4 "Music Makes the People Come Together"

Spotify as an Intimate Social Media Platform

Ben De Smet and Frederik Dhaenens

Introduction

New music technologies (from gramophones, to file-sharing sites like Napster, to music-streaming platforms like Spotify) always bring with them a (partial) change in music production and consumption, not only in a technical and physical way, but also in regards to the socio-cultural aspects. They affect music's level of accessibility and democracy, the modes of consumption, the range of possible intimate and social (political) uses, and the very nature of what music or a recording of sounds can mean.

Music-streaming platform Spotify (along with its predecessors and competitors) has taken music into the realm of digital and social media. At first glance, the Swedish world-leading music-streaming service is a platform that merely provides non-'user-generated content' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010): a library to which people turn to enjoy their favourite music. However, behind this front of neutral provider, Spotify's algorithmic architecture and recommender systems are perhaps the platform's most appealing qualities, and do much more than passively make this library available. Much like its audiovisual equivalent, Netflix, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter, Spotify engages thorough datafication and selection (Van Dijck et al., 2018), utilising user data to offer personalised recommendations.

More than other music-streaming platforms, Spotify acts as a space for the meeting of previously more distinct realms of private music collection/consumption, such as CD or record collections at home, and public music identity/social interaction, including attending live concerts or discussions with peers. On the one hand, offering access to an immense library of music and affording users to arrange and curate a personal digital music collection enables them to intimately and privately experience music, and construct, curate, and negotiate a personal musical identity. On the other hand, Spotify affords users to explore music publicly and engage in self-presentation and social interaction through practices like constructing a profile and following

DOI: 10.4324/9781003250982-6

friends, reminiscent of Facebook and Instagram. These social features provide an arena for social interaction and even political work, and offer ways to articulate a musical, personal, and social identity.

In this chapter we argue that Spotify acts not merely as a music provider, but also as a social media platform. Rather than engaging in a direct one-on-one relationship with the user, Spotify essentially provides a social *network*, where users are connected to one another, both through friending and following affordances, and through indirect algorithmic mechanisms. We then take theories of intimacies and identities on social media to explore what these imply in the context of Spotify. We demonstrate how Spotify mediates, affords, and constrains music-related intimacies and identity work, in particular concerning gender and sexuality.

We look at intimacy as "the enigma of [a] range of attachments" (Berlant, 1998, p. 283), rather than seeing it solely as explicit sexual and/or romantic expressions. We expand on the traditional romantic-sexual notion of intimacy by incorporating a popular music studies approach to the term, where "intimacy" is used to describe those (affective) music practices that are tied closely to emotions, memories, and negotiations of the self (Eriksson et al., 2019, p. 136; Prey, 2018, p. 1087; Hagen & Lüders, 2017, p. xx). We thus respond to Berlant's call: "What if we saw it [intimacy] emerge from much more mobile processes of attachment?" (1998, p. 284), and take into account the more subtle, but profound, ways in which intimacy, music, and identity meet on Spotify.

Spotify builds on music's long-standing connections to identities and identity work, the navigation of emotions and moods, and social and political work. Practices like fandom, identity construction, and taste articulation related to traditional media and settings (radio, record and CD technologies, the Walkman, live music, nightlife) live through Spotify, and at the same time get modified.

Our analysis is informed by (theoretical) literature on intimacies, identities and social media, and an app walkthrough (Light et al., 2018) of the platform. First, we elaborate on the ways in which Spotify can be considered a social media platform, applying key definitions and theories of social media onto the streaming service. Second, we examine optimistic, popular discourses surrounding music, gender and sexuality, and the internet as utopian places of freedom and tolerance. Next, we nuance these claims by first turning to the algorithmic recommender architecture of Spotify, and then to its intimate and social affordances to analyse how these mediate intimacies, identities, and identity work.

Spotify as a Social Media Platform

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) famously defined social media as a "group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological

foundations of the Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61). On the surface, this definition seems to exclude Spotify, as the content (the music), strictly speaking, is generated by artists and not by 'regular' users.

