrates awareness of the managerial benefits of increased productivity as a by-product of the bodily affect of music listening in the workplace, and rejects this as their motivation. This comment does, however, represent a minority of workers sampled in all the case studies: the majority of comments referring to music listening, bodily affect and productivity not acknowledging or rejecting any managerial benefit (96%).

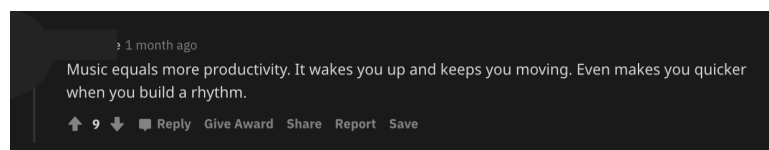


Fig. 7.47. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

I tend to move faster when I get pissed off. Not to benefit management, it's just how I'm built. I put on my headphones, ignore everyone (including my customers) and plow through it just to get done and go home.


Like · Reply · 5y  3

Fig. 7.48. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

In the case of postal workers, wherein discussions of energy, rhythm, and bodily affect were most common (48 comments), many accounts of music listening focus on it helping people ‘keep up’, and move more quickly, following how Korczynski describes music as ‘setting the pace of work’ (2013: 323). Expressing a similar sentiment to the Amazon worker in fig. 7.43, a postal worker in fig. 7.49 explains that ‘if you want to be amped up, listen to Slipknot’, gaining four ‘likes’ of approval. In figs. 7.50-51, however, two workers describe specifically how music listening has a positive effect on energy and bodily movement: ‘dance music helps me keep my pace up’, writes one postal worker as another claims that ‘music keeps me focused and the beat helps too. There [is] a rhythm to the job and I get a lift out of songs that I like’. What is clear from these examples is that music not only that music listening at work may help keep pace, but also that it has an altogether positive impact on the individual.

If you want to be amped up, listen to Slipknot.


Like · Reply · 1y  4

Fig. 7.49. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

Music in one ear when out on delivery, dance music helps me keep my pace up

Like · Reply · 1y

Fig. 7.50. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

Music keeps me focused and the beat helps too. There us a rhythm to the job and I get a lift out of songs that I like.

Like · Reply · 2w

Fig. 7.51. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

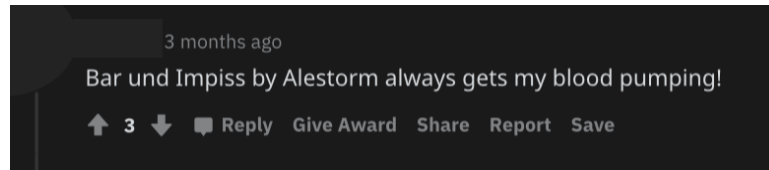


Fig. 7.52. Screenshot from r/USPS.

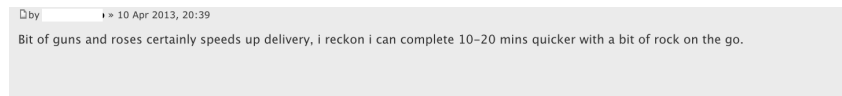


Fig. 7.53. Screenshot from RoyalMailChat.

Beyond simply helping them ‘keep up’, some workers describe the ways in which music can in fact make them ‘go quicker’: ‘bit of guns and roses certainly speeds up delivery’, claims on Royal Mail worker (fig. 7.53), ‘i reckon I can complete 10-20 mins quicker with a bit of rock on the go’. The effect of music helping workers work quicker is also a common theme in the case of truck drivers: ‘Motorhead [...] keeps me rockin through those lonely dark nights’, describes one driver, while another writes that ‘if I want to get a move on, then it’s [...] the William tell overture’. Each of these examples correlates with Lesiuk’s findings that music is reported to ‘make staff work quicker’ (2005: 178).

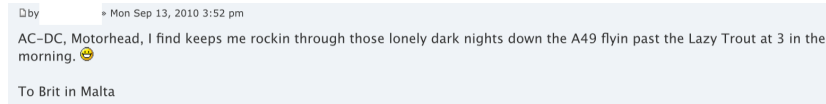


Fig. 7.54 Screenshot from TruckNet.

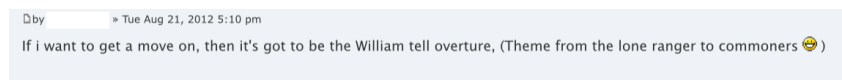


Fig. 7.55 Screenshot from TruckNet.

Many truck and Uber drivers refer to music as ‘pumping up’: in fig 7.56, one truck driver recommends ‘keeping some good ‘pump up’ music playing [so] you can jam to also seriously helps, anything you can sing along or dance to’, while an Uber driver recounts how ‘jazzy drum and bass keeps me happy pushing through traffic’, referring both to the mood and bodily affect of music listening. The driver in fig. 7.58 makes the connection between positive bodily affect and happier customers: ‘if you see your PAX feeling the music/bumping their head a little bit, you can turn it up’, intimating that music’s bodily affect may also have an impact on potential tips. Music listening may also lead to the opposite bodily affect—slowing down, which may be no bad thing.

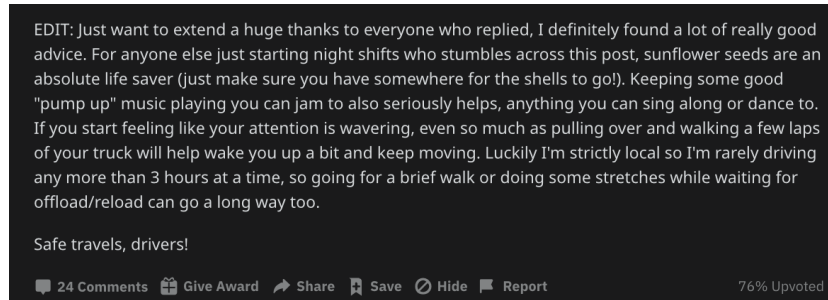


Fig. 7.56. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

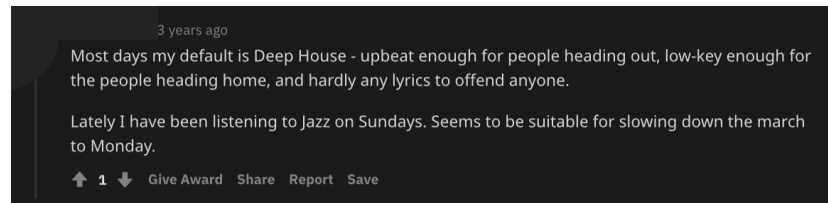


Fig. 7.57. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

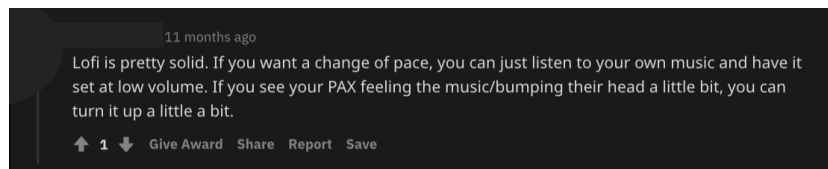


Fig. 7.58. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

In fig. 7.57, an Uber driver writes ‘Lately I have been listening to Jazz on Sundays [...] seems to be suitable for slowing down the march to Monday’. Here, the relaxing, ‘slowing down’ effect appears beneficial from the perspective of the worker (and possibly the passenger). This comment also alludes to the second bodily affect of music listening at work, a phenomenon which is closely related to mood and emotion: how individuals experience the passage of time.

In Tia DeNora’s *Music in Everyday Life* (2000), she offers a holistic, albeit functionalist, perspective of music as acting as something of a tool for self-expression, identity formation, and enjoyment. In relation to mood and affect, DeNora suggests that music effects ‘how people feel about situations’ both emotionally and corporeally (2000:17), noting—crucially for this case—that music listening has a significant impact on ‘how [people] experience the passage of time’. As has been noted, however, DeNora’s writing considers neither critical work sociology, nor empirical accounts from workers themselves; given the average person spends a good proportion of their life at work, this is a significant oversight. It is therefore pertinent to provide the perspectives of workers, something made possible in the data of this project.

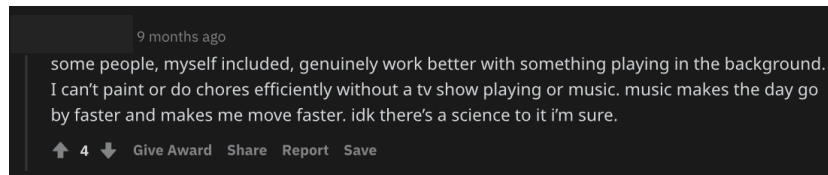


Fig. 7.59. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

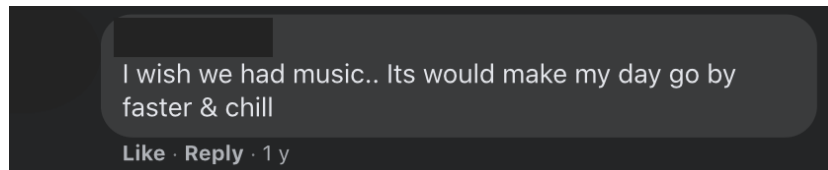


Fig. 7.60. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

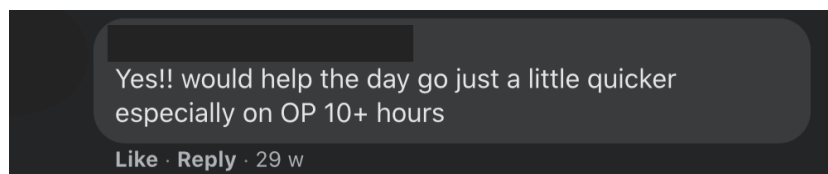


Fig. 7.61. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

Three Amazon warehouse workers (figs. 7.59-61) all provide separate accounts of music improving experience at work by making time appear to pass faster: in figs. 7.59, the worker explains that ‘music makes the day go by faster and makes me move faster [...] idk there’s a science to it i’m sure’; in this example, the individual not only refers to the time effect of music listening but also to an awareness of the scientific justification behind this effect. Although the individual is not clear on the exact science, this statement indicates an understanding of the time effect being closely related to music listening, not merely an incidental occurrence. In figs. 7.60 and 7.61, two other Amazon warehouse workers corroborate this effect: ‘would make my day go by faster’, says one, ‘would help the day go just a little quicker especially on OP 10+ hours’, writes another. In the second example, the individual identifies music listening and its effect on the perception of time as particularly beneficial in the case of long working shifts, which are a standard experience for Amazon workers, with the typical warehouse shift being ten hours with a half hour for lunch (Luna 2015). The importance of music listening in creating a more positive experience for workers in this instance, as evidenced in figs. 7.59-61, should thus not be understated.

A more intangible phenomenon, related to time perception and movement, is referred to by another Amazon worker in fig. 7.62:



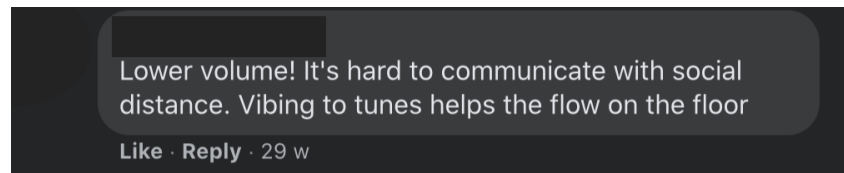


Fig. 7.62. Screenshot from r/AmazonFC.

As alluded to in the literature review (Chapter 2), scholars have linked the ‘inherent fluidity’ of music listening to a certain ‘flow of experience’ described by users employing certain listening technologies such as the iPod (Scherzinger 2014): in other words, music listening helps individuals ‘tune their flow of [...] mood’ (Bull 2007: 115). The iPod and other listening devices ‘expand upon previous listening technologies to customise music to mood and environment’ (Scherzinger 2014: 125), allowing ‘the flow of subjective sound [to take] users away from the physicality of the world’ (113). Although in existing musicological approaches the focus of this effect of ‘flow’ on the body and mind has been toward music performance (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), as Bull notes ‘iPod users do not appear to be passive consumers’ (2007: 119), and thus their ability to ‘tune their flow’ while listening to music should not be underestimated. In fig. 7.62, one Amazon worker specifically states ‘vibing to tunes helps the flow on the floor’: music listening helps movement and the general ‘vibe’. Although this comment does not specify whether ‘the flow’ refers to a state of mind or body, or simply productivity at work, it echoes the accounts of other Amazon warehouse workers who espouse the benefits of ‘getting all ratchet’ (fig. 7.44), being ‘pumped up’ (fig. 7.43), and ‘moving faster’ (figs. 7.46). There is arguably no clear delineation in the examples—and therefore in the experiences of workers—between ‘dancing’, movement, and flow, and these all retain a close link to discussions of perception of time at work (see figs. 7.59-61); as is evident in fig. 7.62, the concept of ‘flow’ may be hard to define, yet is clearly related to both.

It is certainly the case that none of the cases above represent any form of organised resistance to the structures of work or attempts to gain control in a concerted manner. Yet, the observation that music listening allows ‘the opportunity for workers’ bodies to resist being dominated by Taylorism’ through movement does seem particularly relevant here (Korczynski 2022: 19). As is demonstrated in the examples above, music often allows workers to break free from the monotony, drudgery, and ‘indirect’ control over their bodies that capitalist processes force upon them. With similar reference to Korczynski’s observations, it is arguable that the cases presented here offer instances in which agency is enacted by workers, facilitated by music listening.

## 7.4. Taste

### i. Taste as a site of conflict at Amazon

Within social relations, music taste often becomes the stick used to beat others with, be they employees, coworkers, or even customers. Judgements about taste in music represent what Frith terms ‘displaced judgement’ (2013:15): what someone defines as ‘bad music’ connotes, and therefore associates its listener or enjoyer with, ‘bad behaviour’ (for example, sex, crime, and violence). Crucially to the political implications of workplace music listening and disagreements on taste, ‘aesthetic judgements are necessarily tangled up with ethical judgements’ (Frith 2013:19). Taste and music listening at work also coalesce in ‘the feeling that someone else’s music is invading our space’ (Frith 2013: 24), denying ‘people’s sense of spatial integrity’; similarly, different genres and tastes in music may be used and abused to ‘include and exclude people from this kind of aural space’ (25). In the case of Amazon warehouse workers, the data reveals enlightening examples of both phenomena: disagreements about taste and genre impact how individuals interact with one another, while the issue of ‘someone else’s music’ invading space is also a key topic of discussion. In the data there were 19 comments discussing taste, with all but one being negative (see for example fig. 7.63). Similarly, there were 31 mentions of ‘noise’ in reference to music; again all but one were negative, and the only positive comment referring to noise and music listening specified that the individual likes to listen to ‘white noise’ while working. The following examples can be divided up accordingly—those that concern disagreements in taste, and those which defer taste to conflicts of ‘noise’ (and space):

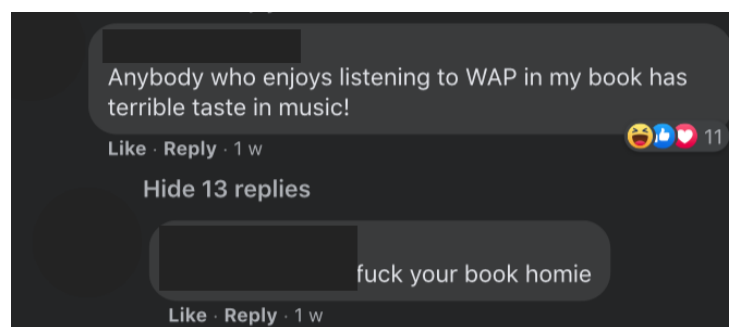


Fig. 7.63. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.



Fig. 7.64. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Two examples of simple disputes centering around music taste can be seen in figs. 7.63-4: ‘Anybody who enjoys listening to WAP in my book has terrible taste in music!’, comments one Amazon worker in fig. 7.63 (to the agreement [or amusement] of 11 fellow group members), to which a coworker replies ‘fuck your book homie’.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, a worker in fig. 7.64 expresses their hatred of ‘the backstreet boys and the thong song and garbage like that’, to which another replies (with a tongue-in-cheek tone) ‘I will not stand for people shit talking’. These seemingly minor disagreements about taste take place online, on a digital platform that arguably represents something of a ‘virtual water cooler’: these arguments may have happened in person in the past, but now they take place either instead of, or in addition to this, on social media.

Some of the disagreements between Amazon workers, however, are less convivial and demonstrate more of what Frith identifies as ‘ethical judgements’, couched in aesthetic ones. For example, in fig. 7.65, one worker posts a ‘reaction meme’ of the Spongebob character Squidward, with a displeased face, accompanied by the caption ‘dis sum bullshit’. The text reads, ‘when your building finally plays music but it’s rap’. This post, as is common with those including images, gifs or videos, gained significant engagement, amassing 144 reactions and 66 comments; although most of the engagement appears to have been garnered due to the content of the discussion rather than the format of the post—74% of comments expressed an opinion on rap music itself (including both positive and negative reactions), while 21% engaged in similar discussions and disagreements surrounding other genres of music.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Fuck your book homie’ in this context means ‘I do not care about your opinion’.



Fig. 7.65. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

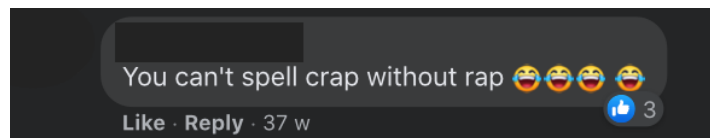


Fig. 7.66. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Over a quarter of comments on taste are less specific about genre disagreements, and more, following Frith (2013) to do with spacial integrity: the issue for many of these workers is not specifically ‘rap music’ or ‘country music’, but rather that what they are being forced to listen to is not their own music. One Amazon warehouse worker (see fig. 7.67) explains: ‘what I hate is that every now and then someone wants to be the floor DJ’, forcing others to listen to ‘their awful music taste’, to which another responds ‘TRUTH’. Here, the issue of taste, good or bad, is secondary to the notion of control: the problem is that someone else’s music is being forced upon them, into their aural space, and that it is not to their own taste. In fig. 7.68, one worker claims that ‘the only thing worse than no music is having to listen to someone else’s shitty music’; again, there is no specific mention of genre or particular taste, merely that the music is not their own.

This echoes Frith's assertion that 'the music itself is not really the issue, just that it's not 'our music' at that point' (2013: 24). Expressing a similar sentiment, the commenter in fig. 7.69 expresses thankfulness that they are no longer permitted to listen to music in the workplace, as they were 'tired of hearing crap'. In fig. 7.70, a worker highlights what Frith terms 'the problem of noise': 'I love hearing music, just not shitty music'; implying that anything not to their taste is less than proper music. In all of the examples below, workers defer arguments about taste to issues of control and 'spacial integrity', in that the significant issue is that the music in question is not their music. Frith suggests that 'musical disputes are probably more often arguments about noise than taste', with noise referring to 'people's sense of spatial integrity' (2013: 24). While it is evidently not true that taste is not a factor (most examples refer to taste, and some beliefs about what 'shitty music' actually is), Frith's conclusion that 'the aesthetics of music involve a particular mix of individualism and sociability' is key here (2013: 24), particularly in the workplace: the personal politics behind who controls music listening and owns aural space is as important a factor as the pure aesthetics of the music itself.



Fig. 7.67. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

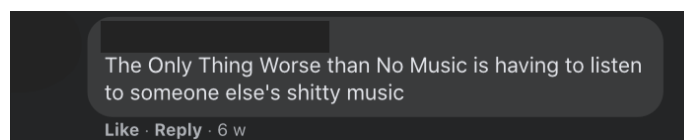


Fig. 7.68. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

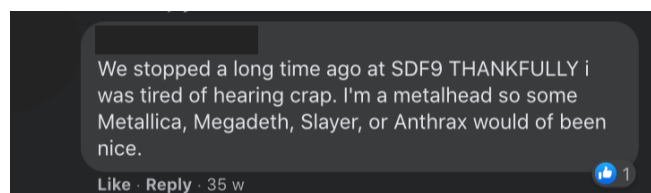


Fig. 7.69. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

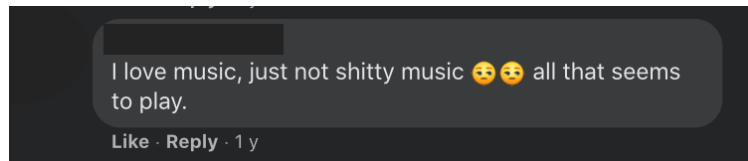


Fig. 7.70. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

As Frith argues, the feeling that someone else's music is 'invading our space' means that 'we can't listen to it as music, a pleasurable organization of sound, but only as noise, an undifferentiated din' (2013: 24). This effect results in responses of 'anger' to perceived 'bad music', as is evident in the tone of the comments in figs. 7.67-70: 'shitty' (x2), 'awful', and 'crap' are words used to describe other people's music tastes, all of which are stronger reactions than simply 'bad'; these extremely visceral responses engender opinions such as those expressed in fig. 7.68, whereby the worker asserts that they would rather listen to 'no music' than 'someone else's shitty music'. For these people, control over their aural space is more important than being able to listen to music at all. This is not a belief shared by all workers, as is demonstrated in fig. 7.71: here, a colleague explains that 'I'd even bump country and I fucking despise country'—for some, then, disputes over taste are secondary to the resistance of rules surrounding music listening.

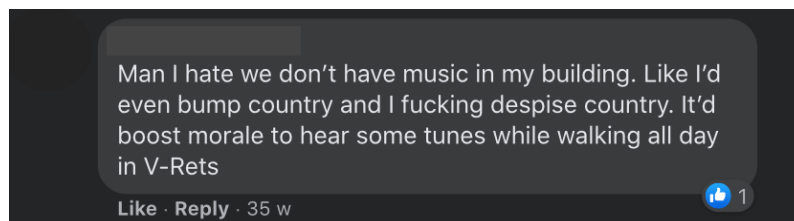


Fig. 7.71. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.



Fig. 7.72. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfilment Centre Memes Facebook group.

Similarly, in fig. 7.72, while the worker recognises that disputes of taste disrupt their ability to listen to music—'can't play metal rock, rap or country without someone bitching about it'—they argue that 'some music is better than no music'. These pragmatic responses represent the

minority in the data, however, accounting for less than 7% of all comments on genre, taste, and music listening.

The extent to which disagreements surrounding taste, as documented in the examples above, represent manifestations of control or resistance is arguably negligible, however their impact on social relations is considerable. Disputes among co-workers clearly affect individuals' experiences at work, and music taste is a large part of this. It is, however, possible to view disagreements on musical taste in the workplace within the lens of 'indirect control': put simply, arguments like those in the examples above distract from power relations. In fig. 7.72, for example, the statement, 'can't play metal rock, rap or country without someone bitching about it [...] some music is better than no music' alludes to the belief that differences and disagreements in taste are to blame for a negative experience (not being allowed music), rather than directing their focus toward managerial rules and control. In this way, music taste can act as a foil for managerial control, regardless of whether it is intended as such!

## ii. Difference and racial profiling among Uber drivers

The potentially negative implications of taste on workplace politics are not limited to inter-worker relations: in the case of Uber drivers, taste plays a significant role in mediating the relationships between worker and customer/passenger. Among Uber drivers, there were 249 mentions of 'taste', accounting for 0.05% the total text, while related terms also appeared frequently (genre—66 times, and 'style' and 'type' in relation to music in total—65 times).

Before discussing the overwhelmingly positive implications of taste and music listening among Uber drivers (for example, shared taste, community building, and utilising commonalities of certain tastes for rewards, both monetary and otherwise), it is worth highlighting a unique phenomenon related to the exploration of figs. 7.75-6: two threads on UberPeople referencing music listening are dedicated to discussions of racial profiling, based on music taste. One thread (see fig. 7.73) gained 75 replies (placing it in the top 1% of engaged-with threads collected within the data), of which 25 comments explicitly stated support for OP.

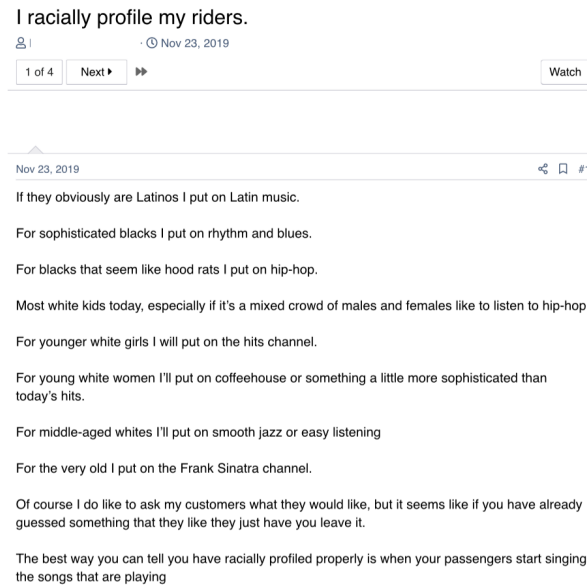


Fig. 7.73. Screenshot from UberPeople.

In this post, the Uber worker states 'I racially profile my riders' in the thread title, continuing to explain the genre of music they select based on the appearance of each passenger: for example, 'rhythm and blues' for 'sophisticated blacks', and 'Latin music' for those who 'obviously are Latinos'. This use of music taste to 'profile' or 'stereotype' passengers is not an isolated occurrence: in fig. 7.75, one driver explains 'I also stereotype my pax and usually get it right', while another in fig. 7.74 states 'I just got called out for being a music profiler [...] Old black ladies? Birocratic station on Pandora'. Although the driver in fig. 7.76 admits they 'used to overthink' the issue of music taste, they still stereotype based on 'male name' or 'female name', as well as perceived customer age. In fig. 7.74, the driver justifies their technique by saying 'I definitely try to create a sanctuary and the right music helps. Tips are better and I feel like I'm making the world a more peaceful place one ride at a time': evidently, they believe music taste 'profiling', based on gender, race and age, benefits both themselves and the passenger.

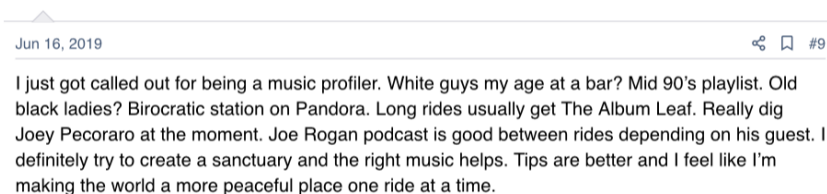


Fig. 7.74. Screenshot from UberPeople.

I also stereotype my pax and usually get it right but sometimes I'm surprised when the young black guy asks for the classical channel instead of trap music. Then I feel like a jerk.

Fig. 7.75. Screenshot from UberPeople.



I used to overthink this. Now I almost always do the following (volume very low), but keep in mind I drive mostly commuters:

Male name: Eagles Pandora station  
Female name: Steely Dan Pandora station

The reason being is Eagles ish songs are more guitar driven, and Steely Dan ish songs are more jazzy / saxophoney. Both are relatively pleasant without crazy electric guitars or screaming.

If I drive evening revellers for some reason (there's almost never surge anymore), I do the following:

Middle age name: 80's Pandora station  
Youngish name: One Republic Pandora station  
Feeling daring: Late 80's / early 90's rap station, like Pharcyde or Black Sheep or Will Smith or Skee Lo.

I always keep the volume very low and only turn it up a) if asked or b) if they start singing.

I once got a bad rating on an otherwise flawless trip, I think, because The Final Countdown came up on the 80's station. Lots of wailing guitar and screaming in the middle. Since then I have been very gunshy.

One of these days, perhaps after I hit a 4.98 rating, I'll stop caring and just play whatever I \*really\* want including T.I., Migos, Future, Drake, Snoop/Dre, Cypress Hill, Lil' Dicky (\$ave Dat Money), Fetty Wap, and then the granddaddy...punk rock (NOFX, Face 2 Face, Descendents, Bad Religion, Operation Ivy, Rancid, Ramones, Black Flag, etc.)!!!!

Fig. 7.76. Screenshot from UberPeople.

In fig. 7.75, the driver recounts a potential hazard of such 'stereotyping': 'I'm surprised when the young black guy asks for the classical channel instead of trap music [...] I feel like a jerk'. Here the Uber driver is aware of the racist implications of profiling music taste based on appearance, however that is clearly not enough to stop them practising such behaviour. Similarly, in fig. 7.73, the worker claims 'the best way you can tell you have racially profiled properly is when you passengers start singing to songs that are playing': it is evident that the drivers understand the potentially socially problematic nature of stereotyping based on music taste, yet they are not ashamed of doing so, and seemingly will continue to do so. A slightly more 'liberal' attitude is demonstrated by the admission of the commenter in fig. 7.77: 'I'll admit it [...] I change the radio station based on the area I'm in'. Here, the driver again notes that such 'taste-stereotyping' has resulted in them achieving 'over 20 of those meaningless compliments for 'Awesome music' (in-app rating 'badges'), however their tone indicates an awareness that profiling might be considered ethically questionable:

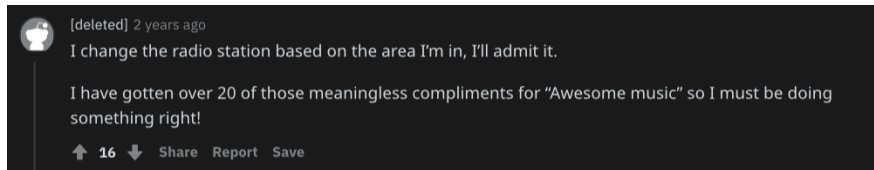


Fig. 7.77. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Some drivers take a more considered approach, as is evidenced in fig. 7.78: initially, they ‘experimented with a lot of different genres’, based on ‘demeanors [...] comments [...] and rating patterns’. This approach led to their conclusion that ‘Mellow Reggae like Rebelution and Stick Figure consistently seem to mellow people out, get more music compliments, was acceptable to all ages and social demographics, and ended up showing a strong correlation with 5 star ratings’ (author’s emphasis).

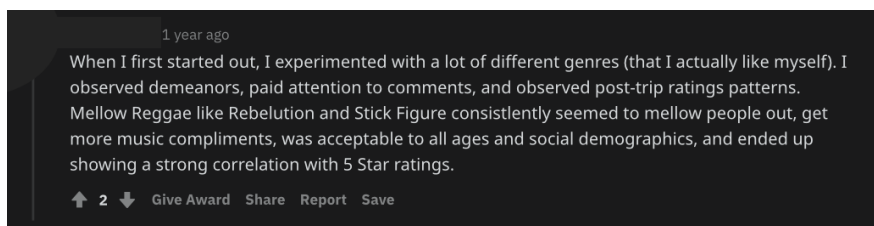


Fig. 7.78. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Based less on ‘racial profiling’ and instead more on a wider range of factors—utilising a methodology seemingly not dissimilar to academic research—this technique still aims to achieve better ratings via specific music tastes and genres, but with the particular goal of pleasing the widest range of passengers possible, rather than specific demographics. This example is characteristic of a broader trend in the data: the use of music taste to improve their experience at work, as well as a money-making device among Uber drivers. In a sense, this is also a case of drivers attempting to gain control over their workplace and conditions therein, as well as over their customers (passengers).

### iii. Taste as a money-making and experience-enhancing device among Uber drivers

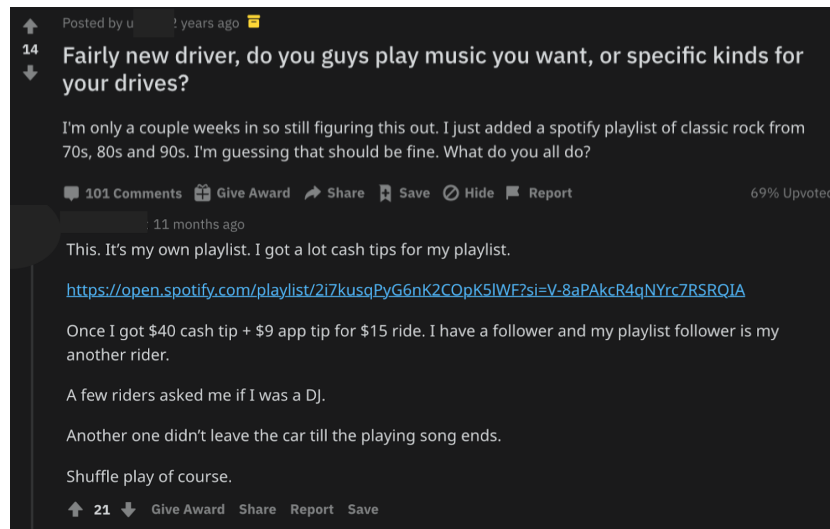


Fig. 7.79. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Music taste is described by multiple Uber drivers as both a key factor in gaining tips and ensuring a pleasant experience for themselves at work. Again, although the examples below do not correlate with any organised resistance efforts or attempts to gain control over their workplace, one might consider them within the Hodsonian context of ‘small acts of resistance’ (2001: 60): in a capitalist system, and especially within ‘gig economy’ work, any tips and tricks used by workers to improve their earnings and their experiences that are not a standard part of these processes represents something of a resistance against the system itself; it is also significant that, as will be demonstrated below, workers are keen to share with each other these ways, not to cheat the system, but to bend it to their advantage, and to resist being beaten down within society.

Some of the most highly-engaged with posts on the Uber driver SubReddit concern choice of genre and its effect both on the experience of the passenger and the workers alike: the questions posed by contributors in fig. 7.79 and fig. 7.80 gained significant engagement, seeing the former amassing 101 comments and the latter 38 comments; with each post specifically referring to ‘kinds’ and ‘genres’ of music, the question of taste and impact is evidently an important one to many drivers. Both posts describe the type of music they themselves choose to play—‘70s, 80s and 90s classic rock’, and ‘Raggae [sic], jazz, acoustic, alternative rock, trap edm, lofi electro, and Hip-hop’ respectively—while also requesting contributions and tips from fellow Uber workers: ‘I’m still figuring this out [...] what do you all do?’, asks the driver in fig. 7.79, while in fig. 7.80 OP

consults their ‘Uber peers’. In both these instances, digital platforms once again become a space for solidarity and community building, spaces in which workers can discuss issues and provide one another with tools to navigate their environment. A majority of comments responded positively, with most (96%) providing their own genre recommendations based on what passengers (and sometimes they themselves too) enjoy: for example, in fig. 7.80 one commenter suggests ‘soft electronic and instrumentals [...] a lot of people comment or compliment’, and another comments, ‘Newage music [...] my fav genre of music...Pax seem to like it too’. Some drivers utilise this space to share their own digital music playlists (as in fig. 7.79, one of 15 comments in total sharing hyperlinks to personal playlists).

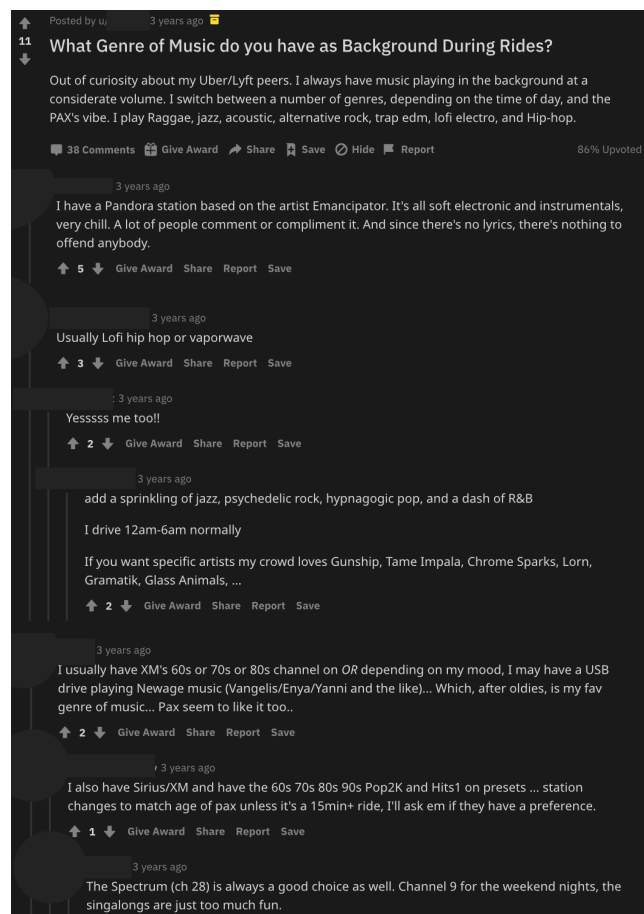


Fig. 7.80. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

These original threads, characteristic of much of the discussion around music and work among Uber drivers on both UberNet and the Uber SubReddit (91% of the 110 threads studied contained at least one reference to music taste and/or genre, while 70% explicitly centred around these

issues), illuminate two key ways in which taste and genre can have a positive effect on workers' experiences: increasing tips, and heightening experience.

In fig. 7.79, the top commenter (gaining 21 upvotes) claims 'I got a lot [of] cash tips for my playlist', that they once received a '\$40 cash tip + \$9 app tip for [a] \$15 ride', and that they 'have a follower and my playlist follower is my another rider [sic]'—the driver presumably means one of their passengers 'follows' their playlist (on Spotify or similar). A tip of over 300% is not insignificant to be sure; is this, however, a one-off, or perhaps an example of exaggerated online storytelling? In fig. 7.81 one Uber driver explicitly asks their community for 'Songs that get you tips':

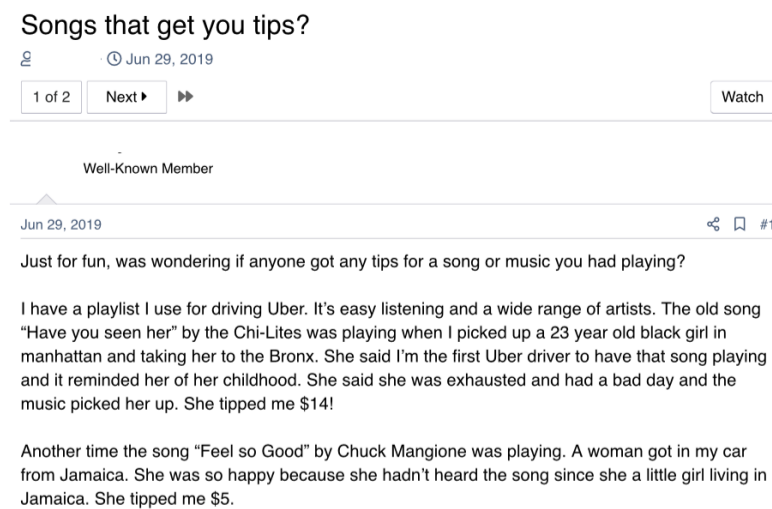


Fig. 7.81. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Although OP claims their question is 'just for fun', they nonetheless ask for 'any tips', and recount two examples of music taste impacting customer experience and tipping: one passenger tipped \$14 because the driver was playing 'the old song 'hang you seen her"' by R&B quartet The Chi-Lites, and 'that song playing [...] reminded her of her childhood [...] she was exhausted and had a bad day and the music picker her up'; in the second example, another passenger again identified with jazz flugelhornist Chuck Mangione's 'Feel So Good' from her childhood, and tipped the driver \$5. Of the 32 responses this original post generated, 30 were positive, with only two arguing that music did not have an effect on tips. In these two comments (figs. 7.82-3), one driver said they 'don't care about no tips', while the other argued that they 'don't believe it has any effect on tips', however in the latter example they nonetheless make reference to the positive impact on both their own and

passengers' experiences that 'classical music' has: 'I mostly play classical music to sooth [sic] the morning stress levels of me and pax [...] pax give me many compliments on my music choice'.

Jul 1, 2019

Don't care about no tips:

Fig. 7.82. Screenshot from UberPeople.

---

I drive solely the morning rush hour.  
 I mostly play classical music to sooth the morning stress levels of me and pax.  
 Pax give me many compliments on my music choice.  
 I don't believe it has any effect on tips.

Fig. 7.83. Screenshot from UberPeople.

The following examples corroborate the link between music taste, genre, and tips: in figs. 7.84-5, two drivers connect 'hip hop' with 'millennials' and 'college' students, with the latter explaining 'it has a huge effect on tips', and the former recounting how 'bruno mars and cardi b got me a 5 dollar tip for a \$5.39 ride. In fig. 7.84, the individual expresses 'dumbfoundedness' at 'white' millennials tipping for this type of music, however the driver in fig. 7.85 does not mention passengers' race, merely that they provide an Amazon 'Alexa' so that riders can 'request whatever music they want'—this is what leads to 'a lot of hip hop'. In this example, it is unclear whether the hip hop itself, or rather the ability to choose 'whatever music they want', is what 'has a huge effect on tips', however taste is clearly an important factor. A similar phenomenon is described in fig. 7.86, wherein the commenter recounts receiving tips of between \$5 and \$20 for allowing passengers to 'pair their phones for music'; not only does the ability to select the genre and songs appear important in the effect on customers—taste itself is a factor in the experience of both passenger and driver, in this case with the passenger described as having 'a real nice mix of music from Frank Sinatra to OZZY [sic]', leading the driver to 'compliment her on her choice of music'. The link between taste and tips is evident.

Jun 30, 2019

🔊 📌 #19

I was on a trip last month, forgot to switch on my lupe playlist before pax entered but somehow the pax(3 white mid 20 millennials) entered the car. It was like a 5 minute ride but we were dripping in finesse by bruno mars and cardi b got me a 5 dollar tip for a \$5.39 ride. I am still dumbfounded about that to this day. Thanks Bruno, and now back to Lupe.

Fig. 7.84. Screenshot from UberPeople.

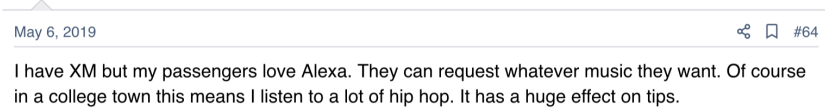


Fig. 7.85. Screenshot from UberPeople.

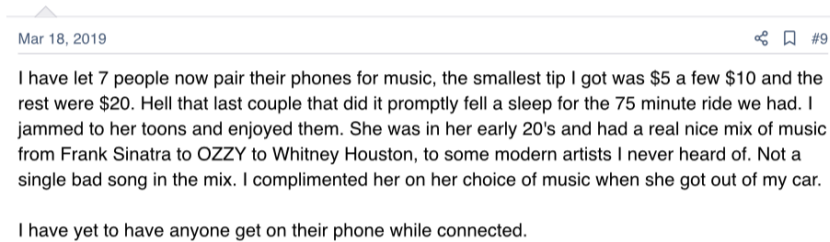


Fig. 7.86. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Multiple commenters propose specific songs as having an effect on tips: for example, in fig. 7.87, one driver states that 'some of my best tip grabbers' include Gorillaz's 'Melancholy Hill', and deadmau5's 'Strobe'. In fig. 7.88, another driver explains how they play 'relevant' hip hop songs for men and women: 'Short Dick Man' by 20 Fingers for a 'group of ladies', and 'My Neck, My Back (Lick It)' by Khia for a 'group of men'. According to this commenter, such music choices cause tips to start 'flowing in like the salmon of Capistrano' (a reference to a line from the 1994 film 'Dumb & Dumber').

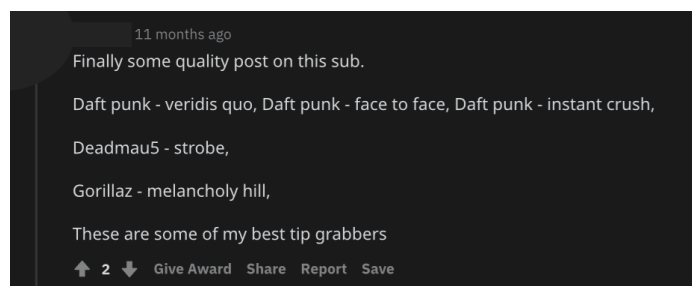


Fig. 7.87. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

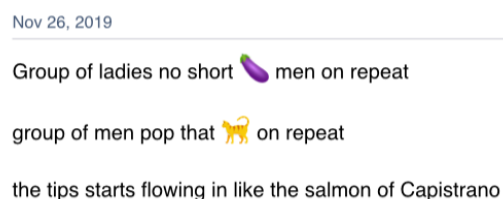


Fig. 7.88. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Classical music is a popular genre choice among Uber drivers for both heightening the experience of themselves and their passengers, and potentially as a method for increasing tips. In total, classical was the fifth most discussed type of music, with 113 mentions, behind rock (347), jazz (207), hip-hop (164), and country (132); of these 113 mentions, 93% concerned its positive effects on passengers and drivers, while six specifically linked playing classical music to an increase in tips. While OP in fig. 7.89 does not explicitly mention tips, rather that drivers should not ‘underestimate the power of classical music’, and that ‘many people appreciate it’, one reply (shown in fig. 7.90) does indeed claim that ‘I get most tips from when I play classical’.

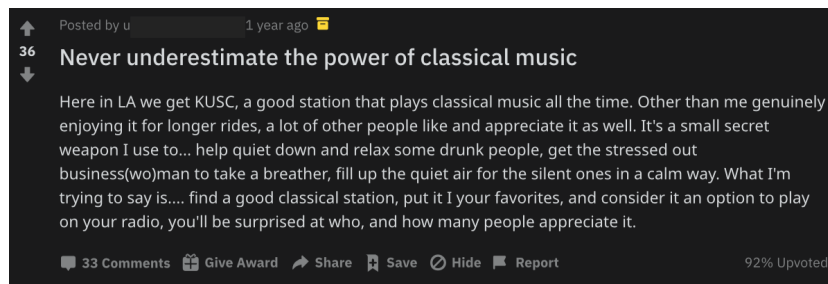


Fig. 7.89. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

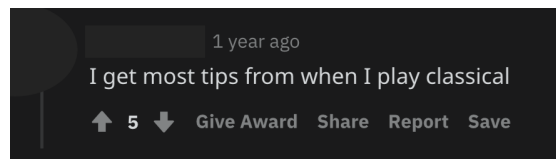


Fig. 7.90. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Receiving five upvotes, this comment was the third most popular in the Reddit thread, indicating some level of agreement or approval. Here, the driver suggests that not only do they receive tips due to the presence of classical music, but also that as a genre it is more successful at engendering positive monetary responses than any other. Although this is ultimately anecdotal evidence, other drivers on different forums agree: in fig. 7.91, for example, one driver on the UberPeople messageboard claims that ‘playing soft classical music always gets a tip [sic] couple of quid to a fiver at a time, Pax love it’. While a ‘couple of quid to a fiver’ may not seem like a significant tip, it is unclear what length of journeys the commenter is referring to; with the minimum fare in the UK being £2.75, tip percentages may be not dissimilar to those seen in fig. 7.81 and 7.84.