However, Spotify affords users to drastically intervene and interact with the music, by curating and arranging this content to preference, for example by generating playlists and queues. Unless you decide to keep this 'private' or 'secret', your personal collection of playlists ('Your Library'), as well as a report of your real-time music listening ('Friend Activity'), can be found and seen by other Spotify users. People can visit and follow each other's profiles to get acquainted with their musical taste and keep up with the music trajectory of one another. So even though these contents are not 'generated' by the users, when they are selected, arranged, and named in personal ways and put on public display, they come to articulate an individual identity, just like on Twitter or Facebook, where much of the content (links, retweets, pictures by others) is not generated by the users either.

Spotify can thus serve as a place for self-presentation and impression management. Hogan (2010), building upon Goffman (1959), noted that on social media, on top of performances taking place in synchronous situations (e.g., chatting), there are also artefacts, put up for display in asynchronous exhibitions. Two or more people do not have to be present simultaneously to socially interact or engage in self-presentation. Profiles, timelines and other 'friend or following' features enable people – virtual curators – to install artefacts in their virtual exhibitions, so that people who come by at any time get a glimpse of their (virtual) identities. Of course, just like in synchronous and analogous situations, curational choices are mediated and shaped by interactional and broader social considerations and deliberations (Hogan, 2010). Applying this theory to Spotify, the real-time report in 'Friend Activity' can be considered a synchronous social situation, while profiles can be considered exhibitions with the playlists and music they contain being artefacts. To keep control over these arenas of self-presentation people might engage in considerable impression management, governing the tension between the public and the private.

Furthermore, Spotify employs the same core mechanisms as (other) social media to shape its users' experiences, trying to keep them on board and monetise their presence. Van Dijck and Poell (2013) state that social media work via social media logic with four central elements: programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication. Spotify programs its content in a personalised and algorithmised way; it measures and communicates popularity (charts, trends, plays, followers); it connects people, not only to each other, but also to "platforms, advertisers, and, more generally, online performative environments" (p. 8); and lastly, Spotify continuously keeps track of data and heavily leans on the data to govern its recommender efforts.

Music, Sexuality and Gender, and New Media: Spotify as Queer/Feminist Utopia?

Arguably, since its very origins, popular music has served "as a means by which we formulate and express our individual identities" (Hargreaves et al., 2002, p. 1). Moreover, music "is much more than a structural 'reflection' of the social. Music is constitutive of the social" (DeNora, 2003, p. 57). While it cannot (entirely) escape the hegemonic power structures under which it operates, music certainly "has provided an arena where marginalized voices can be heard and sexual identities shaped, challenged, and renegotiated" (Lecklider, 2006, p. 117). Performative and creative by definition, "music, and the world of entertainment more generally, have long been hospitable to gender and sexual misfits" (Taylor, 2012, p. 87), and genres like disco (Dyer, 1979) and riot grrrl (Halberstam, 2005) have crafted out places for the negotiation and articulation of gender and sexual identities. Furthermore, musicality, in its very core, has often been associated with femininity (Middleton, 2013) and queerness, insofar that "musicality" served as an insider synonym for "gayness" in pre-Stonewall times (Brett, 1994, p. 11).

Popular music coincides quite naturally with the identity project of the postmodern subject, an identity which has to be reflexively made (Giddens, 1991). Taylor (2012) argues that "both are productive and dynamic systems of constructing meaning, yet neither can be comprehensively articulated discursively or pictorially" (p. 82). Both, *theoretically*, are safe places of unbound self-invention and self-expression, rich with options to select from and to be combined to an infinite array of constellations. Similarly, intimacy too is "supposed to be about optimism, remember?" (Berlant, 1998, p. 288), providing a supposedly harmless and safe arena as well: "a controllable space, a world of potential unconflictedness (even for five minutes a day): a world built for you" (Berlant, 1998, p. 286).