P.S

Playing soft classical music always gets a tip couple of quid to a fiver at a time, Pax love it..

Fig. 7.91. Screenshot from UberPeople.

As in fig. 7.86, a factor commonly mentioned in achieving tips from customers in relation to music taste is the interaction that the music brings between driver and passenger: in fig. 7.92, for example, the driver suggests that in addition to ‘complimenting their home town area’ they have ‘gotten many tips cuz of music pleased pax [sic] [...] the last one was \$20. ‘Time is Tight’ by Booker T & MGs.’ In fig. 7.93, the driver says that ‘music is vital’, and that ‘the bulk of my tips has been from pax who’ve like my music’. Attributing their success to ‘a massive playlist with everything from Billie Eilish to Sam Cooke’ on it, this individual says they ‘end up talking music with ~50% of my pax’, explaining that ‘it’s an easy way to create a personal connection and that’s really what seems to prompt people top tip’. The driver takes this approach ‘a step further’ in explaining that they sometimes specifically curate types of music (in this case R&B singer Audra Day) based on predictions of the customer’s mood, claiming that ‘I haven’t not gotten a tip yet for that little trick’.

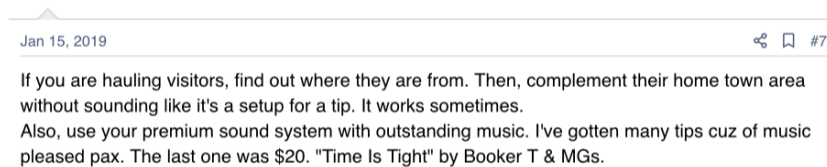


Fig. 7.92. Screenshot from UberPeople.

Music is vital. The bulk of my tips have been from pax who've liked my music. I have a massive playlist with everything from Billie Eilish to Sam Cooke. I end up talking music with ~50% of my pax. It's an easy way to create a personal connection and that's really what seems to prompt people to tip.

I'll also take it a step further - if I sense that someone's having a bad day, do I subtly tee up "Rise Up" by Audra Day to come on next? You're absolutely correct. I haven't not gotten a tip yet for that little trick.

Fig. 7.93. Screenshot from UberPeople.

It would appear then that multiple different genres of music are described as eliciting tips from passengers. In total, there were 212 comments concerning tips and music taste and/or genres, of which 42% directly linked the two in a positive way, compared to only 9% of comments which

argued explicitly that music choice had no impact on tips (the remaining comments were not specific).

As indicated in fig. 7.86, tips are not the only instantiation of positive experience effects linked to music taste for both passengers and drivers: in fig. 7.94, the driver states that ‘Latin jazz’ causes their passengers to ‘say it makes their ride feel ‘upscale’”:

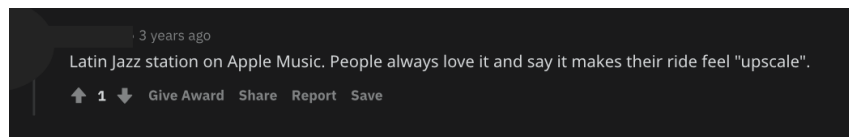


Fig. 7.94. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Such associations of jazz are also demonstrated in fig. 7.95, wherein the commenter argues that ‘most drivers miss the opportunity to control the situation with the radio’, and that ‘smooth jazz’ helps ‘to calm people down and make them less rowdy’, but also that it ‘makes them feel special, like they’re on a higher class ride’. The perceived link between ‘smooth jazz’ and ‘class’ are well-documented: Barber notes that smooth jazz is often used to please customers at ‘upscale food outlets’ (2010), while Early and Monson observe how it has ‘gained high esteem’ in the ‘business and art worlds as a sophisticated artistic expression’, frequently being used in ‘upscale business establishments, in museums and galleries, and in commercials promoting upscale products’ (2019: 9). The examples seen in fig. 7.94 and fig. 7.95 provide evidence of Uber drivers utilising these associations of music and taste to please their passengers. The driver in fig. 7.96 simply puts this more bluntly:

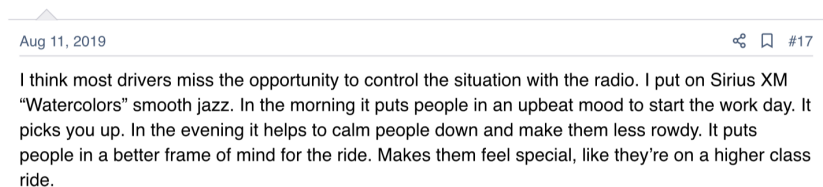


Fig. 7.95. Screenshot from UberPeople.

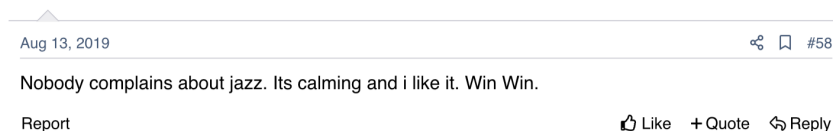


Fig. 7.96. Screenshot from UberPeople.

The second key way in which music taste plays a role in non-monetary positive experience is demonstrated in figs. 7.97-9: a broadening of workers' music taste is an effect described and appreciated by drivers. In fig. 7.97, the Uber worker asks 'if your car has an aux port, why not let your pax DJ?'. As well as 'perhaps even a slight chance of a tip', the main justification for this is not only that 'it's a 0 effort way to boost ratings', but also that it provides 'an opportunity to make a connection with the pax, and maybe even broaden your music taste':

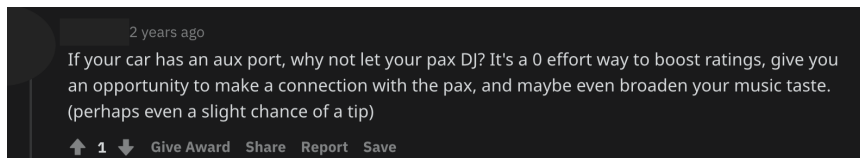


Fig. 7.97. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

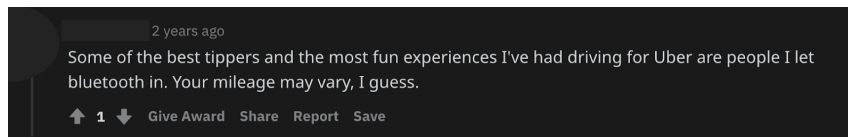


Fig. 7.98. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

I let them connect to bluetooth. I will sing along to their stuff as most of them are playing music i know / like. They are all surprised that i know it & get all excited.

Fig. 7.99. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

Another driver explains in fig. 7.98 that not only are 'some of the best tippers' those they 'let bluetooth in', but also that doing so has resulted in 'the most fun experiences I've had driving for Uber'. As well as potentially broadening their music taste (as in fig. 7.97), positive experiences are had due to shared music taste: in fig. 7.99, one driver says they 'will sing along to their stuff' to which 'they are all surprised [...] & get all excited'. The potential to explore an expansive music taste, as well as share connections based on this with passengers, is described as 'the best part of the job as far as I'm concerned', by the driver in fig. 7.100:

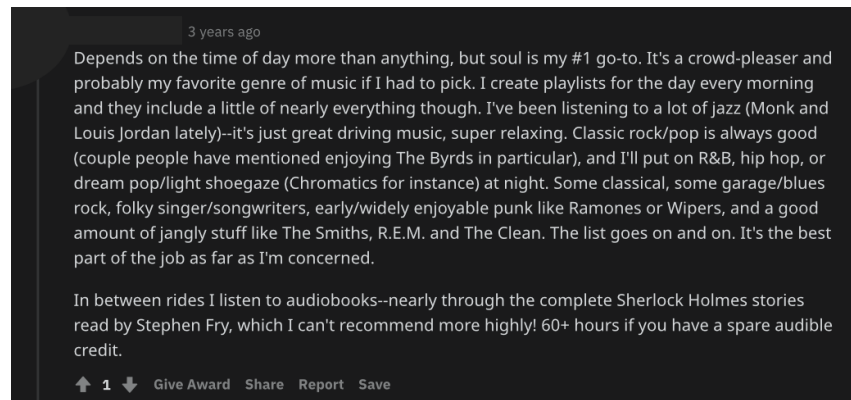


Fig. 7.100. Screenshot from r/UberDrivers.

In the latter examples, as well as figs. 7.79-86, a strong connection is made between music taste and positive experience, often including a monetary effect. The conclusions that can be drawn from these examples are necessarily limited, as anecdotal evidence from a variety of individual drivers cannot support the statement that any particular genre of music consistently elicits certain positive responses. Nonetheless, it is possible to perceive trends: as previously observed, the most commonly-mentioned genres were rock (347 references), jazz (207), hip-hop (164), country (132), and classical (113); in each of these cases, differing numbers of comments directly relate these genres to both positive experiences and an increase in tips. Interestingly, the order of most-commonly mentioned does not follow the percentage of comments which positively link the genre with these effects: in classical music this number was 42%, for jazz 39%, 30% for rock, and 22% and 19% for hip-hop and country respectively. Again, any conclusion must be qualified as these results do not represent a controlled scientific experiment, however it is certainly possible to conclude that jazz and classical music in particular are two genres well-associated with positive experience and tips, while the lesser effect of genres such as country and hip-hop might be in part due to their relatively polarising nature (Cooper 2018), particularly in the context of a 'customer service' environment.

#### iv. Taste as a centre of community building among truck drivers and postal workers

A key aspect of discussions of music taste apparent in the data is its role in community building: particularly evident in the cases of postal workers and truck drivers is the use of online digital platforms for sharing music taste and bonding over collective interests. Crucially, these online spaces act as community-building environments due to the importance of music listening in individuals' day-to-day lives, and provide an opportunity to explore and discuss this in a way which

might have previously been impossible. To this end, there are significant examples in both sectors of workers calling out to their community, asking what music others listen to while at work, and sharing and exploring their own tastes as easily as simply copying and pasting a link to a personal Spotify playlist. It is arguable that the community-building enabled by technology, music listening and shared taste can contribute to resistance in the sense that collectives are stronger in resisting control; certainly, community is a benefit to workers with regards to both social relations at work and outside of it. Understanding the following examples within the context of Born's 'musically imagined communities' that 'aggregate' individuals together allows for a better understanding of the ways in which taste might help build solidarity (2011: 378).

Posts encouraging members of the postal worker community to share their own music listening habits and tastes are among the most highly engaged-with threads in this specific case study (see figs. 7.101-3); the examples below each amassed over 60 comments, placing them in the top 5% of threads (out of a the total of 111). Some of these posts simply ask what others are listening to while working (figs. 7.102-3), while OP in fig. 25.1 suggests that music taste is a 'fun' topic of discussion. As is evidenced not simply by the number of comments, but also the examples in figs. 7.102-3, colleagues are often keen to share their taste: 'Bach, Beethoven, Rolling stones, AC/DC [...] it's endless', responds one postal worker in fig. 7.102, while another in fig. 7.103 suggests 'anything from Slipknot' to the Bee Gees.

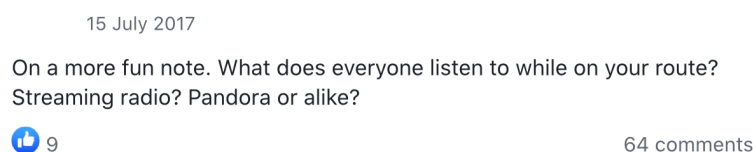


Fig. 7.101. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

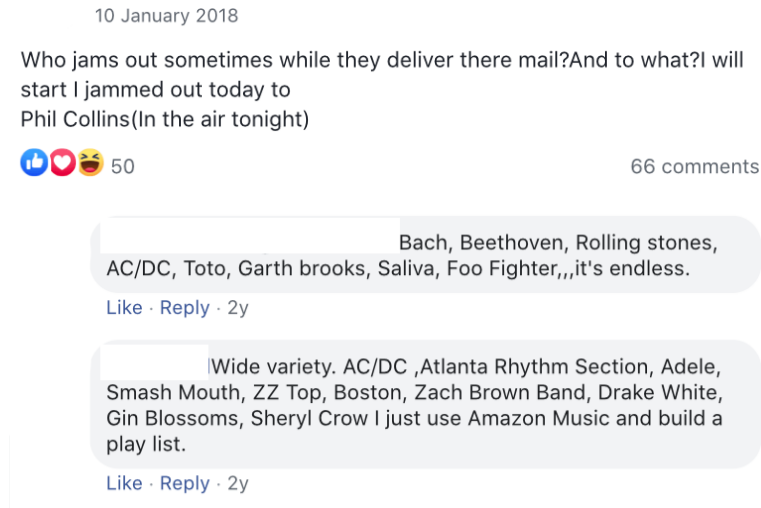


Fig. 7.102. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.



Fig. 7.103. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

What is evident in these examples is the enthusiasm with which postal workers in this case share their tastes; given the topic of the original posts, others clearly want to know about their differing tastes and music listening habits too. This culture of sharing and exploring taste is seen in fig. 7.104:

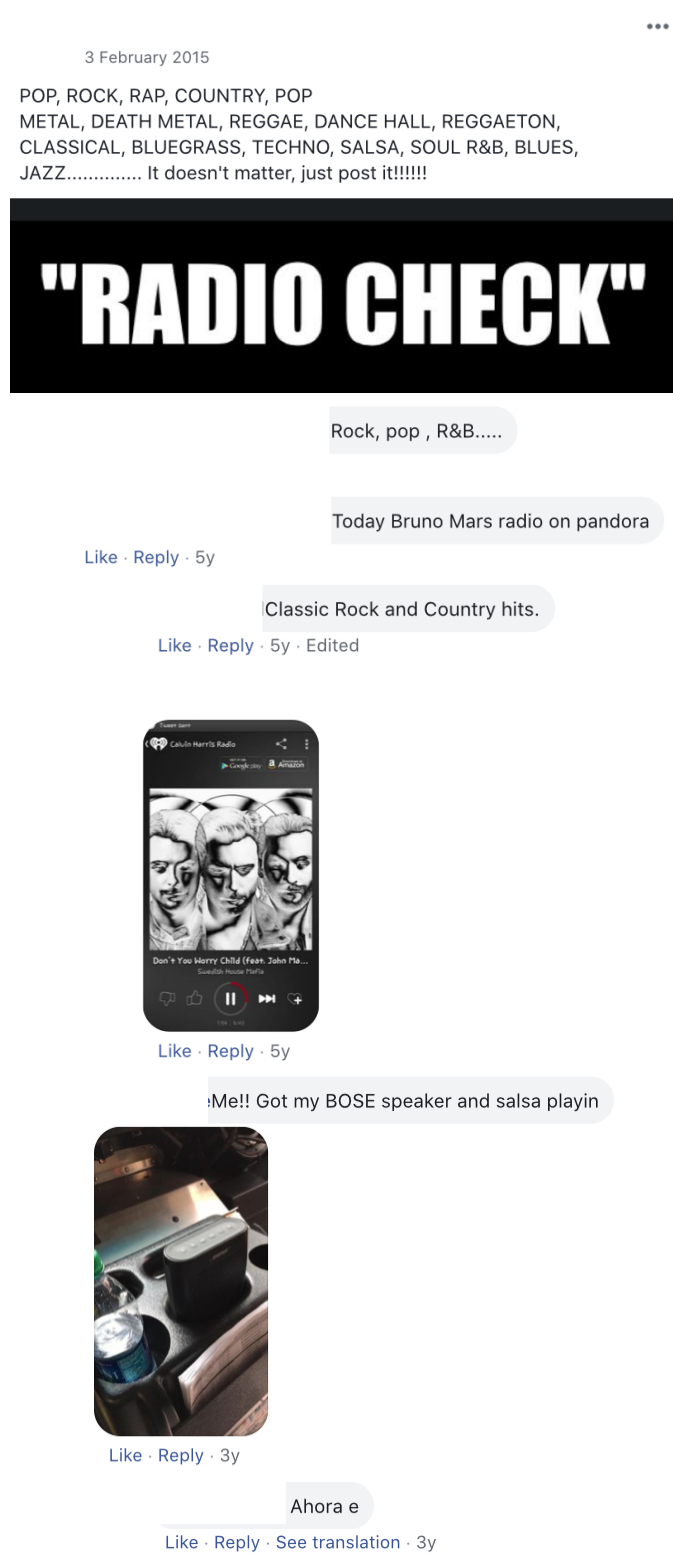


Fig. 7.104. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

In the thread above (fig. 7.104), which gained 39 comments, OP conducts a ‘radio check’, encouraging their colleagues to share what’s on their headphones. They offer a lengthy list of

potential music genres that one might favour, from pop to bluegrass, and add that ‘it doesn’t matter [which genre], just post it!!!!!!’. The majority of the comments were simple text replies, sharing their genre(s) or artist(s) of choice, while others included photos and screenshots: the fourth comment as seen in fig. 7.104 provides a screenshot of the individual’s Pandora in-phone app with the current song being played visible (in this case Swedish House Mafia’s ‘Don’t You Worry Child’. In the comment below this, another postal worker writes enthusiastically, ‘Me!! Got my BOSE speaker and salsa playin’, accompanied by a photo of their dashboard and said speaker, fitted in a cup-holder. The enthusiasm of fellow workers for sharing their own music tastes and listening habits is clear in these examples.

In the threads below, two postal workers put out a similar call for others to share their music tastes, albeit with a specific connection to bodily affect and rhythm: in fig. 7.105, OP asks ‘do you guys have a song that gets you in the groove when delivering mail?’, while in fig. 7.106, a Royal Mail worker titles their thread ‘Music For Pounding The Streets’, and asks ‘what music do you listen to on delivery that gets you moving faster’. In both these cases, other workers are similarly enthusiastic to share their listening habits, with 24 and 53 replies respectively. These two original posts elicit some astonishingly similar responses:

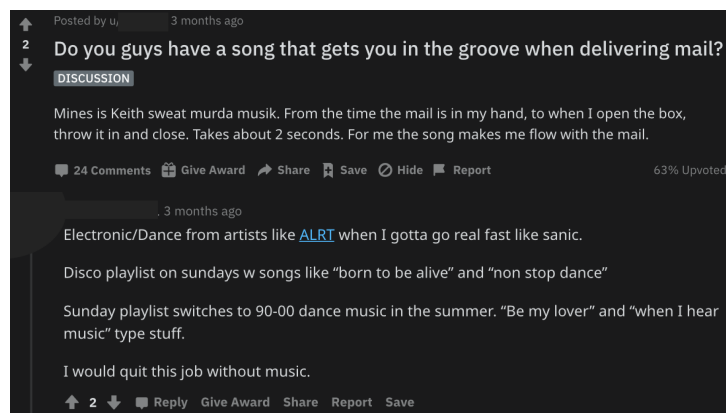


Fig. 7.105. Screenshot from r/USPS.

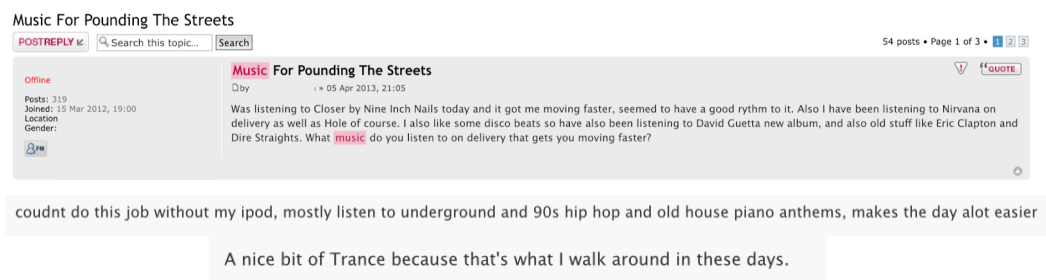


Fig. 7.106. Screenshot from RoyalMailChat.



'I would quit this job without music', states one commenter in fig. 7.105, and another in fig. 7.106 says 'couldn't do this job without my ipod', mostly listen to underground and 90s hip hop and old house piano anthems, makes the day alot [sic] easier. In these cases, not only do individual workers enthusiastically share their taste and discuss others, they also bond over the role their music listening plays in their life at work—and in making it bearable.

Some original posts within the case study of postal workers do not just encourage others to share their own personal tastes: they also seek directly to collect suggestions for playlists; in these examples, the culture of music sharing facilitated by digital platforms creates shared musical archives, conjuring up, in line with Georgina Born's theory of imagined communities (2011: 377), 'virtual collectivities and publics based on musical taste'.

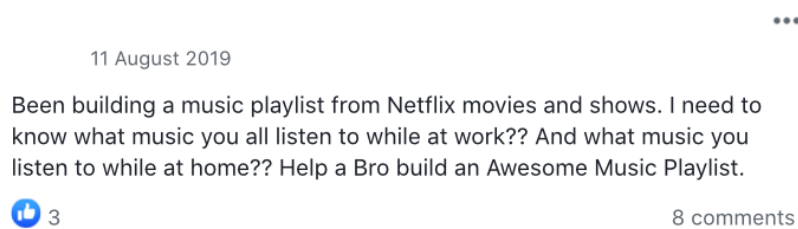


Fig. 7.107. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.



Fig. 7.108. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.



Fig. 7.109. Screenshot from Friends of USPS Facebook group.

In each of the examples above (figs. 7.107-8), postal workers encourage colleagues to contribute to a collectively-constructed 'playlist'. The threads amassed a total of between eight and 50 comments, and in the case of the Reddit thread (fig. 7.110), a 100% upvote rate, indicating approval of the discussion or idea. The discrepancy between the engagements of figs. 7.107 and 7.108 is substantial, particularly noting the similar content and date of both posts: it is possible that the post in fig. 7.108 gained 42 comments more because it contains less text—this generally trends toward higher engagement on Facebook (Heiss & Matthes 2021); Facebook also formats posts containing less text with a larger font size.

'I need to know what music you all listen to while at work??', asks the postal worker in fig. 7.107, requesting their community 'help a Bro build an Awesome Music Playlist'. Similarly, the worker in fig. 7.108 writes, 'I need a new playlist [...] What do you listen to?'. While in fig. 7.107 OP specifies that they have 'been building a music playlist from Netflix movies and shows', the latter does not request any particular genre or type of music. Both these posts gain multiple comments offering suggestions of everything from '70s and traditional country', to 'Indian trap music'. Most noteworthy aside from the enthusiasm with which co-workers share their music tastes is the discussions that ensue, resulting in bonding and community building around music. In response to the original post (in fig. 7.108), three different postal workers discuss certain preferred music genres: the first commenter says that OP should listen to 'Reggaeton [because] you don't need to understand the words to feel the rhythm', a statement which gained three 'likes' from other members of the group. A second worker writes in reply, 'I listen to afrodance', while another says 'oh I'll understand them' (referring to the lyrics in Reggaeton). The first commenter then replies again, 'you stay in NY, I know you hear that everywhere [musical notes emoji]'. Not only do workers gladly respond to OP's request for collective playlist-building, but a discussion has also arisen based on (to a greater-or-lesser extent shared) music taste. This example is characteristic of the tone of discussions under posts such as those in figs. 7.107-8 and fig. 7.110, with coworkers keen to share, and in some cases bond over, their music tastes.

Digital platforms such as Facebook (and in the examples below, Reddit) therefore offer spaces in which workers can discuss and create community around music taste. As Born notes, 'music seems to be ever more significant in its powers to generate imagined or virtual communities' (2011: 378), with taste often acting as a conduit of social aggregation (Baym & Ledbetter 2009: 408). Interestingly, Born suggests that 'musically imagined communities' are often 'irreducible to prior categories of social identity' (2011: 381), a phenomenon that can arguably be observed in fig. 7.109, wherein one of the commenters is non-Black while the others

are Black: in this case, a shared enjoyment of Reggaeton and ‘afrodance’ (or Afrobeats) engenders discussion and contribution to the thread (and possibly OP’s ‘new playlist’).

The space digital platforms provide for community-building and sharing musical tastes also depends on the technological developments that facilitate them: in the example below, bonding over music is enabled by simply sharing a Spotify link:

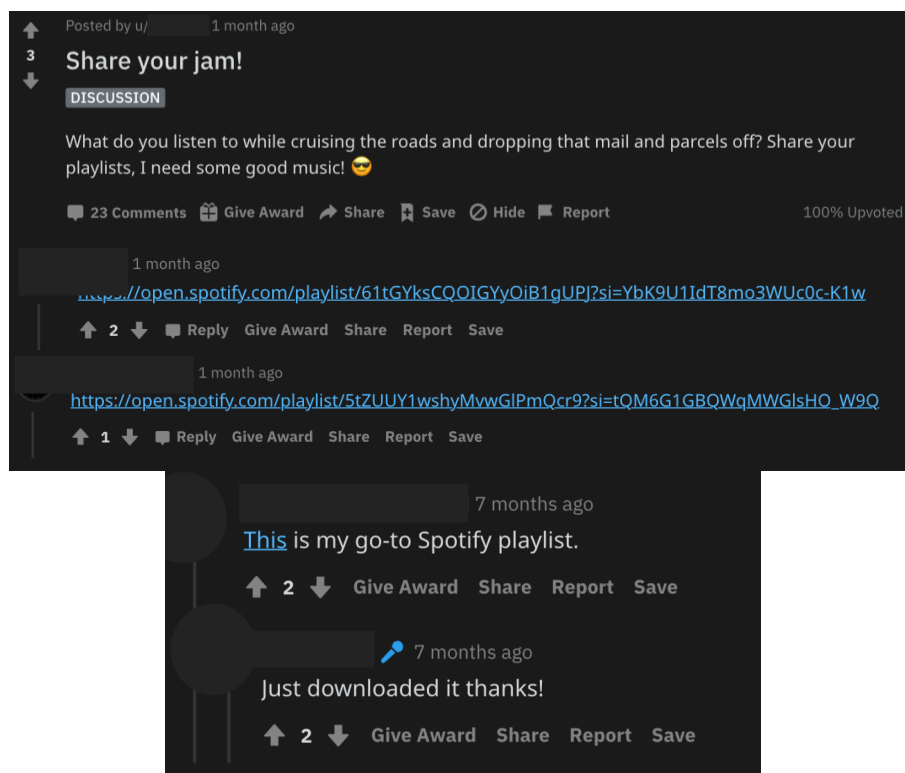


Fig. 7.110. Screenshot from r/USPS.

In fig. 7.110, OP asks their co-workers to ‘share your playlists, I need some good music!’. While other comments from the 23 this post received simply state specific songs, artists or genres, two individuals reply with links to personal Spotify playlists, clearly of their own tastes. Similarly, in response to a post about music listening habits, one postal worker comments in fig. 7.110, ‘This is my go-to Spotify playlist’, with the hyperlink embedded in the text of the reply, to which the OP responds ‘Just downloaded it thanks!’. In these examples, community-building and sharing of music tastes is made easy through digital platforms: in this case, Spotify playlist links, however many other examples occur, such as sharing screenshots of Pandora radio stations or similar (see fig. 7.104).

In some cases, sharing of music taste occurs in these digital spaces even where more traditional, or older, technology is common: in fig. 7.111, one worker responds to a post asking what music others listen to by stating, ‘I listen to either the local classic rock radio station, or the USB stick with a mixture of all my favourite tunes’. To this OP asks, ‘Can you share what’s on the [USB] stick?’; the worker replies, ‘I can’t name it all, but off the top of my head [...]’, continuing to list a variety of artists from Johnny Cash to Aerosmith. In this case, OP is evidently keen to explore others’ music tastes, and the individual replying is happy to share their listening habits in a way that is facilitated by the platform of Reddit, even though direct links are not being shared.



Fig. 7.111. Screenshot from r/USPS.

In the case of truck drivers, taste was also a key topic of discussion both generally (33 of 89 threads concerned music taste or genres), and specifically in reference to shared tastes and community building (53 comments in total). Some examples present a similar narrative to the role of taste sharing in postal workers, with truck drivers asking for genre, artist and song recommendations as well as discussing their own, while others (see figs. 7.116-17) related more directly to truck driving specifically, asking for their colleagues’ ‘driving anthems’ or ‘favourite trucking songs’, while two substantial threads were devoted in their entirety to community building centred around music taste based in memory (see fig. 7.118), asking ‘what song takes ye back?’.

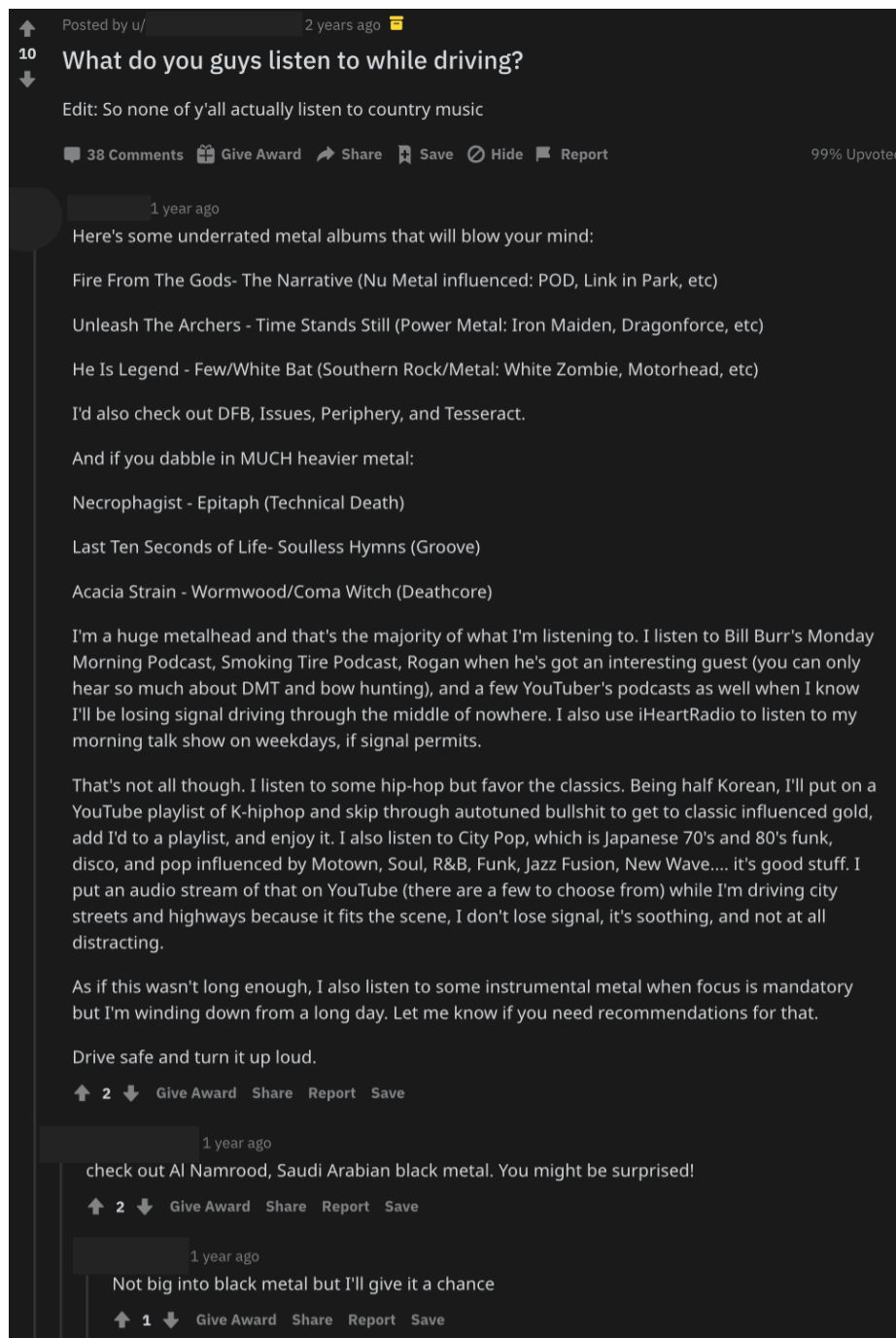


Fig. 7.112. Screenshot from r/Truckers.

The above example demonstrates similarities with discussions among postal workers (see figs. 7.102-6), and the high engagement on the post again demonstrates the relative importance of the topic among truck drivers. As with postal workers, the first (lengthy) comment shows their enthusiasm to share what can only be described as an extremely eclectic music taste, claiming that their choices would 'blow your mind'. In the thread, 31 different members of the SubReddit offer their suggestions, with the second reply saying 'check out Al Namrood, Saudi Arabian black

metal. You might be surprised!'. The original commenter responds: 'Not big into black metal but I'll give it a chance'. Not only are truckers keen to share their wide variety of music listening habits with others, they also engage in discussions of trying new music, building (online) community around taste. What characterises the discourse on these online platforms is this shared sense of community: in fig. 7.113, a thread titled, 'What CDs do you listen to in the cab?' received 51 responses, demonstrating once again a keenness to share workers' eclectic tastes, but also their friendly approach to other drivers. 'No one uses CDs anymore, grandad', one commenter replies with a tongue-in-cheek tone, continuing to say that their music listening 'depends what mood I'm in, don't mind a bit of country and western either'. 'I think the word eclectic covers my music library', contributes a third driver, adding the suggestion that 'some of the later infotainment systems don't take CDs !!'. These discussions take on a convivial tone which seems to help build a sense of online community—contributed to also by the format of sites such as TruckNet, Reddit, and UberPeople, which allow users to choose a username, customise their avatar, and add a identifying and often witty footer on their posts (seen redacted in fig. 7.113).



Fig. 7.113. Screenshot from TruckNet.

As is alluded to by the edit in fig. 7.112 ('so none of y'all actually listen to country music'), these threads also allow workers to 'aggregate' themselves, following Born (2011): in fig. 7.114, one truck driver reaches out to their community, asking 'Any Classical Music lovers?', and continuing to say, 'Just wondering if any other folk on here have the same interest in music'. In this example, the emphasis appears less on sharing and expanding music taste, and instead on seeking shared identity and community:

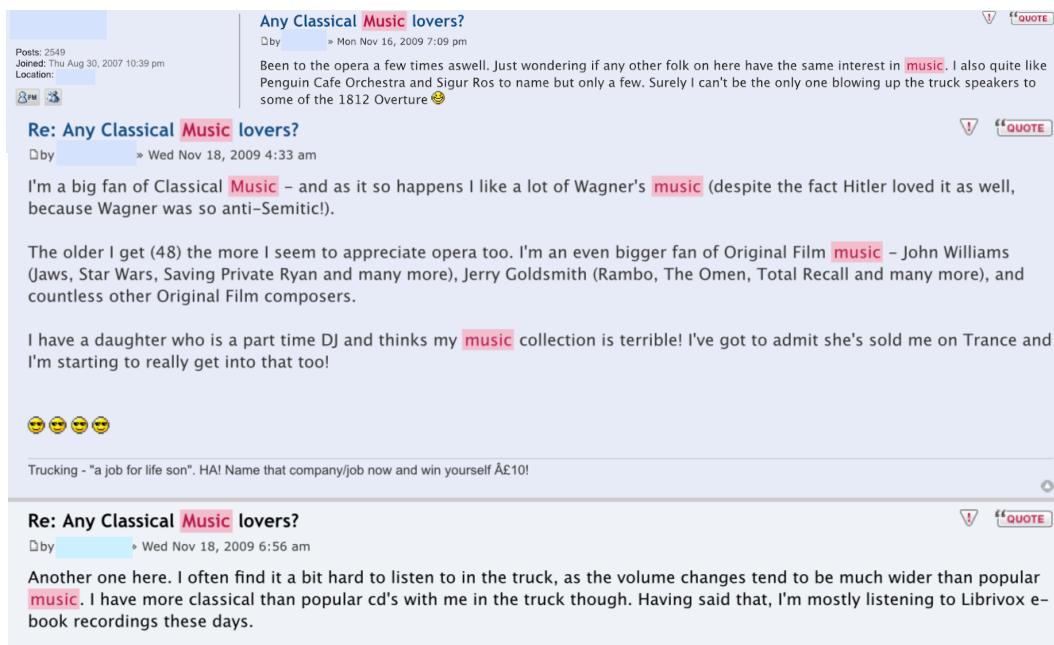


Fig. 7.114. Screenshot from TruckNet.

'I'm a big fan of Classical Music', responds one driver, while another writes, 'Another one here'. The first commenter appears to seek reassurance and community: 'I have a daughter who is a part time DJ and thinks my music collection is terrible!'; in the context of this thread, it is clear that multiple workers are looking for shared experiences and tastes, through which to build connections. Specifically on the subject of Classical music, it is interesting to note the third comment: 'the volume changes tend to be much wider than popular music', so they 'often find it a bit hard to listen to in the truck'; it is certainly true of much Classical music that volume intensities and equalisations tend to be more extreme than pop music, for example, and these observations as made by drivers themselves demonstrate both an awareness of how their own listening experiences are affected, as well as their ability to discuss these issues using online platforms.

Of course, not all 'community building' around music is based on shared taste, and the example below offers an instance unique within both this case study and among postal workers (thematically, though, it refers back to examples of taste disputes in Amazon warehouse workers [see for example figs. 7.101-8]), where difference in taste is observed, yet not necessarily viewed as a bad thing, and potentially even acting as a community-building aspect in and of itself:

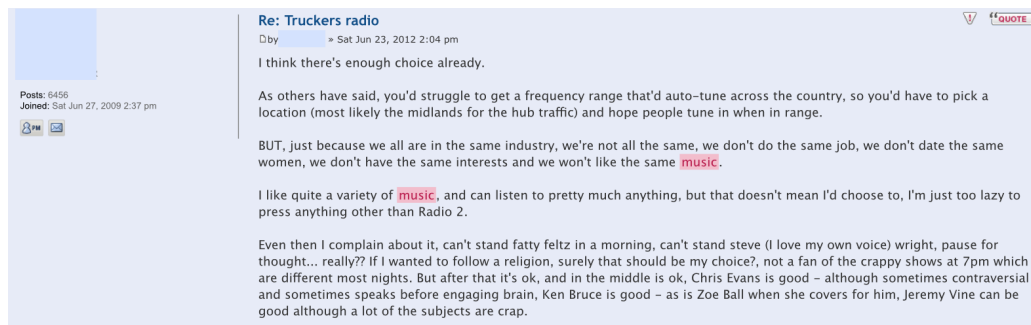


Fig. 7.115. Screenshot from TruckNet.

In fig. 7.115, one truck driver is responding to an original post suggesting the creation of a ‘Truckers radio’ as some kind of grassroots, trucker-run station specifically for themselves. A majority of the comments (74%) were either mildly enthusiastic or did not express a strong opinion on whether such a radio station would be a good idea, however the trucker in fig. 7.115 offers an interesting perspective: ‘just because we all are in the same industry, we’re not the same, we don’t do the same job, we don’t date the same women, we don’t have the same interests and we don’t like the same music’. Taken on its own, this appears to be a somewhat divisive statement, and certainly one not aimed at promoting shared interests or community. However, the driver writes that ‘I like quite a variety of music, and can listen to pretty much anything’, qualifying this with the fact that they might not ‘choose to’. The driver emphasises ‘choice’ above shared interests, however the tone of the comment is non-combative and suggests that in fact it is only natural that workers within the same community will not all have the ‘same interests’, like the same music (or ‘date the same women’). ‘I think there’s choice enough already’, they argue, suggesting that plurality of taste and interests is a good thing within their community.

A second common theme among truck drivers is the sharing of specific songs for trucking: ‘trucking anthems’, as seen in fig. 7.116. In a similar way to postal workers seeking to make playlists (see figs. 7.107-10), fig. 7.116 shows a truck driver asking for suggestions to build a collection of sorts: ‘I want to compile a list of UK drivers’ favourite trucking anthems - don’t necessarily have to be ABOUT trucking, can just be your favourite driving tunes - what do you put on when you need a boost?’ The difference in these examples is that the drivers appear not to be aiming to make a playlist on Spotify or similar streaming platform, but rather build a collaborative list of the group’s shared music tastes. The thread in fig. 7.116 also demonstrates the way in which digital platforms can act as community-building spaces, with music taste being an aggregator: ‘I’ve searched google [for music suggestions] but all the lists I’ve found are American’; through these messageboards,



then, relatively disparate groups are able to form communities and subcultures previously less widely accessible. Drivers share their suggestions for their ‘favourite trucking anthems’ in the replies (demonstrating a wide variety of musical genres), and friendly discussions are had: ‘Anything by slipknot or rammstein does it for me’, says one individual, to which another replies ‘Good choice [smiling emoji]’. In fig. 7.117, one driver offers their music taste: ‘Most Rammstein songs [...]’, to which another replies ‘All good choices [cheering emoticon] [...] My taste is very varied [...]’. Discussions such as these show how community can be found, and built, centred around music taste and listening habits; and how these digital platforms are central to such community-building.

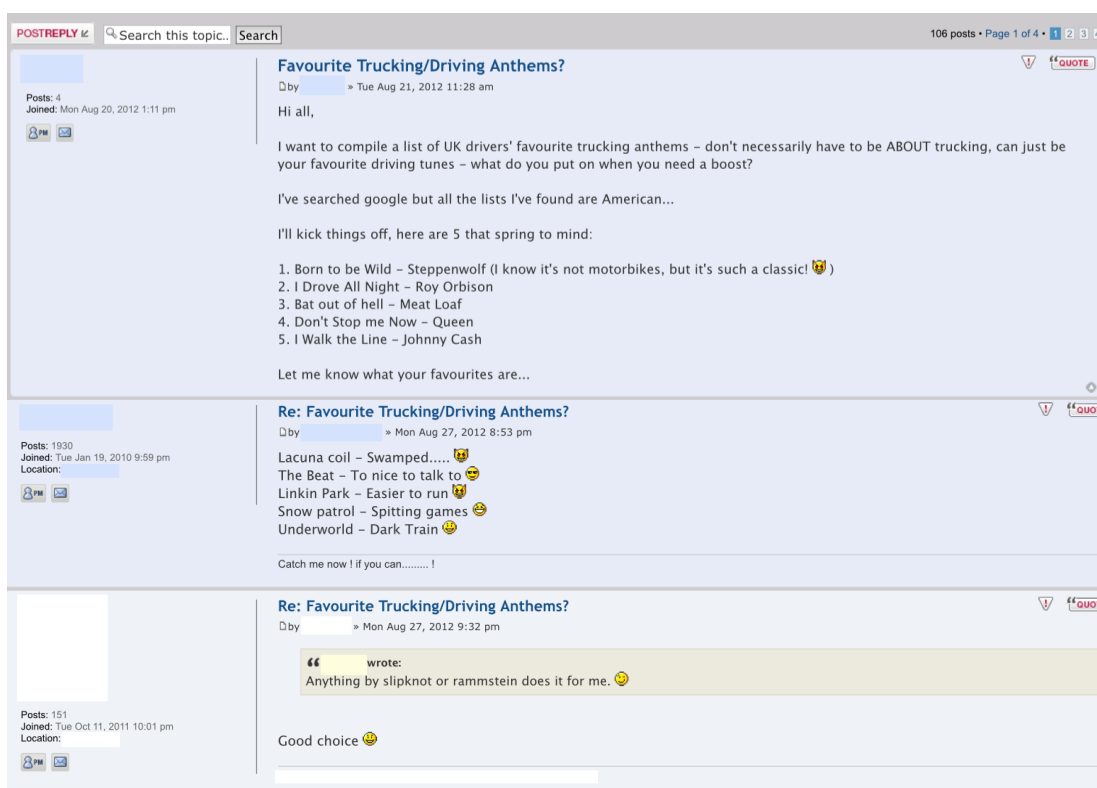


Fig. 7.116. Screenshot from TruckNet.

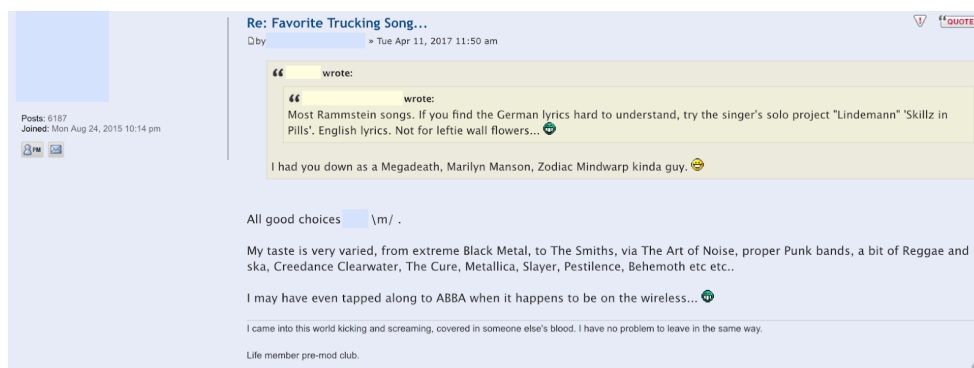


Fig. 7.117. Screenshot from TruckNet.

A third theme common among truck drivers which demonstrates the role in bonding that music taste plays is memory: two threads in the case study specifically refer to music taste memory, with example below (fig. 7.118) gaining 85 responses, placing it in the top 6% of posts in terms of engagement—clearly, the question of ‘what song takes ye back and why’ is a meaningful one for the community:

The screenshot shows a forum thread on TruckNet. The main thread is titled "What song takes ye back and why?" and was posted by a user on Monday, March 23, 2009, at 2:27 am. The thread has 86 posts and is on page 1 of 3. The original post asks for examples of songs that remind users of certain places and times. A user provides a list of songs: Chanson D'amour - Manhattan Transfer, Sir I can Boogie - Baccara, Mul Of Kintyre - Wings, Mamma Mia - ABBA, Kissin in a back row in a movie on a sat night - Drifters, Green Green Grass of Home - Tom Jones, and Velvet Mornings - Demis Roussos. Another user replies with a long, detailed story about a truck trip through Europe, mentioning Prague, the East German border, and various songs like John Denver, Simon and Garfunkel, and The Eagles. A third user replies with a shorter comment about a song that got them going now. A fourth user mentions Mike Oldfield's "Dark Side Of The Moon" and "Tubular Bell's 2".

Fig. 7.118. Screenshot from TruckNet.

In the thread of fig. 7.118, OP offers examples of music that ‘takes them back’—not all to relevant work memories and experiences, but some specifically refer to trucking—including pop-rock like ‘Velvet Mornings’ by Greek singer-songwriter Demis Roussos, which reminds them of ‘Headin Dussleldorf [sic] [...] load changed to Germany [...] here we come’. Many of the 85 responses are lengthy, averaging 255 words per post, in comparison to an average of less than 100 words overall per comment in this case study. Some also take impassioned tones otherwise less common in other threads about music listening: ‘you have got me going now [smiling emoji]’, comments one individual, while another writes that, ‘this could be a very long reply cos I’m a bit of a softy when it comes to music and memories’. As seen in fig. 7.118, multiple drivers keenly share their musical memories, often related specifically to work: ‘you can’t beat a bit of John Denver going over the [Mont] Blanc’, comments one driver, adding that ‘[The] Eagles, Abba, Stevie Wonder’s ‘Songs in the

key of life' all have me reminiscing [sic] about my driving days [...]'. This demonstrates not only the well-established strong connection between music and memory (Filene 2000; Cuddy & Duffin 2005; Juslin & Sakka 2019), but also, as Bithell notes, its role as a 'powerful tool for binding communities together in this way [through memory]' (2006: 8). Again, online platforms such as internet messageboards provide the space in which to bond and build connections and community, and music taste in these cases acts as a cultural aggregator.

Returning to the original research questions as set out at the beginning of this chapter one might ask: in what ways does shared music taste affect social relations, potentially build resistance and contribute to dignity or agency at work? In the above examples, what is clear is that both musical taste and genre, as well as the medium of digital platforms themselves, do indeed have 'the power to generate imagined or virtual communities' (Born 2011: 381); shared musical tastes and experiences are developed and 'aggregated' via these online message-boards and other social media, contributing to the 'constitution of social groups' and creation of shared identities (Drott 2011: 7). The extent to which these 'virtual communities' manifest themselves as any form of resistance or meaningful organising and affectation of social relations and control is unclear; yet, as Coulter notes (2014: 47), digital platforms do indeed 'foster community among coworkers', providing the potential to 'empower unions' (Frangi et al. 2019: 302). As Frangi et al. note, this 'assemblage of dispersed groups' that 'coalesce around specific issues' (in this case, music listening) may indeed be 'able to affect the attitudes and behaviours of others' (2019: 302).

It seems clear in this context, and considering the examples above, that digital platforms wherein musical experience and taste are shared and discussed represent fruitful ground for solidarity-building and collectivisation, as well as the potential to 'empower' organising. This potential, however, is in large parts unrealised. It would certainly benefit both the research field and workers themselves to investigate these potentialities facilitated by coalescence of musical taste.

## 8. Discussion

---

This chapter will discuss the findings, themes, and implications thereof, within the case studies. It will broadly be categorised in a similar way to the overall presentation of the data, considering the importance and implications of rules, surveillance, and ideology within ‘control’ and music at work, organised and non-organised resistance, and finally the effects of mood, emotion, affect, and taste on social relations as they relate to music listening at work. Across the case studies, two key themes will be discussed: first, the importance of music at work in relation to its ubiquity and congruent perceived lack of importance and insignificance—the ways music works in unseen ways in affecting and manifesting itself as control and resistance; and second, the importance of online space, as shown in the data, as communities and places wherein discussions occur that may affect ‘real life’ activity.

Subsequently, the limitations of the data and findings presented within these case studies will be considered; key questions that should be asked are those such as ‘how generalisable are these findings?’, and ‘what are the real-world impacts of discussions around music listening in the workplace, and how useful is this all for the workers themselves?’. Finally, I will explain how this research contributes to a burgeoning field that has significant implications and uses for both researchers and workers; my aim is not so much to stop a gap as it is to open up a gate for further inquiry.

### 8.1. Control: the importance of rules, surveillance, and ideology in music at work

Rules about music listening are evidently important to workers across the four case studies: in the case of Amazon warehouse workers, mentions of rules and policies occurred 500 times; in the case of postal workers there were 436 mentions; and 347 times and 52 times in the cases of Uber drivers and truck drivers respectively. Rules meant different things in each work environment. In the case of Amazon warehouse workers, for example, discussions of workplace music listening rules frequently headphones ‘not being allowed on the floor’ (fig. 4.3), or it being ‘against company policy’ (fig. 4.7); similarly, postal workers often described being told that ‘if they [management] catch you on the road with even just one bud in your ear you will be pulled off the road’ (fig. 4.22), and that ‘if we were caught using headphones while out on the street, we would be terminated’

(fig. 4.25). In both these two cases, workplace guidelines surrounding music listening can frequently be seen to take on what Wardell et al. define as ‘rigid work rules’ (1999: 11), including ‘bureaucratic’ and ‘official’ rules, whereby breaking them might result in significant negative action such as punishment or termination. By sharing personal examples and observations of such concrete effects (such as in fig. 4.9 and figs. 4.22-5), workers in both Amazon warehouses and postal jobs entrench the power of these rules. In many of these cases, online forum comment sections and threads act as advice-centres, whereby individual workers ask about listening to music, and others warn them of potential consequences. In this way, such ‘hard’ forms of control, as identified by Thompson and Harley (2007) allow power to be maintained over workers, particularly in work environments like these where supervision is more direct. The implications of music listening rules are likely to mean the continuing experience of control in the workplace where such conditions remain the same. As such, in sectors such as Amazon warehouse work, where, despite recent efforts toward unionisation becoming more commonplace (Kugler 2021: 19),<sup>20</sup> working conditions and the autonomy and power of the individual worker remain contested and precarious, the effect of direct music-listening rules as evidenced in the case studies will likely continue to be felt regardless of their inconsistent enforcement.

In the case of truck drivers and official ‘rules of the road’, many of which prevent them from listening to music in situations and circumstances they might otherwise like to (see figs. 4.36-8), these ‘hard’ forms of control are unlikely to ever change or be removed due to their origins in road safety. It appears, across the examples (see fig. 4.37 and fig. 4.40), that the fear that they might get caught and/or punished remains a significant influence on truck drivers and that, as in instances of Amazon warehouse workers and postal workers, the role of online forums as evidenced in this study is often one that contributes to such systems of control: prior to the existence of internet message-boards as digital platforms for the sharing of experiences and information, workers might simply have gone about their day listening to music in ways that now numerous colleagues respond to online posts telling them that this is not allowed or is illegal. The existence and awareness of these rules and their effect on the music listening of truck drivers is unlikely to change in any significant way, although the development of music listening technologies may improve their experiences, as alluded to in fig. 4.39: more vehicles are now being produced with inbuilt technologies such as Pandora radio, Spotify, other streaming apps and

---

<sup>20</sup> A recent campaign in Bessemer, AL, saw 1798 workers vote *against* unionisation, compared to 738 *for* (Kugler 2021: 19).

digital connections services, meaning that it may be easier to curate their music listening within the limit of workplace and legal rules.

What of the role of surveillance, and its implications for workers, on music listening? As Gill noted, workplace surveillance has become an ‘important object of study in recent years’ (2013: 22), with particularly enlightening facets being how companies use technology to track workers, their movements, speed, and productivity. To what extent was this element of control present within the data? How important (or otherwise) was it to the workers themselves? Is Braverman’s claim, discussed in chapter 2.3, that ‘technology is deployed by management to improve control over [...] workers’ (1974: 229) relevant to the case studies?

Certainly, in the case of Uber drivers, technologies of surveillance represent an important element of systems of control, as evidenced by many worker comments: with over 900 mentions of the word ‘ratings’, the centrality of reviews and algorithms in their working lives cannot be overstated. The effects of ratings and review systems with regards to music listening on drivers is also a very material one: in fig. 4.49, for example, the worker titles their post ‘I refuse aux cord to pax, rating goes down’; the driver expressed significant hopelessness and apathy, stating that ‘I’ll let it [the rating] hit rock bottom and then switch to yellow cab’. Although, as noted, Uber drivers globally continue to attempt collective organising in order to protect themselves from such negative employment effects, their position remains precarious: Uber ‘bought’ significant legislation in the US (‘Proposition 22’) by promising benefits and compensation to drivers if they supported the proposition to let the company continue to treat them as effectively ‘freelancers’ (Chen & Padin 2021), thereby withholding protections that should be afforded normal employees. In this context, drivers continue to be at the mercy of what Leidner describes as the ‘customer—worker—management triangle’ (1993: 197), wherein they will continue to depend on pleasing the passenger in order to fulfil their livelihood. This phenomenon, apparent in the data, is also characteristic of what Chan terms the ‘rendering of consumers as ‘middle managers’’, whereby ratings become ‘engines of anxiety’ and drivers’ ‘practices are motivated by the consciousness of being monitored’ (2019: 184). It is easy to see how such a conclusion might veer into the technologically deterministic realm, whereby workers are mere pawns in a dystopian science fiction; however it is Chan’s belief that drivers demonstrate a constrained sense of agency, and of ‘(self-)surveillance’ (2019: 188). As such, he argues, researchers should ‘consider how drivers might modify their reactions to changes in the platform so as to better understand the ramifications of platform surveillance’ (2019: 189). The data in chapter 6 provides ample examples of this.

Within such precarious conditions, the ramifications are once again arguably most serious in the case of minority workers: as Leong observed (2014: 77), given that systems of control and surveillance such as algorithms and rating technologies lend themselves to minority workers being less ‘well-rated than white drivers’, the added factors of music taste and listening habits contribute to further uncertainty. Many of the drivers remark on the difficulties of catering to passengers’ music tastes (see fig. 4.43), and if these decisions can affect their employment position, as evidence within this data suggests, then the ‘invisibility’ and ‘opaqueness’ of what Chander terms the ‘racist algorithm’ (2017: 1027) is particularly relevant and its implications for drivers certainly significant. Until workers are protected legally in their employment position, as is a particular point of uncertainty for Uber drivers, then they will be subject to potential discrimination: and, it appears, music is one possible aspect of this.

While surveillance methods within systems of control are often indirect, they also have physical manifestations—as in the case of Amazon warehouses, where metal detectors (or ‘scanners’) are a key topic of conversation (see figs. 4.55-61). In figs. 4.55 and 4.56 workers describe the security set-ups and their effects on Amazon employees, with the impact of such surveillance technologies appearing very similar to those found in environments like airports. This parallel to airport security is not merely a cursory one: as a part of the ‘war on terror’ following the 9/11 attacks, airport security effectively became what it is today—increasing ‘forms of security and surveillance’ (Adey 2009: 282), and increasingly complex and deliberately visible technologies. Many studies have shown that airport security measures and technologies are unnecessarily stringent and complex when faced with the reality of meaningful threats to safety (Stewart & Mueller 2013); the ultimate power of surveillance technologies is in deterrence. Part of this is making the subject (either the person travelling through airport security, or the Amazon warehouse worker) feel a sense of surveillance. Technologies like metal detectors can have a real effect on the subject, both physiologically and psychologically (Adey 2007: 275), causing potential stress and tension, even where someone is ‘innocent’ of any ‘crime’.

Such ‘material’ surveillance systems are therefore not merely a key topic of conversation among workers, as demonstrated in the case studies, but also continue to be an important influence on their daily lives at work: as long as working conditions remain the same in environments such as Amazon warehouses, an atmosphere of surveillance and feelings of being controlled, in relation to music listening, will likely persist. The importance here also lies in the fact that music exists as an integral aspect of such systems of control, and in discussions around them. As such, music listening can be said to have a reflexive relationship to work and employment

conditions: improving conditions at work will have an impact on music listening, but music itself also appears to play a significant role in such conditions. Music at work should therefore be considered as an important part of employment relations.

The final way in which control at work relates to music listening in the case studies is shown to be through workplace ideology: across the case studies, examples were found within the data that demonstrated three distinct but often overlapping ‘ideologies’—managerial ideology, common-sense ideology, and customer service ideology. In each case, prevailing beliefs about correct and proper behaviour regarding music listening align with an ideology that can simply be seen as controlling workers in their actions and autonomy. Managerial ideology is perhaps the ‘purest’ form of workplace ideology and was evident in many cases within the Amazon warehouse worker data: in fig. 4.64, one Amazon employee says ‘don’t need that shit [music] we are here to work’; this is a clear example of workers taking on managerial ideology (i.e. specifically against worker power, control, and autonomy), and spreading it as their own perspective among their colleagues. In this way, online forums can themselves become tools of managerial control<sup>21</sup>: if workers are sharing opinions that benefit employers and entrench control in the workplace, they are effectively working against their own best interests, assuming what Armstrong et al. define as ‘helper’ functions (1981: 82).

In the case of Uber drivers (and relevant to within the platformised labour of the ‘gig economy’), ‘customer service ideology’ appeared significant as a similarly controlling prevailing belief system that was often shared by workers and privileged customer sovereignty (Bishop et al. 2005). Customer service as a phrase appeared a total of 66 times in the case of Uber drivers, and was often a contentious topic resulting in lengthy and impassioned comments and threads from drivers, not all of whom shared the same perspective. While some (see fig. 4.94) argued for a customer service ideology, others (see fig. 4.95) saw those who acquiesced to passengers’ music requests as weak, and there was a fairly even split between those on both sides of the argument. What is made clear in these examples, however, is that Leidner’s ‘customer-worker-management triangle’ (1993: 197) is relevant for Uber drivers with regards to music listening and behaviours surrounding music at work: as long as Uber drivers’ status as workers and their employment position remains precarious and contested, ideologies of customer service will continue to be important for individuals as certain behavioural expectations persist and they depend on their

---

<sup>21</sup> More research would be required to ascertain the extent to which online forums can be said to *concretely* become tools of managerial control. It is the aim of this research to highlight such potential issues and encourage further investigation.



passengers for their livelihood. If proper benefits and protections were afforded to all Uber drivers as is common within other work sectors in the UK and US, then workers might not feel the need to bend to the will of the customer in such a way that affects their daily lives, including listening to whatever music they wish, without the threat of a negative review.

## **8.2. Resistance: the use of online spaces and technologies for resistance**

Resistance, as set out in Chapter 2, normatively refers in labour theory to the organised type: strikes, collective bargaining, organisation and other forms of collective action (Armstrong et al. 1981; Armstrong 1989; Taylor & Bain 2003; Thompson 2010). When one thinks of ‘worker resistance’ this usually brings to mind large, organised events in global labour history, from the UK miners’ strikes in the mid 1980s, to the South Korean automotive and shipbuilding strikes of the late 1990s, or depictions of picket line activity and unions in popular culture like *Made in Dagenham* (2010).

In designing this study and collecting the data, it was initially assumed that organised resistance in the workplace rarely centres music as a key factor. This would be a fair assumption: although collective bargaining with management and union activity is often focused around improving working conditions, this has traditionally centred around issues of pay, hours, time-off, breaks, and general safety etc. Music listening might even be considered something of a luxury. For this reason, there is little existing evidence of music being discussed or referred to as a key concern within or grounds for organised resistance. Ben Hamper’s *Tales From the Assembly Line* (1991), the autobiographical account of a General Motors plant worker in the 1980s, for example, contains many descriptions of mischievous behaviour related to music listening, from playing the ‘wrong songs’, to ‘blasting the radio’ in order to aggravate management, however never does it play a role in collective action.

It was therefore surprising to note the significance of the (relatively rare) instances of organised resistance centring around music listening that did occur, and that they ended up being shared and referred to frequently by workers (see figs. 5.5-7). As noted in chapter five, multiple postal workers across different social media platforms cited the extensive arbitration between the AFL-CIO and the USPS on the subject of music listening and headphone use as evidence when discussing rules, regulations, and resistance. This particular instance of organised resistance was important as the postal union stated their workers’ ‘right’ to listen to music in the workplace (or be compensated for unfair treatment to the sum of \$250 (see fig. 5.7). Although the arbitration

was only partially successful (the key sentence of the entire ruling was that the postal service determined music listening to be a ‘privilege, not a right’), it remains a key historical precedent and is referred to a total of twelve times in the data for this case study alone. The importance of this case as a precedent is evident in its continued use as evidence on issues of music listening across the online forums, and could be used in the future to build a case for further union activity and organising: given there is now extant evidence of the postal service admitting it was unfair for some managers to not allow drivers to listen to music, this might be used in future efforts. It does seem, however, that organised action centring around music listening in the workplace is becoming less common—and, as is clear in the case of Amazon warehouse workers (see figs. 5.1-4), management often seek ways of circumventing unionisation by providing alternatives (in this instance, ‘round tables’), wherein workers are given the rare opportunity to put issues, questions, and suggestions to their superiors. In both of these cases, however, it does seem that digital platforms like social media and online forums act as facilitators for potential collective action: in fig. 5.3, one Amazon worker asks ‘who is the lowest on the amazon totem pole that is able to change the music policy’, to which they received numerous comments and suggestions; here, social media acts as a space in which ‘pre’-organisation can occur, laying the groundwork for material action. Similarly, postal workers in various Facebook groups (see figs. 5.8-10) are keen to encourage unionisation and resistance, even where union activity remains relatively rare and disparate: ‘good luck and fight the good fight’, comments one worker in fig. 5.10 in response to a call of ‘UNION UP!’

As Coulter notes (2014: 47), digital platforms such as social media may help ‘foster community among coworkers’—this is certainly evident in fig. 5.10. ‘Technology, social media, and digital platforms can empower unions’, Frangi et al. suggest (2019: 302), as these online spaces can provide platforms to ‘promote an assemblage of dispersed groups and individuals who coalesce around specific issues’, and in some cases ‘they are able to affect the attitudes and behaviours of others online and beyond through the dissemination of information’. The conversation between two postal workers seen in fig. 5.10 represents an example of an exchange of information and advice which ultimately leads to coalescence and agreement centred around the power of organised resistance.

The importance of examples such as these for demonstrating the community-building potentiality of digital platforms should be qualified, however: workers may also ‘perceive online communities as a substitute for trade unions, thus contributing to countermobilization’ (Frangi et al. 2019). In other words, in a similar way to which Amazon’s ‘round table’ employee discussions

may help displace organised activity, workers may put energy into discussions on social media, while actual unionising is neglected. Of course, the global Covid-19 pandemic has added a further dynamic to this balance: as in-person activity continues to be limited, online spaces may take on an even more significant role in organising. However, as Cullinane and Murphy note (2021), unions are ‘not known hotbeds of technological adoption’, and many organisations continued throughout the pandemic with their ‘reliance on phone conversations and even socially distanced face-to-face conversations in open-air locations’ (2021: 20). Therefore, any conclusion on the importance of online organising and community-building in recent years must continue to be qualified.

Instead of endlessly debating and qualifying the utility of digital platforms for organised resistance though, it seems sensible to conclude that, in light of evidence presented in the data (see chapter 5.2), online spaces are those in which unionisation, and other forms of collective action, are discussed, encouraged, and begun. Their potential is, as Coulter notes (2014: 47), quite significant, and more attention ought to be paid by both researchers and those simply interested in advancing the position of the worker.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of resistance with regards to music listening evident in the data, however, was what I termed ‘non-organised resistance’: the ‘small acts of resistance’ that contribute to individuals’ dignity at work (Hodson 2001: 60). As Edwards and Wacjman note (2005:31), ‘new methods of [...] resistance’ in the workplace have become increasingly significant in ever-changing labour environments. I have hesitated to say ‘disorganised’ as an antonym of ‘organised’, as this has something of a negative connotation and implies lack of intent on the part of workers which is not reflective of reality (non-organised resistance is often very deliberate). The forms of non-organised resistance as defined by Hodson can be ‘both passive and active’, and include ‘withholding enthusiasm, avoiding work’, and ‘machine or social sabotage’ (2001: 60).

There is much to be said for the chaotic nature that these forms of resistance often entail. In the case of Taylor and Bain’s study on humour in the workplace (2003), a level of chaos was created from the workers’ ‘general mocking and cynicism about management’ and ‘belittling of superiors’ (2003: 1498). The atmosphere of chaos created by relatively non-organised resistance types was seen to ‘erode the defence of authority’ and contribute to the ‘undermining’ of management. By definition, management desires order and control, and chaos is essentially a polar opposite: therefore, just as Taylor and Bain argue in their study, a level of power and control can be reasserted by the workers, when chaos ensues. In this sense, even accounting for a lack of organised union activity and support, non-organised resistance will often benefit the worker and disrupt management.

It is in this context that the small acts of non-organised resistance demonstrated in the case studies gain their significance: in the case of Uber drivers (see figs. 6.14-27) where unionisation efforts and workers' employment positions are relatively weak, such examples of 'new methods of resistance' are central to improving to their work lives. In figs. 6.14-21, drivers demonstrate what Hodson identifies as 'withholding enthusiasm' (2001: 60), resisting customer authority and sovereignty simply by lying about the functionality of an aux cable or car stereo. Also evident in this case study is machine sabotage (see figs. 6.11-3), of which the examples may seem relatively minor in significance, but take on more relevance in the context of literature on non-organised resistance (Hodson 2001; Taylor & Bain 2003). Perhaps the most important thing to note is that, while the employment conditions for Uber drivers and other 'gig-economy' workers remain the same, small acts of non-organised resistance such as these will continue to be one of the few ways in which, following Hodson, dignity and autonomy at work is realised.

What Hodson describes as these 'countless small acts of resistance' against management are similarly evident in abundance in the case of Amazon warehouse workers (2001: 49). In a way similar to how Taylor and Bain view humour in the workplace as an example of 'undirected subversion' that 'resists' and 'sabotages' managerial ideology and control (2003: 1494), the various ways in which Amazon warehouse workers bypass security, sneak music technologies into the workplace where they are not allowed, and even create make-shift listening devices in the form of mobile 'boomboxes' and electronic scanners, can be seen through the lens of non-organised resistance (see figs. 6.28-52). Although these 'small acts of resistance' may seem trivial from an outside perspective, it is important to pay close attention to these 'strategies' through which workers may resist control (Hodson 2001:50).

A relatively minor yet important theme within this case study was the use of masks to disguise or hide music listening devices, resisting managerial control (see figs. 6.40-2). Once again, digital platforms such as Reddit forums become spaces in which workers share their tips: when discussing how to sneak in earbuds to their workplace, one Amazon worker comments, 'I got a mask that cover[s] my ears fully' to which another responds 'oh that's the move! I didn't even think of that!'. What is evident in these examples is not only the adaptability and resilience of workers in findings new ways to maintain their autonomy, but also the way in which changes in circumstances of work environments are often utilised for their advantage: 'since we have to wear masks I've bought the masks that pull up over my ears and then I can put one headphone in and not worry about a thing', commented one Amazon warehouse worker in fig. 6.42. Not only does this highlight the fast-changing nature of their working conditions and how they use this to their

advantage, it also indicates that future changes may continue to be used by workers to gain 'dignity at work'. It is therefore important for future research to pay close attention to the ways in which workers adapt to changing work environments, particularly in relation to music listening.

### **8.3. Musical experience: mood, affect, and taste in music as a tool for dignity at work**

In many examples across the case studies, workers allude to the positive effect of music listening on mood and in stimulating positive emotions and moods. Music helps workers 'chill out' (see figs. 7.3 and 7.12), makes them feel 'happy all day' (fig. 7.2), and 'cheers everyone up'. In one instance, an Amazon warehouse worker even shares an image describing music as 'my therapy' (fig. 7.1). The positive mood-affect of music also often benefits the worker in an indirect way, through its impact on others: in the case of Uber drivers, for example, 'soft jazz' and 'Muzak' are used to create a 'relaxing, comfortable' environment, and a 'soothing, chilled ambience' (fig. 7.17). Not only do the drivers themselves describe enjoying such music (see fig. 7.18), they also describe how it can help to 'calm people down and make them less rowy', thereby putting them 'in a better frame of mind for the ride', while also 'making them feel special, like they're on a higher class ride' (fig. 7.19). In this way, the effect on mood that music has is beneficial to the worker through its function as a passenger-pleaser, indirectly making their job easier and often more pleasurable.

As was briefly alluded to in Chapter 4, the positive mood-affect that music listening is shown to bring to the work environment could be said to play a role in resistance (and control): the ability to listen to their own music is often key to positive feelings, moods, emotions, and experiences for workers across each case study, and might be viewed within the lens of Hodson's 'dignity at work' (2001: 70). Hodson argues that to work and exist in an environment with dignity is a 'central concern for workers' (2001: 50), and therefore the researcher should pay close attention to all strategies utilised by workers to realise this. As evidenced in the examples from the case studies, music listening plays a key role in generating positive experiences, moods, and emotions, and therefore should be considered as a central figure in providing workers with the capacity for dignity.

A key aim of this study is to not simply provide contemporary evidence of the effects of music in enhancing and improving mood at work, as set out in existing music studies literature (Oldham et al. 1995; Hagen & Bryant 2003; Reybrouck 2004; Lesiuk 2005; Haake 2011; Hagen 2015), but rather to situate these examples within the context of critical work studies, asking not merely, as Haake does (2011: 116), how and why music 'helps you relax' and 'improves your mood' at work,

but what this means for the workers and field moving forward. This is why I believe the work of Hodson is so important as a lens through which to consider the data set out in this study: to view the 87% of Amazon warehouse workers or 93% of postal workers who discuss music listening having a positive effect on their mood and experience at work as merely functional is to ignore a good deal of its significance; such examples can be viewed, following Hodson, as ‘small acts of resistance’ (2001: 70), all of which play an important role not just in improving mood but also in enabling agency and autonomy in the workplace. Hesmondhalgh, in *Why Music Matters* (2013: 39), declares that ‘we need a sense of constrained agency’ in considering the material effect of music on people. In the data I believe I have identified one: workers finding ways to control their own music listening can provide positive effects and represent a sense of agency, even where they exist within a system in which they are otherwise subject to the power of management. In this way, strands are drawn from music studies and work studies in order to understand the reality of music at work; as Frith notes (2002: 46), functionalist accounts of music as a tool of individual identity-building, mood-improvement etc., such as those of DeNora (2000), often underestimate the power and control exerted over individuals (in this case workers), so in weaving together both strands of literature and theory I propose that its effect on mood is one area in which workers achieve a sense of ‘constrained agency’ through music listening.

Music as having a ‘bodily affect’ was a second key area of discussion within each case study. The significance of music listening on bodily movement, rhythm and energy is evident throughout, from Amazon warehouse workers feeling energised and dancing to music (fig. 7.44), to truck drivers listening to AC-DC to ‘keep them rocking through those lonely dark nights down the A-49’ (fig. 7.54). As alluded to by Korczynski, perhaps the key aspect of music’s bodily affect is how it ‘opens up space for agentic, rather than structural, movements’ (2016: 18),<sup>22</sup> allowing ‘workers’ bodies to resist being dominated by Taylorism’ (19). The drudgery and ceaseless structural flow of the work day is disrupted in many cases by music listening: as one Amazon warehouse worker says, certain music encourages them to ‘stop picking and start dancing’<sup>23</sup> (fig. 7.45). The political implications of the bodily affect of music listening in these cases are evident, in that they work against the prevailing systems and structures. Although from a functionalist perspective, many accounts of workers becoming ‘amped up’, syncing to the ‘rhythm of the job’,

---

<sup>22</sup> ‘Structural’ as used by Korczynski here refers to the ‘expected’ movements and behaviour within the confines of labour.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Picking’ in Amazon warehouses refers to standard stockroom activities like sorting, packing—and literally picking—items for customers.

and helping to ‘keep the pace up’ (figs. 7.49-51) may represent the opposite of resistance, fulfilling the requirements of labour more effectively, it is certainly clear that, as Korczynski notes, music plays a role in ‘informing the rhythm and pace of labour’ (2013: 317). Furthermore, it is evident in many examples that the workers themselves are not interested in improving productivity for the benefit of management, or making the company more successful, but simply rather, following Hodson (2001: 70), aiming toward dignity at work. Some workers even demonstrated a clear awareness of managerial interests as opposed to workers’ interests with regards to bodily affect and music listening: in fig. 7.48, one USPS worker writes, ‘Not to benefit management [...] I put on my headphones, ignore everyone (including my customers) and plow through it just to get done and go home’. The bodily affect of music in this case is a functional one for the worker, but it is a tool that enables them to cope and navigate their work day as they want. It would be easy from a more traditionalist LPT perspective to view these behaviours as merely part of systems of control, enabling management to increase productivity and leading to worker alienation. However by paying close attention to the voices of the workers themselves, we are able to observe their intentions and feelings; it may be in the interests of USPS management for a postal worker to complete their deliveries quickly with the aid of music listening, but the aim of the individual is often simply to retain their sanity and get through the day. In this sense, the bodily affect of music is an important tool for workers.

As long as workers remain in environments such as those in these case studies, the bodily affect of music at work will continue to be relevant, and its implications are, in a similar way to music’s effect on mood and emotions, manifested in a sense of ‘constrained agency’. It is important for the researcher to foreground the voices of the workers, observing how the musical experience impacts their work lives, as well as social relations, while recognising that they operate within a controlled environment: in the examples within this study, music is shown to have an effect on workers’ bodies, energy, rhythm, and even perception of time (see figs. 7.59-61), yet this is often merely a method of coping with the realities of capitalist labour. There remains, in the words of Armstrong (1989: 312), a ‘structured antagonism’ inherent within the capitalist system. What I hope is evident is that the voices and experiences of workers themselves should not be overlooked.

The final aspect of musical experience that was a key topic of discussion among workers was taste. With regards to music listening, taste appeared to play three roles in effecting social relations: first, music taste represented a site of disagreement at work in the case of Amazon warehouse workers, one that disrupted social dynamics and led to a diffraction of workers, with

individuals focused on their differences rather than on improving conditions for the collective; in the case of Uber drivers, musical taste acted as a tool for helping workers navigate their work life, and frequently being referenced as a way to improve tips and ratings; in the case of postal workers, truck drivers, and, to a lesser extent Amazon warehouse workers, music taste represented a site of community building and solidarity, with digital platforms and social media acting as conduits for this aggregation of disparate individuals around one shared topic—music.

In the case of Amazon warehouse workers, disagreements about music listening as evidenced in the data were frequently centred around taste (see figs. 7.63-70). Multiple workers expressed such a strong dislike of others' music that they would prefer to listen to no music than someone else's that they didn't enjoy (see fig. 7.68). Within these taste-disagreements were consistent value judgements: as Frith notes, 'aesthetic judgements are necessarily tangled up with ethical judgements' (2011: 19), thus disagreements about taste among Amazon workers could be seen to represent more fundamental disagreements about other people's behaviours, personalities, and cultures. One comment selected from those 49 discussing rap music, for example, wrote, 'You can't spell crap without rap [four crying laughing emojis]: both examples indicate that the judgement on music taste being made is not just aesthetic but also ethical. These discussions inevitably take on a racial aspect. Rap music retains strong historical associations with Blackness (Haynes 2012), and has previously been found to be disproportionately disliked by white people (Bryson 1996: 891)—whether or not this is still the case requires further research.<sup>24</sup> It is inadvisable, and arguably impossible, to view the comments such as those in figs. 7.63-6 outside of this context. Revisiting the argument that judgements on 'bad music' belie judgements on perceived 'bad behaviour', it is worth noting that these behaviours specified by Frith (violence, drugs etc.) are most commonly, still today, associated with 'traditionally Black' music like rap and R&B (Lauger and Densley 2018; Kartika and Rusdiarti 2020). Therefore, comments and disagreements on taste relating to music such as rap are likely reflective of racism in wider society.

What, then, are the implications of such disagreements around taste? First, it is likely that such disagreements—and therefore diffraction of solidarity and disruption of social dynamics—will continue in any environment and context, as musical taste remains incredibly subjective, as well as being highly emotive. As such one would expect to see similar beliefs and behaviours expressed in different work environments and in the future: wherever the human

---

<sup>24</sup> Research by Rentfrow et al. (2012) suggests that rap music is often still considered 'lowbrow' and 'aggressive' by a majority-white sample of Americans, indicating a persistently racialised reception.



aspect of labour remains, disagreements around taste, in particular music listening, will persist, and will continue to have an impact on social relations. It could also be argued that such issues of taste will continue to weaken solidarity in the face of managerial control, as individuals remain focussed on the nuances of personal likes and dislikes, as opposed to the interests of the collective and workers' rights.

In the case of Uber drivers, a unique application of musical taste in the data was seen to be in adapting to customer needs, and in money-making: in figs. 7.79-81 and 7.84-8, multiple Uber drivers recount the use of music choice to gain tips from passengers, with a variety of musical genres—notably classical, jazz, and pop—being consistently popular in this regard. Many drivers choose to tailor their music choices to their customers, in some cases explicitly 'profiling' in order to achieve the greatest effect and ideally to elicit the most money (see figs. 7.74-6). In these instances, multiple drivers even admitted to 'racially profiling' passengers, choosing particular music based on the passengers' appearance, leading to 'better tips' in some instances (fig. 7.73). The racial aspect of music taste profiling is an interesting and important one, however it is easy to lose sight of the overwhelming examples of drivers merely using music genre and choice as a tool for achieving the most 'successful ride': there are indeed entire threads dedicated to 'racial profiling' based on music taste, yet in reality this accounts for only a few out of tens of thousands of drivers. The prevailing interest (see fig. 7.81) seems to be 'songs that get you tips': it is in the interest of drivers to please customers in order to make the most money.

The implications of music taste in this instance is obvious: as evidenced in the data, it can be a very effective tool for eliciting tips and more successfully navigating work, and crucially for the worker this is a use of music listening unlikely to change or become less true. Some drivers suggest that some passengers bring their own headphones or other listening devices with them on trips, meaning that the worker's music choice is unlikely to have a material impact on ratings or tips, however only two individuals mention this—significantly fewer than those who recognise the potential of music taste.

The final aspect of taste—and one that relates closely to a key theme running throughout each case study—is its role in community building (specifically within truck driving and postal worker groups). Multiple threads were found to be dedicated to sharing music taste among postal workers (see figs. 7.101-111), and the same was the case for truck drivers, many of whom engaged in convivial conversations in which individuals demonstrated a desire to share and experience others' music tastes (see figs. 1-112-16). In each of these examples, music taste represented a way in which communities were—following Born (2011: 381)—'generated'. Clear examples of solidarity-building

are evident in many cases, wherein music taste plays a central role. The importance of technology in these cases was also obvious: in many examples (see fig. 7.110), workers share links to personal Spotify playlists amongst themselves, with the digital platforms and streaming services enabling important exchanges of information that would previously have been impossible among disparate individuals (the historical equivalent might be sending each other cassette tapes and mixtapes, a significantly less quick and easy approach). This final aspect of taste links directly to one of the two key themes running throughout each case study: the ways in which online spaces and digital platforms construct communities where these discussions can take place, and which may have ‘real life’ effects.

#### **8.4. Key theme I—online spaces and musical communities**

The role of digital platforms as online spaces in which discussions, debates, and community-building centred around music listening is a theme common across all the case studies: for Amazon warehouse workers, Facebook groups and SubReddits were spaces in which they could share tips for smuggling headphones through metal detectors, work out disagreements or shared music tastes, discuss the ways in which music listening help them navigate their work, and occasionally hint at collective action in the form of bringing requests for music to ‘round tables’; in the case of postal workers, the Facebook groups and SubReddits were used similarly to share individuals’ experiences and difficulties with music listening at work, debate the ideologies of management, professionalism, and customer service, as well as spread information on historical examples of collective union activity; for Uber drivers, online forums and SubReddits represented a space in which tips were often shared on how to gain tips, what music to play, as well as discussing employment issues such as ratings and ‘customer service ideology’; in the case of truck drivers, online forums were used to discuss proper music-listening ‘behaviour’ with regards to road-safety, tips on how to maximise enjoyment and survive work and long drives, and frequently as spaces in which community-building occurred based around music taste, shared interests, and memories (often elicited by music listening).

Returning to Born and her concept of ‘musically imagined communities’ (2011), it is evident in the data that this is highly applicable to the case studies, and the digital platforms from which the source material is drawn. Music has, as Born notes, a particularly strong power ‘to generate imagined or virtual communities’ (2011: 381). From the outset, then, it seemed obvious that gathering data from online communities such as Facebook groups and SubReddits—recognised by

Weslowski as ‘fruitful sites for research’ (2014: 3)—would provide excellent material for analysis on the subject of music listening. What was made clear through the collection and analysis of the data, however, was quite how important these online spaces were as both key centres of communication, as well as presenting novel opportunities for community-building. While, as Langer and Beckman point out, online spaces for workers have begun to ‘replace traditional word-of-mouth’ in terms of both ‘advice-seeking’ and ‘genuine communication’ (2005: 191), it also presents possibilities for sharing of knowledge otherwise impossible: for example, Uber drivers shared links to their personal Spotify playlists in an answer to the question of what music is best to listen to while driving; while in the case of Amazon warehouse workers, individuals used Facebook groups to share links to particular earbuds, headphones, and other listening devices that would help them get through security undetected. In these cases, digital platforms become fonts of shared knowledge and information exchange, enabling workers to affect their music listening habits and thus social relations at work. Across all the case studies, but particularly evident on the truck driver forums, was the importance of online spaces for pooling music tastes, and ultimately building community. In many examples, workers are keen to share and listen to others’ music tastes: in this way, the digital platforms act exactly as theorised by Born, in ‘aggregating [...] listeners into virtual collectivities [...] based on music and other identifications’ (2011: 381).

The implications of online spaces and their role in community-building with regards to music listening reside not just in evidencing and building on existing theoretical projects, but also in what this means for the workers: particularly in the cases of Amazon warehouse and postal workers, there are examples of discussions around music leading towards material action, be this through actual unionisation, or otherwise. As Frangi et al. note, ‘technology, social media, and digital platforms can empower unions’ (2019: 302), and music can be an aggregating factor in this, even if currently there exists only potentialities and not yet real action.

### **8.5. Key theme II—ubiquitous music and power**

The second key theme spanning each case study is the ubiquity of music as way both of discussing, and affecting social relations. As Cloonan and Johnson note (2008: 190), there has been a ‘general refusal’ to ‘take [music] seriously’ as a factor in control, resistance and power; while music listening—and particularly certain genres—are continually ‘trivialised’, many accounts of social relations at work miss crucial discussions, and its importance is often underestimated in

everyday discussions. In other words, while music continues to be an area of perceived unimportance, it may continue to act in key ways, unnoticed.

Jacques Attali, after Adorno (1941), was one of the earliest scholars to consider music as a central aspect of power (1985 [1977]): in his writing, Attali suggests that music's power is partly in its ability to 'make people forget' (20), to not notice its existence and let it work its magic without scrutiny and awareness. Scholars have subsequently written of the power of music in its ubiquitousness (Keller et al. 2011; Keller et al. 2019), with the broad conclusion that when we are not really listening, or noticing music, its effects are most powerful (Quiñones et al., 2016).

The ubiquity of music, and the power it often derives from this, is evident across the case studies: in the case of Uber drivers, music's 'silent' power is identified by many drivers in its effects on passengers—in fig. 19.24, for example, one tells their colleagues to 'never underestimate the power of classical music', describing it as 'a small secret weapon' that helps control passengers who may be too loud or rowdy, and create a more pleasurable experience for all, potentially resulting in an increase in tips. While many scholars have noted the way in which the ubiquity of music can be used to enact power and social violence (Johnson & Cloonan 2008; Hirsch 2012), in this instance its unnoticed presence is beneficial to the workers themselves, and often to all parties. While in the instances described by Johnson and Cloonan (2008), music going unnoticed as a 'weapon' that is 'not morally neutral' is often a negative thing as utilised by governments and authorities for social control (194), as evidenced in the data of this case study, its ubiquity can be in many ways a tool of resistance, of helping Uber drivers navigate their work life.

There is also a sense in which the perceived insignificance of music, combined with its ubiquity, benefits the worker in cases such as postal and Amazon warehouse work: many examples are evident in the data of workers depending on a 'don't ask, don't tell' attitude toward music listening in the workplace in order to ensure dignity at work. In figs. 6.53-8, postal workers describe the ways in which music listening often goes unnoticed by management, acting as something of an underground tool of non-organised resistance. With workers across the case studies describing their dependence on music listening in order to survive the day, the fact that it is possible to get away with misbehaving in this way, with management often not considering music listening as a particularly important issue or subversive tool, actually highlights its importance.

So, while in historical examples—such as BBC radio's Music While You Work broadcasts in factories, as described by Korczynski (2013: 205)—the ubiquity of music can be seen to have had widely negative, controlling effects on the workforce, examples in these contemporary case

studies demonstrate ways in which the unnoticed nature of music belies a certain power in favour of the worker: while it continues to be trivialised (Cloonan & Johnson 2008: 190), music may represent an important tool for workers in enacting resistance and maintaining dignity at work.

Ironically, encouraging researchers and the wider public to pay closer attention to the power of music at work may end up threatening its utilisation by workers. As Haake notes in her study of music listening among office workers, ‘managers can benefit from recognising the importance’ of these studies, and in her case many were indeed ‘very interested’ in her results (2011: 122), with a view to improving productivity; therefore in order to negate future nefarious uses and implications derived from studies such as this one, it is crucial to centre the voices of the workers themselves.

## 8.6. Limitations

A significant limitation of this study is, ironically, its relatively unique and contemporary nature: not only is the world of work constantly evolving, but also the ways people communicate, and in particular platformised communication (the centre of my data) make it difficult to draw definite and material conclusions. Although, as Frangi et al. note, ‘technology, social media, and digital platforms can empower unions’ (2019: 302), it is not possible to draw as concrete and generalisable conclusions as one might hope. Furthermore, the relatively small pool of research that exists at the crossroads of music and work (primarily Korczynski 2003, 2007, 2013, 2014, 2020), and Haake (2011, 2015), means that this study should perhaps be best seen as adding to a growing body of knowledge and evidence, as opposed to making broad conclusions.

I have written in the previous section, as well as evidencing this in the empirical data, on how music listening and online platforms have the potential for resistance, and use toward organising and unionising. The realities of this, however, are uncertain and certainly ever-changing. A part of the issue here is, as Johnson and Cloonan note (2008: 190), the ‘trivialization’ of music as a key and active factor in social relations, and also that it is often easier to neatly define the negative powers of music, as opposed to its liberatory potential: Johnson and Cloonan (2008), and Hirsch (2012) both present empirical examples of governments and authorities explicitly utilising music for morally ‘bad’ purposes, while even in Bull’s 2007 account of iPod use (including in offices), he primarily found listening technologies such as headphones to be used in exerting power, by managers over workers, as well as ‘privatising’ soundscapes; in the latter case, not only does ‘privatisation’ retain a negative connotation, but the possibilities for

using iPods, headphones, and over devices for liberatory effects are not considered—for example, one might point to the potential use of noise-cancelling headphones as ‘coping’ mechanisms and tools for navigating daily life among autistic individuals (Ikuta et al. 2016).

Regardless, it remains true that much of my interpretation of the data in this study is somewhat speculative: there are cases of workers rebelling against rules, using music listening technologies to resist managerial control etc., however in many instances I simply observe that, for example, online spaces may be used for organising, or that there is potential for greater community-building or unionisation, coalescing around the issue of music. I ultimately consider this to be an unavoidable limitation of this type of study, in the context of the existing literature, however this is mitigated by the suggestions I offer future researchers, in the subsequent section.

A second limitation of this study was primarily methodological: as explained in chapter three, an in-person case study was arranged pre-pandemic (Covid19), and the inclusion of this on-the-ground observation and interviews with workers would have provided another layer to my research, potentially enabling further conclusions. Unfortunately for my research, this omission was unavoidable (and mitigated through the inclusion of one further online case study), due to the closing of many workplaces. There are, as Thorsen notes (1985, 1989), significant benefits to utilising a multi-method approach, with in-person research and observation being important for understanding what Grazian describes as ‘the consumption of music in real time and space’ (2004: 206). While this remains a key limitation of this study, it is important to note the strengths and flexibility of this research and its methods: as Hodson writes, ‘the systematic analysis of written records’, (which would logically include internet comments), ‘has the potential to combine the strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches’ (2001: 53); I believe this has been achieved regardless of the (often unavoidable) limitations encountered in the process.

A third limitation of this study and its findings is the overall similarity of much of the data across the case studies. The work environments selected were done so because they represented a relatively wide variety of job types, as well as each having a similarly large online data pool; to an extent, these case studies are representative of much contemporary employment, with platformised labour such as Uber being increasingly prevalent, and Amazon warehouses continuing to manufacture (and terminate) job placements worldwide. It became apparent through the collecting and analysing of the data, however, that many similar behaviours, beliefs, and phenomena were being described across the case studies: for example, the approaches to workplace rules regarding music listening among postal workers and Amazon warehouse workers was broadly similar, as well as many of the descriptions of music being used to improve driving

experience at work, among postal workers, Uber drivers and truck drivers. These similarities certainly allow for useful links and conclusions to be drawn, however they are also symptomatic of this limitation I identify: for example, many unique and noteworthy social dynamics occur in the research of Haake on office workers (2011), and this study was not able to consider the contemporary nature of this in the context of my critical and theoretical perspective. As suggested below, these remain important and relatively untapped sites of research.

A final limitation of my analysis of the data and any themes and conclusions identified therein, is the potential for its misuse by management or authority: as Haake notes in her research, management were ‘very interested’ in the results of her study (2011: 122), with evidence and conclusions offering the chance for more effective measures to be taken by them to exert control and power over workers. It has been my explicit goal in this study to discuss how control is felt by workers through music, and how they may enact resistance therein, from a strongly critical perspective. Therefore, in collecting data on, and describing the ways in which many workers seek to resist managerial control, I may be providing ammunition toward the opposite objective: for example, in observing how some Amazon workers use their ‘picking’ scanners to listen to music where they aren’t allowed conventional listening devices, I am potentially identifying a target for management to focus on. It may even be counterproductive for me to discuss this as a limitation, simply drawing more attention to the issue. The reality is, however, that this is all readily-available information—both this research and the data contained herein. It is therefore the researcher’s responsibility to direct its use as they see most effectively: to this end, I do not propose any sentiment similar to Haake’s claim that ‘managers can benefit from recognising the importance’ of music in the workplace (2011: 122); instead I implore those with an interest in music’s potential as a liberatory tool of resistance to pay close attention to the data, and continue to do my personal best to foreground the voice of the workers, and object to the intervention and power of management and authority.

## **8.7. The future of the field**

To return to the quote that opened the literature review of this study: ‘academics will do a considerable disservice to both the literal and metaphorical voice of the workforce [...] if they continue to avoid addressing [...] the relationship between music and work’ (Korczynski 2013: 328-331); precisely because there has been relatively little interest in the intersection between critical music studies and work studies, there exists significant, and important opportunities for

researchers and future projects. This gap in literature exists not only because of the historical disinterest the disciplines have taken in one another, but also in the ‘trivialization’ of music which, as Cloonan and Johnson note, gives rise to a ‘deeply embedded ideology that shadows popular music studies by placing it on the defensive’ (2008: 190): work studies and other traditionally non-creative disciplines may have previously failed to consider the important role music plays, however music studies itself is as much to blame in its disciplinary isolationism. There has, certainly, however, been a ‘general refusal of the media [and public] to take [music] seriously’ (Cloonan & Johnson 2008: 190). In similar ways to how Taylor and Bain treated humour in the workplace as a lens through which to view control and resistance (2003), music should be used by sociologists of work as a tool through which to better understand social relations at work. Music should be taken more seriously among those outside of critical music studies, and conversely, the latter ought to be less defensive and open to interdisciplinary investigation. Korczynski’s work, for example, is excellent at linking work studies and critical music studies from a historical perspective, but contemporary research is much needed. If anything, I hope that the data within this study provides effective evidence of the ubiquity and relevance of music listening in workers’ everyday lives.

As alluded to in the previous section, I also believe it will prove fruitful to consider music listening and its effects in a wider variety of workplace settings than was possible within this study. While an effective and relatively representative sample was selected for the data used in this research, there are certainly sectors that are yet untapped in this regard: for example, music listening among office workers, as in the writing of Haake (2011), should be considered from the perspective set out in this study, utilising both critical music studies and work studies literature. It might also be prudent to consider the effects of music listening among those who ‘work from home’, a phenomenon that mushroomed due to the Covid19 pandemic—and research shows is likely to continue for a large proportion of the workforce ‘post pandemic’ (Bick 2020: 3). The implications of working from home (as opposed to in an office or similar) for music listening might seem obvious: less managerial supervision means less direct control and more freedom, in this case to choose music. The reality of this is likely to be quite different, and vary significantly among different types of workers, while surveillance technologies do not simply disappear: there are still many tools management use to monitor productivity and work, meaning that it may not be so clearly correlated; furthermore, studies continue to show that bringing work into the home does not bring with it more freedom, and certainly not fewer feelings of responsibility or even guilt (Hochschild 1997; Dey et al. 2020).



Finally, as noted in the previous section, researchers would benefit from combining research methods and engaging in direct observation and interviews or informal discussions with workers, both as a way of substantiating the data, and also of foregrounding the voices of the workers. It is important to highlight and pay close attention to the ways in which 'small acts of resistance' may play an important role in creating 'dignity at work' (Hodson 2001: 49), and improving the lives of workers. An increased willingness to engage in interdisciplinary work from both a music and work perspective would begin to enable this. It is my hope that the novel use of internet data in this study to this end will provide context and rich material with which to combine further research.

## 9. Conclusions

---

**‘My car, my music. You’re paying for a safe ride from point A to point B. Music selection requires you to pay more in cash’**

-Uber driver, fig. 3.8

**‘Way to go guys...keep on snitching out your facilities...then get your music taken away too’**

-Amazon warehouse worker, fig. 5.1

**‘Who is lowest on the amazon totem pole that is able to change the music policy?’**

-Amazon warehouse worker, fig. 7.3

**‘They got me with my headphones on while I was delivering so they sent me home’**

-USPS worker, fig. 7.6

Each of the sentiments expressed by the workers in the quotes above demonstrate different aspects of, and attitudes toward, control, resistance, and music listening in the workplace. Across a variety of work environments, music is shown in this study to have important, and often unseen, consequences with regards to employment relations. The Uber driver in fig. 4.31 expresses a territorial and controlling approach, asserting that passengers ought to ‘pay more’ if they want to choose what music is playing in the car. In fig. 4.82, an Amazon warehouse worker blames their colleagues for managerial rules about music listening, while in fig. 5.9, a postal worker recounts the draconian effects of music listening policies and direct control at work. In fig. 5.3, an Amazon warehouse worker highlights how music listening can represent an issue around which organised resistance can occur.

What is clear in each of these examples is that music is important—and yet it is an aspect of our everyday lives that is both frequently ignored from a work studies perspective, and rarely considered from an employment relations perspective within music studies.

From the outset, I sought in this project to address the gap in research that exists at the intersection of work studies and critical music studies, focussing on what the experiences of the workers themselves of music listening in the contemporary workplace reveals about power, control, and resistance. The writing of Korczynski (2003, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2014, 2020), and Haake

(2010, 2011, [and Dibben] 2013), in particular, represent two different faces for ascent: historical examples of music at work from a critical perspective; and (relatively) contemporary examples of music at work, from a psychology of music perspective. I identified the confluence of these approaches as a key area of research, and one that would ideally both foreground the voices of workers, and elucidate their experiences.

To this end, the four case studies within this study (Amazon, Uber, postal work, and trucking) were designed to illuminate the multifaceted ways in which music listening affects social relations at work. Internet message boards and social media groups were studied within each case study in order to collect a large and varied pool of data, with the aim of enabling both replicable and accessible quantitative and qualitative research. What was ultimately revealed was that these digital platforms represent important spaces in which discussions and experiences of music listening and its effect on workers' lives are shared, and often where community and solidarity are built.

Let me briefly recount the key research questions on control, resistance, and musical experience, that were set out within the study:

- How do control and resistance manifest through musical experience at work?
- How do aspects of music (e.g. genre, taste) affect social relations at work? And
- How does workers' experience music at work in ways that might contribute to dignity at work?
  
- What role does music listening play in control and resistance in the workplace?
- How does music act as a tool or power and control in the workplace?
- How does music act as a tool of resistance for workers?
  
- Through workers' experiences, it was shown that music listening manifests itself in ways that could be seen as contributing to both control and resistance: across all of the case studies, music was shown to have positive mood effects, often acting as therapy, improving mood, and enabling the workers to 'survive' the day. In this sense, music listening is vital in resisting the drudgery and boredom of the realities of the working day; furthermore, in each of the case studies, music listening was seen to play an important role in bodily affect, providing energy, movement, and rhythm to workers, either in ways

that helped them ‘power through’ work, or ‘space for agentic rather than structured movements’ (Korczynski 2016: 18).

Music’s effects on the mind and body, however, were often not positive: workers across the case studies often found themselves ‘annoyed’ by particularly kinds or instances of music, which in turn had implications for control and resistance, as well as social dynamics; where music had a negative effect on mood, for example, disagreements among workers could be seen to benefit management and refract resistance. Similarly, instances of disagreements among Amazon warehouse workers were often centred around music taste: workers were often focused more on arguing that someone else’s music was ‘bad’ than on resisting managerial control and enabling everyone to be able to listen to music. There were cases, however, such as among Uber drivers, where music taste was used as a way of controlling both their environment and their passengers: certain genres and types of music, for example, were discussed as eliciting positive responses, making customers calmer, and potentially eliciting more tips. In this sense, aspects of musical experience, specifically genre and taste, could be seen as manifesting in both control and resistance.

Music taste was also seen to be a site of potential community-building and solidarity-forming, particularly among truck drivers, for whom digital platforms became spaces in which they shared and discussed taste, building connections which would otherwise previously have been impossible. Such a phenomenon was also present among postal workers, among whom some of the most engaged-with threads on Facebook and Reddit were centred around sharing taste and music suggestions.

It was argued, particularly in the former cases, that musical experience contributed to ‘dignity at work’ in a Hodsonian sense: where workers do not have the control they might want over their conditions and within employment relations, the importance of music as a way of ‘feeling happy’ or ‘chilling’ at work should not be underestimated.

- From a critical work studies perspective, it is clear within the data that music listening plays significant roles as both tools of control, and of resistance, in the workplace: first, through rules—these may be strict, and safety-related, as in the cases of truck drivers, or they may be inconsistent and varyingly applied, as in the cases of postal workers and Amazon warehouse workers; second, through surveillance technologies, including

‘algorithms of control’ in the case of Uber drivers, or literal security measures such as CCTV and metal detectors, in the case of Amazon; finally, ideology was shown to be a key aspect of control through music listening at work, taking the form of ‘common-sense’ ideologies in the case of Amazon warehouse workers, as well as ‘customer service ideology’ among Uber drivers.

Music listening was shown to be a tool of resistance in the case studies in both organised and ‘non-organised’ forms: instances of union activity centred around the issue of music listening were present particularly in the case of postal workers in the US, while Amazon warehouse workers often displayed desires to organise collectively through digital platforms like Facebook. Non-organised resistance was identified throughout the case studies, taking the form of, for example, ignoring or bypassing managerial control and security measures regarding music listening among Amazon warehouse workers and postal workers, as well as occurrences of machine sabotage, with Uber drivers deliberately damaging or altering their stereos and other music-playing devices in order to resist customer control; the ‘hacking’ of scanners among Amazon warehouse workers (see fig. 6.49) could also be seen as a form of machine sabotage, utilising technology available to workers in order to contravene workplace rules.

The latter examples provided further evidence for the ways in which ‘dignity at work’ might be realised (Hodson 2001: 49): in all cases of resistance, both organised and non-organised, acts large and small can all be viewed through this lens as a way of illustrating how workers navigate control, resist it, and try to make their situation more bearable. The roles of music listening in control and resistance in the workplace reflect a state of ‘structured antagonism’, as identified by Armstrong (1989: 312), within which workers operate: efforts to control are often resisted, and, vice versa, management seek to control attempts at resistance. What is identified in many of these cases is what Hesmondhalgh terms ‘a sense of constrained agency’ (2013: 39): people exist within a system, in a constant state of flux, as workers constantly demonstrate ways in which dignity at work might be realised, while remaining always constrained by their circumstances, and by capitalism itself.

Ultimately, three conclusions have been observed in this study. Perhaps the key takeaway, a sentiment that I began this research with and yet was not seeking to prove so much as explore, is the fact that music listening is an extremely important aspect of workers’ lives. This is a conclusion

that seemed to me to be self-explanatory, and yet, because of the trivialisation (and concurrent ubiquity) of music, it is a fact that bears repeating. Consider the conclusions of the workers themselves:

‘I couldn’t do the job without listening [to music]’ - Royal Mail worker, fig. 7.42

‘I would quit this job without music’ - USPS worker, fig. 7.105

‘Couldn’t do this job without my ipod, mostly listen to underground and 90s hip hop and old house piano anthems, makes the day a lot easier’ - Royal Mail worker, fig. 7.106

Second, the case studies demonstrated the role and significance of music listening as sitting somewhere between DeNora’s conception of it as a tool for self-expression and emancipation (2000: 17), and Johnson and Cloonan’s somewhat pessimistic vision of music as an inescapable and violent tool of control (2008: 10): following Hesmondhalgh’s call for an understanding of ‘constrained agency’ (2013: 39), music often represented a tool for potential resistance, worker agency, and realisation of dignity at work, as well as being a site around which collective organising might occur; however the realities of many workers’ situations see music listening play a role in managerial control, through rules, surveillance, and ideology, with any liberatory or emancipatory potential being mitigated by their circumstances within a capitalist system.

Finally, and perhaps foreseeably given the methodology of this study, it was found that digital platforms such as social media groups and online message boards and forums play a central role in both mediating and enabling discussions of experiences about music listening regarding control and resistance: in the case of postal workers, this took the form of colleagues sharing links to .pdf files of historical union arbitration on the topic of headphone use at work; in the case of Uber drivers, co-workers shared Spotify links and other music tips for the best listening experience and effect on customers (and themselves); in the case of Amazon warehouse workers, many individuals utilised Facebook groups and SubReddits to discuss music listening rules, often seeking to make changes; in the case of truck drivers, online forums often became spaces in which different (and shared) music tastes were discussed, and community built.

I conclude by returning to one of the first examples analysed in this study: in fig. 12.1 (also 4.12), an Amazon warehouse worker references managerial control and rules regarding music listening, writing, ‘I love how we all get lied too. We were told [that] the entire North American

node was forbidden to have music as a policy. But I keep finding out that other facilities still play music'. In this brief example, many of the conclusions of this study are apparent: first, music listening is an important topic of discussion and plays a role in control and power; second, workers demonstrate a sense of constrained agency—in this case, the employee is aware of managerial inconsistencies, yet they appear unable to make meaningful change to their position; finally, digital platforms (in this case a Facebook group) are spaces in which discussion occurs, allowing the growth of awareness, and potentially the translation of this into material action, as workers are alerted to perceived unfairness, and provided with greater information.

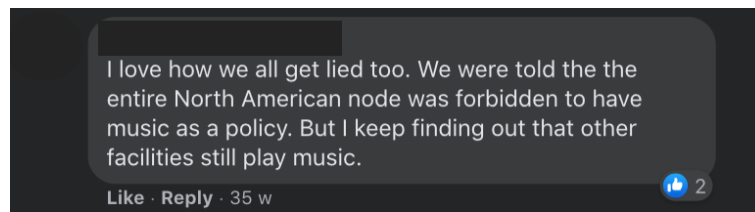


Fig. 9.1. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfillment Centre Memes Facebook group.

As is detailed in chapter 8.7, there is much important potential research still to be done in this field. Many of the realities of workers' music listening and experiences cannot be included in this research, being necessarily limited in scope. Future studies will ideally illuminate further the nature of musical experience in the workplace, continuing to stitch together the interwoven strands of theory and empirical evidence that exist in this and previous studies. This thesis therefore contributes to a theory and practice-building project that seeks a better understanding of control, resistance, and music listening at work: it is my hope that this study offers fruitful data with which to kick-start vital, interdisciplinary research that is of significance to both scholars and workers alike. For now, among the tales of resistance and the positive impact of music listening, workers are left with uncertainty and difficulties directly related to power and control in the workplace, as is well-summarised by the quote from an Amazon warehouse worker below. It is the job of the researcher to investigate such issues of power and control as they relate to music listening at work, and our ultimate goal should be worker liberation.

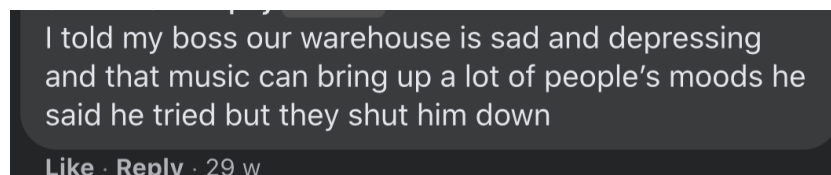


Fig. 9.2. Screenshot from Amazon Fulfillment Centre Memes Facebook group.

This page intentionally left blank



## 10. Bibliography

---

- Adley, P. 2009. 'Facing airport security: Affect, biopolitics, and the preemptive securitisation of the mobile body'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27(2), 274-295.
- Adorno, T. 1941. 'On popular music'. *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9, 17-48.
- Anderson, P. A. 2015. 'Neo-Muzak and the Business of Mood'. *Critical Inquiry* 41(4), 811-840.
- Ambrose, T. 2022. 'Rail union leader Mick Lynch says dispute could go on 'indefinitely''. 18th Aug 2022. The Guardian.
- Armbrorst, A. 2017. 'Thematic Proximity in Content Analysis'. *SAGE Open* 7(2). Retrieved 15th June 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2158244017707797>.
- Armstrong, P., Goodman, J. F. B., & Hyman, J. D. 1981. *Ideology and shop-floor industrial relations*. London: Routledge.
1989. 'Management, Labour Process and Agency'. *Work, Employment, and Society* 3(3), 307-322
- Associated Press. 2021. 'Blow for Uber as judge finds California's gig-worker law unconstitutional'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 23rd Feb 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/aug/20/california-gig-worker-law-proposition-22-unconstitutional>.
- Attali, J. 1985. *Noise: the Political Economy of Music*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Attewell, P. 1987. 'The Deskillng Controversy'. *Work and Occupations* 14(3), 323-346.
- Barber, S. 2010. 'Smooth jazz: A case study in the relationships between commercial radio formats, audience research and music production. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media* 8(1), 51-70.

- Benton, A., Ungar, L., Hill, S., Hennessy, S., Mao, J., Chung, A., Leonard, C. E., & Holmes, J. H. 2011. 'Identifying Potential Adverse Effects Using the Web: A New Approach to Medical Hypothesis Generation'. *Operations, Information and Decisions* 44(6), 989-996.
- Bergh, A. & DeNora, T. 2009. 'From wind-up to iPod: Techno-cultures of listening'. In N. Cook, E. Clarke, D. Leech-Wilkinson, & J. Rink (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. pp. 102-115.
- Bick, A., Blandin, A., & Mertens, K. 2020. 'Work from Home After the COVID-19 Outbreak'. *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas*. Retrieved 8th May 2022, from <https://www.dallasfed.org/-/media/documents/research/papers/2020/wp2017.pdf>.
- Bishop, V., Korczynski, M., & Cohen, L. 2005. 'The invisibility of violence: Constructing violence out of the job centre workplace in the UK'. *Work, Employment and Society* 19(3), 583-602.
- Birgillito, G. & Birgillito, M. 2018. 'Algorithms and Ratings: Tools to Manage Labour Relations. Proposals to Renegotiate Labour Conditions for Platform Drivers'. *Labour & Law Issues* 4(2), 25-50.
- Bithell, C. 2006. 'The past in music: introduction'. *Ethnomusicology Forum* 15(1), 3-6.
- Boewe, J. & Schulten, J. 2017. '13 Amazon Strikes in Europe: Seven Years of Industrial Action, Challenges, and Strategies'. In J. Alimahomed-Wilson & E. Reese (eds.), *The Cost of Free Shipping: Amazon in the Global Economy*. London, UK: Pluto Press. pp. 209-224.
- Born, G. 'Music and the materialization of identities'. *Journal of Material Culture* 16(4), 376-388.
- Bowling, B. & Philips, C. 2007. 'Disproportionate and Discriminatory: Reviewing the Evidence on Police Stop and Search'. *The Modern Law Review* 70(6), 936-961.
- Brackett, D. 2005. 'Questions of genre in black popular music'. *Black Music Research Journal* 25(1-2), 73-92.

- Braverman, H. 1974. *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Brown, S. & Volgsten, U. 2006. *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*. Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books.
- Bryson, A., Gomez, R., & Willman, P. 2010. 'Online Social Networking and Trade Union Membership: What the Facebook Phenomenon Truly Means for Labor Organizers'. *Labor History* 51(1), 41-53.
- Bryson, B. 1996. "Anything but heavy metal": Symbolic exclusion and musical dislikes'. *American sociological review* 61(5), 884-899.
- Budd, J. M. 1997. 'A Critique of Customer and Commodity'. *College & Research Libraries* 58(4), 309-320.
- Bull, M. 2007. *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*. London: Routledge.
- Burawoy, M. 1978. 'Toward a Marxist Theory of the Labor Process: Braverman and Beyond'. *Politics & Society* 9(3-4), 247-312.
- Burrell, G. 1988. 'Modernism, Post Modernism and Organizational Analysis 2: The Contribution of Michel Foucault'. *Organization Studies* 9(2), 221-235.
- Canella, G. 2017. 'Social movement documentary practices: digital storytelling, social media, and organizing'. *Digital Creativity* 28(1), 24-37.
- Casili, A. A. & Posada, J. G. 2019. 'The Platformization of Labor and Society', in M. Graham & W. H. Dutton (eds.), *Society and the Internet: How Networks of Information and Communication are Changing Our Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cattero, B. & D'Onofrio, M. 2018. 'Organizing and Collective Bargaining in the Digitized "Tertiary Factories" of Amazon: A Comparison Between Germany and Italy'. In E. Ales, Y. Curzi, T. Fabbri, O. Rymkevich, I. Senatori, & G. Solinas (eds.), *Working in Digital and Smart Organizations*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 141-164.

- Chan, N. K. 2019. 'The Rating Game: The Discipline of Uber's User-Generated Ratings'. *Surveillance & Society* 17(1-2), 183-190.
- Chander, A. 2016. (Review) 'Review: The Racist Algorithm?'. *Michigan Law Review* 115(6), 1023-1045.
- Chen, B. & Padin, L. 2021. 'Prop 22 was a failure for California's app-based workers. Now it's also unconstitutional'. *National Employment Law Project*. Retrieved 14th Feb 2022, from <https://www.nelp.org/blog/prop-22-unconstitutional/>.
- Chilisa, B. & Kawulich, B. B. 2012. 'Selecting a research approach: paradigm, methodology and methods'. In Wagner, C., Kawulich, B. B. & Garner, M., *Doing Social Research*. Maidenhead, UK: McGraw-Hill. pp. 51-61.
- Chiripanhura, B. 2019. 'Labour market economic commentary: July 2019'. Newport: ONS.
- Clayre, A. 1974. *Work and Play: Ideas and Experience of Work and Leisure*. Worthing, UK: Littlehampton Book Services.
- Clayton, G. 2022. 'More Value, More Bargaining? Unionization Campaigns and Industry Value Shocks'. SSRN. Retrieved on 17th May 2022, from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4045260>.
- Collingwood, J. 2016. 'The power of music to reduce stress'. *Psych Central* 17. Retrieved 14th Apr 2022, from <https://sites.google.com/site/overcomingstressthroughmusic2/home/biography/power-of-music>.
- Conger, K. 2020. 'California sues Uber and Lyft, claiming workers are misclassified'. *New York Times*. Retrieved 23rd Feb 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/05/technology/california-uber-lyft-lawsuit.html>.
- Cooper, P. K. 2018. (Review) 'The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop'. *Journal of Popular Music Education* 2(1-2), 181-183.

- Corbishley, S. 2021. 'Woman told she can't listen to music on headphones at work wins discrimination case'. 9th June 2021, Metro.
- Coulter, K. 2014. *Revolutionizing Retail*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crystal, D. 2001. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2009. 'Flow'. In S. Lopez (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*. Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing. pp. 394-400.
- Cuddy, L. L. & Duffin, J. 2005. 'Music, memory, and Alzheimer's disease: is music recognition spared in dementia, and how can it be assessed?'. *Medical hypotheses* 64(2), 229-235.
- Cusick, S. G. 2008. 'Musicology, Torture, Repair'. *Radical Musicology* 3. Retrieved on 6th Aug 2019, from <http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk/2008/Cusick.html>.
- Delsol, R. & Shiner, M. 2006. 'Regulating stop and search'. *Critical Criminology* 14, 241-263.
- DeNora, T. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Dey, M., Franzis, H., Loewenstein, M. A., & Sun, H. 2020. 'Ability to work from home'. *Monthly Labor Review*, 1-19.
- Dibben, N. & Haake, A. B. 2013. 'Music and the construction of space in office-based work settings'. In G. Born (ed.), *Music, Sound and Space*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. pp. 151-168.
- Ditchfield, H. & Meredith, J. 'Collecting Qualitative Data from Facebook: Approaches and Methods'. In U. Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*. London, UK: SAGE Publications. pp. 496-510.
- Downs, A. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York, NY: Harper.

- Droit-Volet, S., Ramos, D., Bueno, J. L. O., & Bigand, E. 2013. 'Music, emotion, and time perception: the influence of subjective emotional valence and arousal?'. *Frontiers in Psychology* 4, 1-12.
- Drott, E. 2011. *Music and the Elusive Revolution*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Early, G. & Monson, I. 'Why Jazz Still Matters'. *Daedalus* 148(2), 5-12.
- Edwards, P. 1983. 'The Political Economy of Industrial Conflict: Britain and the United States'. *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 4(4), 461-500.
- & Wajcman, J. 2011. *The Politics of Working Life*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Ejnavarzala, H. 2019. 'Epistemology—Ontology Relations in Social Research: A Review'. *Sociological Bulletin* 68(1), 94-104.
- El-Aouar, W. A., de Vasconcelos, C. R. M., & Veiga-Neto, A. R. 2016. 'Quality of working life and music in the manufacturing workplace'. *Organizações & Sociedade* 23, 656-674.
- Eriksson, M. & Johansson, A. 2017. "'Keep Smiling!": Time, Functionality and Intimacy in Spotify's Featured Playlists'. *Cultural Analysis* 16(1), 67-82.
- Eysenbach, G. & Till, J. E. 2001. 'Ethical issues in qualitative research on internet communities'. *BJM*. Retrieved 6th Oct 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.323.7321.1103>.
- Filene, B. 2000. *Romancing the folk: Public memory & American roots music*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Fleming, P. & Sewell, G. 2002. 'Looking for the Good Soldier, Švejk: Alternative Modalities of Resistance in the Contemporary Workplace'. *Sociology* 36(4), 857-873.
- Flyvbjerg, B. 2011. 'Case Study'. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. pp. 301-316.

- Fox, A.A. 2004. 'White trash alchemies of the abject sublime: Country as "bad" music'. In C. Washburne & M. Derno (eds.), *Bad Music: The Music We Love To Hate*. London, UK: Routledge. pp. 33-43.
- Frangi, L., Zhang, T., & Hebdon, R. 2019. 'Tweeting and Retweeting for Fight for \$15: Unions as Dinosaur Opinion Leaders?'. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 58(2), 301-335.
- Frith, S. 1996. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
2002. 'Music and everyday life'. *Critical Quarterly* 44(1), 35-48.
2013. 'What is Bad Music?', in C. J. Washburne & M. Derno (eds.), *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 15-38.
- Furnham, A. & Strbac, L. 2002. 'Music is as distracting as noise: the differential distraction of background music and noise on the cognitive test performance of introverts and extraverts'. *Ergonomics* 45(3), 203-217.
- Gabrielsson, A. 1988. 'Timing in music performance and its relations to music experience'. In J. A. Sloboda (ed.), *Generative processes in music: The psychology of performance, improvisation, and composition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. pp. 27-51.
- Galasinska, A. 2010. 'Leavers and stayers discuss returning home: Internet discourses on migration in the context of the post-communist transformation'. *Social Identities* 16(3), 309-324.
- Giles, D. 2017. 'Online Discussion Forums: A Rich and Vibrant Source of Data'. In V. Braun, V. Clarke & D. Gray (eds.), *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide to Textual, Media and Virtual Techniques*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. pp. 166-188.
- Gill, D., Prowse, V., & Vlassopoulos, M. 2013. 'Cheating in the workplace: An experimental study of the impact of bonuses and productivity'. *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organization* 96, 120-134.
- Goodman, S. 2012. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Gowensmith, W. N. & Bloom, L. J. 1997. 'The effects of heavy metal music on arousal and anger'. *Journal of Music Therapy* 34(1), 33-45.
- Gracely, N. 2012. 'Surviving in the Amazon'. *New Labour Forum* 21(3), 80-83.
- Grazian, D. 'Opportunities for ethnography in the sociology of music'. *Poetics* 32(3), 197-210.
- Haake, A. B. 2010. *Music listening in offices: Balancing internal needs and external considerations*.  
Doctoral thesis: University of Sheffield.
2011. 'Individual music listening in workplace settings: An exploratory survey of offices in the UK'. *Musicae Scientiae* 15(1), 107-129.
- Hagen, A. N. 2015. 'The Playlist Experience: Personal Playlists in Music Streaming Services'. *Popular Music and Society* 38(5), 625-645.
- Hagen, E. H. & Bryant, G. A. 2003. 'Music and dance as a coalition signaling system'. *Human Nature* 14, 21-51.
- Hamper, B. 1991. *Riverthead: Tales from the Assembly Line*. New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing.
- Harley, B. & Dundon, T. 'Amazon: HRM and change in the house of neo-liberalism' In T. Dundon & A. Wilkinson (eds.), *Case Studies in Work, Employment, and Human Resource Management*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. pp. 191-200.
- Haynes, J. 2012. *Music, difference, and the residue of race*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Heinz, M., Martin, P., Margrett, J. A., Yearns, M., Franke, W., Yang, H-I., Wong, J., & Chang, C. K. 2013. 'Perceptions of technology among older adults'. *J Gerontol Nurs.* 39(1), 42-51.
- Heiss, R. & Matthes, J. 2021. 'Funny cats and politics: Do humorous context posts impede or foster the elaboration of news posts on social media?'. *Communication Research* 48(1), 100-124.



- Herring, S. C. 1996. 'Posting in a different voice: Gender and ethics in computer-mediated communication'. In C. Ess (ed.), *Philosophical perspectives on computer-mediated communication*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. pp. 115-145.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. J. 2008. 'Towards a Critical Understanding of Music, Emotion, and Self-Identity'. *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 11(4), 329-343.
2013. *Why Music Matters*. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
2018. *The Cultural Industries*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.
2022. 'Streaming's Effects on Music Culture: Old Anxieties and New Simplifications'. *Cultural Sociology* 16(1), 3-24.
- Higgins, K. 2012. *The Music between Us*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hirsch, L. E. 2012. *Music in American Crime Prevention and Punishment*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Hodson, R. 1997. 'Group Relations at Work: Solidarity, Conflict, and Relations With Management'. *Work and Occupations* 24(4), 426-452.
2001. *Dignity at Work*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Holtz, P. & Wagner, W. 2009. 'Essentialism and attribution of monstrosity in racist discourse: Right-wing internet postings about Africans and Jews'. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 19, 411-425.
- ., Kronberger, N., & Wagner, W. 2012. 'Analysing Internet Forums'. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods and Applications* 24(2), 55-66.
- Hochschild, A. R. 1997. 'When work becomes home and home becomes work'. *California Management Review* 39(4), 79-97.
- Hoskin, K. 2004. 'Spacing, Timing and the Invention of Management. *Organization* 11(6), 743-757.

- Ingham, T. 2021. 'Pandora was acquired for \$3.5bn. It's since lost over 10m users'. *Music Business Worldwide*. Retrieved 5th Oct 2022, from <https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/two-years-ago-pandora-was-bought-by-siriusxm-for-3-5bn-its-since-lost-over-10m-users/#:~:text=In%20Q2%202021%20%E2%80%93%20as%20just,3.86%20billion%20in%20Q2%202018.>
- Jarman-Ivens, F. 2013. *Oh Boy!: Masculinities and Popular Music*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Johnson, B., & Cloonan, M. 2008. *Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, S. C. & Schumacher, T. G. 1992. 'Muzak: On functional music and power'. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9(2), 156-169.
- Juslin, P. N. & Sloboda, J. A. 2001. 'Psychological perspectives on music and emotion'. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (eds.), *Music and emotion: Theory and research*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. pp. 71-104.
- & Sakka, L. S. 2019. 'Neural correlates of music and emotion', in M. H. Thaut & D. A. Hodges (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Music and the Brain*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. pp. 285-332.
- Kartika, A. A. & Rusdiarti, S. R. 2020. 'Faces Of Banlieue In French Rap Song'. *BASA 2019 (20-21)*. Retrieved 17th May 2022, from <https://eudl.eu/doi/10.4108/eai.20-9-2019.2296850>.
- Kassabian, A. 2013. *Ubiquitous Listening*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Katz, M. 2010. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kellaris, J. J. & Kent, R. J. 1992. 'The influence of music on consumers' temporal perceptions: Does time fly when you're having fun?'. *Journal of consumer psychology* 1(4), 365-376.
- Keller, D., Flores, L. V., Pimenta, M. S., Capasso, A., & Tinajero, P. 2011. 'Convergent trends toward ubiquitous music'. *Journal of New Music Research* 40(3), 265-276.

- ., Schiavoni, F., & Lazzarini, V. 2019. 'Ubiquitous music: Perspectives and challenges'. *Journal of New Music Research* 48(4), 309-315.
- Korczynski, M. 2003. 'Music at work: Towards a historical overview'. *Folk Music Journal* 8(3), 314-334.
2007. 'Music and meaning on the factory floor'. *Work and Occupations* 34(3), 253-289.
- & Jones, K. 2006. 'Instrumental music? The social origins of broadcast music in British factories'. *Popular Music* 25(2), 145-164.
- ., Pickering, M., & Robertson, E. 2013. *Rhythms of Labour: Music at Work in Britain*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
2014. *Songs of the Factory: Pop Music, Culture, and Resistance*. London: ILR Press.
2016. 'From Workplace Culture to Collective Resistance: An Ethnography'. A *Gedenkschrift to Randy Hodson: Working with Dignity (Research in the Sociology of Work 28)*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing. pp. 3-30.
2020. 'Music in the British Workplace: From Voice to a Technique of Control?'. In A. Morcom & T. D. Taylor (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of economic ethnomusicology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Kozinets, R. V. 2010. *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- Kugler, L. 2021. 'The unionization of technology companies'. *Communications of the ACM* 64(8), 18-20.
- Landay, K. & Harms, P. D. 2019. 'Whistle while you work? A review of the effects of music in the workplace'. *Human Resource Management Review* 29(3), 371-385.
- Langer, R. & Beckmann, S. C. 2005. 'Sensitive research topics; Netnography revisited'. *Qualitative Market Research* 8(2), 189-203.
- Lauger, T. R. & Densley, J. A. 2018. 'Broadcasting badness: Violence, identity, and performance in the online gang rap scene'. *Justice Quarterly* 35(5), 816-841.

- Leidner, D. E. & Kayworth, T. 2006. (Review) 'A review of culture in information systems research: Toward a theory of information technology culture conflict'. *MIS Quarterly* (30), 357-399.
- Leidner, R. 1993. *Fast Food, Fast Talk*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Leong, N. 2014. 'The Sharing Economy Has a Race Problem'. *Salon*. Retrieved 8th June 2021, from <http://www.salon.com/2014/11/02/the-sharing-economy-has-a-raceproblem>.
- Lesiuk, T. 2000. 'The Effect of Music Listening on a Computer Programming Task'. *Journal of Computer Information Systems* 40(3), 50-57.
2005. 'The effect of music listening on work performance'. *Psychology of Music* 33(2), 173-191.
2010. 'The Effect of Preferred Music on Mood and Performance in High-Cognitive Demand Occupation'. *Journal of Music Therapy* 47(2), 137-154.
- Lewis, K. & Kaufman, J. 2018. 'The Conversion of Cultural Tastes into Social Network Ties'. *American Journal of Sociology* 123(6), 1684-1742.
- Li, R. 2021. 'Prop. 22, the gig worker exemption for Uber and Lyft, is ruled unconstitutional'. *San Francisco Chronicle*. Retrieved 23rd Feb 2022, from <https://www.sfchronicle.com/tech/article/Prop-22-the-gig-worker-exemption-for-Uber-and-16401915.php>.
- Linstead, S. A. 1985. 'Breaking the "Purity Rule": Industrial Sabotage and the Symbolic Process'. *Personnel Review* 14(3), 12-19.
- Logan, J. 2021. 'Crushing Unions, by Any Means Necessary: How Amazon's Blistering Anti-Union Campaign Won in Bessemer, Alabama'. *New Labor Forum* 30(3), 38-45.

- Lyddon, D. 2015. 'The changing pattern of UK strikes, 1964–2014'. *Employee Relations* 37(6), 733–745.
2018. 'Why trade union legislation and the Labour Party are not responsible for the decline in strike activity'. *International Social* 158. Retrieved 18th Aug 2022, from <https://isj.org.uk/why-trade-union-legislation-and-the-labour-party-are-not-responsible-for-the-decline-in-strike-activity/>.
- MacLeod, B. 1979. 'Facing the Muzak'. *Popular Music and Society* 7(1), 18-31.
- Maróti, E., Barabás, E., Deszpot, G., Farnadi, T., Nemes, L. N., Szirányi, B. & Honbolygó, F. 2019. 'Does moving to the music make you smarter? The relation of sensorimotor entrainment to cognitive, linguistic, musical and social skills'. *Psychology of Music* 47(5), 663-679.
- Medley-Rath, S. 2019. 'Using Facebook Secret Groups for Qualitative Data Collection'. *The Qualitative Report* 24(7), 1765-1777.
- M Hanif v Department for Work and Pensions. 2021. 2500446/2019 & 2504225/2019. *HM Courts & Tribunals services*.
- Milligan, E. 2021. 'Uber Accused of Undermining U.K. Ruling on Worker Rights'. *Bloomberg UK*. Retrieved 24th Feb 2022, from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-23/uber-accused-of-trying-to-undermine-u-k-ruling-on-worker-rights>.
- Murphy, G. & Cullinane, N. 2021. 'Performance management technologies and trade union responses: A case study from banking'. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 36(3), 285-306.
- National Association of Letter Carriers. 2014. Workplace Issues Materials Reference System (MRS). Retrieved 5th Feb 2022, from <https://www.nalc.org/workplace-issues/resources/materials-reference-system>.
- Negus, K. *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. London, UK: Routledge.

- Nolan, P. & Wood, S. 2003. 'Mapping the Future of Work'. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 41(2), 165-174.
- North, A. C. & Hargreaves, D. J. 1998. 'The effect of music on atmosphere and purchase intentions in a cafeteria'. *Journal of applied social psychology* 28(24), 2254-2273.
- Oldham, G. R., Cummings, A., Mischel, L. J., Schmidtke, J. M., & Zhou, J. 1995. 'Listen while you work? Quasi-experimental relations between personal-stereo headset use and employee work response'. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 80(5), 547-564.
- ONS. 2019. 'Employees in the UK by industry: 2018'. Retrieved 29th Nov 2020, from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employeesintheukbyindustry/2018>.
- Payne, J., Korczynski, M., & Cluley, R. 2017. 'Hearing music in service interactions: A theoretical and empirical analysis'. *Human Relations* 70(12), 1417-1441.
- Pelly, L. 2017. 'The Problem with Muzak'. *The Baffler*, 37. Retrieved 19th Oct 2022, from <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/the-problem-with-muzak-pelly>.
2019. 'Big Mood Machine'. *The Baffler, Downstream*. Retrieved 19th Oct 2022, from <https://thebaffler.com/downstream/big-mood-machine-pelly>.
- Però, D. 2019. 'Indie Unions, Organizing and Labour Renewal: Learning from Precarious Migrant Workers'. *Work, Employment and Society* 34(5), 900-918.
- Plourde, L. 2017. 'Sonic air-conditioning: muzak as affect management for office workers in Japan'. *The Senses and Society* 12(1), 18-34.
- Potter, J. 2004. 'Discourse Analysis'. In M. Hardy & A. Bryman (eds.), *Handbook of Data Analysis*. London, UK: SAGE Publications. pp. 607-642.
- Priest, E. 2022. *Earworm and Event: Music, Daydreams, and Other Imaginary Refrains*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Prichard, C., Korczynski, M., & Elemen, M. 2007. 'Music at work: An introduction'. *Group and Organization Management* 32(1), 4-21.
- Quinones, M. G., Kassabian, A., & Boschi, E. (eds.). 2016. *Ubiquitous musics: The everyday sounds that we don't always notice*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Qureshi, R. B. (ed.). 2002. *Music and Marx*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rae, M. 2021. 'Amazon Busts Union Efforts in Alabama: What's Next for Workers?'. *SAGE Business Cases*. Retrieved 23rd Feb 2022, from <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529779363>.
- Ranmarine, T. K. 2011. 'The Orchestration of Civil Society: Community and Conscience in Symphony Orchestras'. *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20(3), 327-351.
- Reybrouck, M. 2004. 'Music Cognition, Semiotics and the Experience of Time: Ontosemantical and Epistemological Claims'. *Journal of New Music Research* 33(4), 411-428.
- Rogers, B. 2015. 'The Social Costs of Uber'. *The University of Chicago Law Review Online* 82(1). Retrieved 3rd Dec 2021, from [https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclrev\\_online/vol82/iss1/6](https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclrev_online/vol82/iss1/6).
- Rosenblat, A., Kneese, T., & Boyd, D. 2014. 'Workplace Surveillance'. *Data & Society*. Retrieved 11th May 2021, from <https://www.datasociety.net/pubs/fow/WorkplaceSurveillance.pdf>.
- Russon, M. 2021. 'Uber drivers are workers not self-employed, Supreme Court rules'. *BBC News*. Retrieved 23rd Feb 2022, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56123668>.
- Sakolsky, R. 1992. 'Disciplinary Power and the Labour Process'. In A. Sturdy, D. Knights, and H. Willmott (eds.), *Skill and Consent*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Sanders, T. A. & Cairns, P. 2010. 'Time Perception, immersion and music in videogames'. *UCL Open*. Retrieved 23rd Dec 2021, from [https://ucl.scienceopen.com/document\\_file/59fd8d5a-b178-49a2-94fc-8a3e6d5ab77a/ScienceOpen/160\\_Sanders.pdf](https://ucl.scienceopen.com/document_file/59fd8d5a-b178-49a2-94fc-8a3e6d5ab77a/ScienceOpen/160_Sanders.pdf).

- Saval, N. 2014. *Cube: A Secret History of the Workplace*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Scherzinger, M. 2014. 'Divisible Mobility: Music in an age of cloud computing'. In S. Gopinath & J. Stanyek (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. pp. 75-102.
- Schrimshaw, W. 2013. 'Non-Cochlear Sound: On Affect and Exteriority'. *Sound, Music, Affect*, 27-44.
- Scruton, R. 1999. *The Aesthetics of Music*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Sharman, L. & Dingle, G. A. 2015. 'Extreme metal music and anger processing'. *Frontiers in human neuroscience* 21. Accessed 24th Dec 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.01020>.
- Shaviro, S. 2010. *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Winchester, UK: O Books.
- Skitka, L. J. & Sargis, E. G. 2006. 'The Internet as Psychological Laboratory'. *Annual Review of Psychology* 57, 529-55.
- Sloboda, J. A. 1999. 'Everyday Uses of Music Listening: A Preliminary Study'. *Music, Mind and Science*, 354-369.
2011. 'Music in everyday life: The role of emotions'. In P. N. Juslin & J. Sloboda (eds.), *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. pp. 493-514.
- Spencer, D. 2000. 'Braverman and the Contribution of Labour Process Analysis to the Critique of Capitalist Production - Twenty-Five Years On'. *Work, Employment and Society* 14(2), 223-243.
- Spherion**. 2006. 'Spherion survey: Workers say listening to music while working improves job satisfaction, productivity'. Retrieved 20th June 2021, from [http://www.spherion.com/press/releases/2006/iPod\\_at\\_work\\_Snapshot.jsp](http://www.spherion.com/press/releases/2006/iPod_at_work_Snapshot.jsp).



- Sterne, J. 1997. 'Sounds like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space'. *Ethnomusicology* 41(1), 22-50.
2005. 'Urban Media and the Politics of Sound Space'. *Open!*, Retrieved 14th Jan 2022, from <https://onlineopen.org/urban-media-and-the-politics-of-sound-space>.
2013. (ed.) *The Sound Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Stewart, M. G. & Mueller, J. 2013. 'Terrorism risks and cost-benefit analysis of aviation security'. *Risk Analysis* 33(5), 893-908.
- Sturdy, A. & Fleming, P. 2003. 'Talk as Technique - A critique of the Words and Deeds Distinction in the Diffusion of Customer Service Cultures in Call Centres'. *Journal of Management Studies* 40(4), 753-773.
- Tacchi, J. A. 2009. 'Radio and affective rhythm in the everyday'. *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 7(2), 171-183.
- Taruskin, R. 2008. *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Taylor, P. & Bain, P. 2003. "Subterranean Worksick Blues': Humour as Subversion in Two Call Centres'. *Organization Studies* 24(9), 1487-1509.
- Taylor, T. D. 2015. *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Telegraph Reporters. 2021. 'Anxious workers can wear headphones after discrimination ruling'. 10th June 2021, *The Telegraph*.
- Thompson, M. 2017. 'To soothe or remove? Affect, revanchism and the weaponized use of classical music'. *Communication and the Public* 2(4), 272-283.
- Thorsen, S. 1989. 'Music and work: End report for the project "Background music at work and in leisure"'. Gothenburg: Musicology Department.

- Trotta, F. 2020. *Annoying Music in Everyday Life*. London, UK: Bloomsbury.
- Thompson, P. & Harley, B. 2007. 'HRM and the worker: Labour process perspectives'. In P. Boxall, J. Purcell, & P. Wright (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of human resource management*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. pp. 147-165.
2010. 'The capitalist labour process: Concepts and connections'. *Capital & Class* 34(1), 7-14.
- & Van den Broek, D. 2010. 'Managerial control and workplace regimes: an introduction'. *Work, Employment and Society* 24(3), 1-12.
- Uber Australia. 2020. 'Taking Comfort to new heights: Introducing new Quiet mode and Extended wait Rider Preferences to Uber Comfort'. *Uber Newsroom*. Retrieved 13th Feb 2022, from <https://www.uber.com/en-AU/newsroom/comfortpreferencesarrive/>.
- Uber BV v Aslam. 2021. UKSC 5. *The Supreme Court*.
- Vandaele, K. 2016. 'Interpreting strike activity in western Europe in the past 20 years: the labour repertoire under pressure'. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* 22(3), 277-294.
- Vidal, M. 2011. 'Reworking Postfordism: Labor Process Versus Employment Relations'. *Sociology Compass* 5(4), 273-286.
- Walker, C. M. 2007. *Mind/body dualism and music theory pedagogy: Applications of Dalcroze Eurythmics*. Doctoral thesis: University of Missouri - Kansas City.
- Wardell, M. 1999. 'Labor Processes: Moving Beyond Braverman and the Deskilling Debate'. In M. Wardell, T. L. Steiger, & P. Meiksins (eds.), *Rethinking the Labor Process*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. pp. 1-16.
- Webster, J. 2020. 'Taste in the platform age: music streaming services and new forms of class distinction'. *Information, Communication & Society* 23(13), 1909-1924.

Weslowski, P. 2014. 'Using Forums and Message Boards to Recruit Study Participants in Qualitative Research'. *The Qualitative Report* 19(39), 1-15.

Whole Worker. 2018. 'Amazon's Union-Busting Training Video'. *YouTube*. Retrieved 23rd Feb 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQeGBHxlyHw>.

Wood, S. 1982. *The Degradation of Work?: Skill, Deskillling and the Labour Process*. London: Hutchinson.

Wortley, S. & Owusu-Bempah, A. 2011. 'The usual suspects: police stop and search practices in Canada'. *Policing and Society* 21(4), 395-407.

---