Much like popular music, new technologies and especially social media have been welcomed as postmodern places offering potential for creative, subversive, and safe identity work. Social media are pre-eminent sites for the reflexive construction of postmodern identity (Giddens, 1991) and for "the aestheticization of everyday life" (Featherstone, 2007, p. 65). Through their algorithmic architectures, which are always in motion and alteration, social media themselves can be seen as possessing and enabling postmodern identities with "variable ontologies" (Mackenzie, 2006, p. 96). Especially in their early stages, new media have often been "associated in popular depictions with empowerment and liberation as 'the people' apparently reclaim the internet", thus placed within "a rhetoric of democratization" (Beer, 2009, p. 986). Finally, it is believed by some that people can negotiate their identities independently of the hegemonic structures that exist offline.

If popular music, postmodern identities and intimacies, and new (social) media are elusive sites where identities can be (re)negotiated and hegemonic

structures can be challenged, then Spotify might just be the ultimate queer and feminist utopia. Is Spotify a place ultimately fit for queering practices, for "the doubting of 'authentic' gender and sexual identity and a reaction against the 'legitimate' categories of female and male, heterosexual and homosexual and the social power afforded to them" (Taylor, 2012, p. 44)? In reality, in spite of all the techno-optimism and faith in the power of art, music and identity practices on Spotify are subject to algorithmic architectures, opaque infrastructures, and governing templates of desirable (musical) identities.

Agency and Identity in Algorithmic Environments

Many scholars (among others, MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Van Dijck et al., 2018; Cheney-Lippold, 2011) have been studying how social media, technologies, and algorithm-driven architectures are affecting our individual, social, and political lives. Exactly how strong and coercive these powers are is hard, if not impossible, to measure, especially since these media and their underlying (algorithmic) architectures are ever-evolving, both short term and long term, and remain hidden from the public (Van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 41). The question as to whether social media, including Spotify, 'guide', 'mediate', 'govern', 'influence', or 'determine' our social lives remains to a certain extent unanswerable, but the fact is that social media play *a* role in people's lives and that it has become almost impossible to construct, negotiate, and/or present identities entirely independently of social media.

These social media "are neither neutral nor value-free constructs; they come with specific norms and values inscribed in their architectures" (Van Dijck et al., 2008, p. 3). For the sake of this chapter, we focus on how Spotify's architecture affects intimacies and identity work. Having originally operated as a more or less impartial library of music, Spotify in 2013 took a "so-called curatorial turn […] from a search-based interface focused on simply accessing music to its current emphasis on delivering crafted music recommendations" (Eriksson et al., 2019, p. 117). To help people navigate through its immense library, several algorithm-driven personalised recommender features (Discover Weekly, Release Radar, personalised Mixes) arose and grew to be among Spotify's most prominent qualities. Importantly, rather than relying on all kinds of sonic parameters, Spotify's algorithms make their so-called "inferences" "based on your listening habits (what you like, share, save, skip) and the listening habits of others with similar taste" (Support.spotify.com), an algorithmic technique called "collaborative filtering" (Ricci et al., 2015, p. 2).

To cater to the individual musical profiles of its hundreds of millions of users, Spotify thoroughly engages in datafication, a key characteristic of social media and platforms (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Van Dijck et al., 2018). Datafication involves the capturing and circulation of user data,

"[rendering] into data many aspects of the world that have never been quantified before" (Van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 33). These transcend demographic parameters such as gender and age, and can encompass things like happiness, mood, friendship, ideology, and music taste. The data are no mere accurate reflections of the qualities they try to capture, in fact "raw data is an oxymoron" (Gitelman, 2013), as "data are always already prefigured through a platform's gathering mechanisms" (Van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 34). Platforms decide what and how to measure, and what and how to ignore. What's more, algorithms are self-learning and adjust themselves when they notice some things work better than others.

This datafication is vital in Spotify's search for revenue, first, by attracting and retaining (paying) users through the appeal of these personalised recommendations, and secondly, by using these data for personalised advertising towards non-paying users. People's music practices are thus commodified by Spotify, and while the monetisation of music has been taking place for ages through live concerts, records/CDs, etc., now the most personal and intimate engagements with music are captured and translated into data, and later revenue. CDs and CD players had and have to be purchased too, but the very practices they afford – e.g., listening to sad music on the bed on a Tuesday night – remained until recently more or less uncommodified.

By relying on datafication, more specifically on collaborative filtering, Spotify engages in a "cybernetic relationship to identification" that replaces "essential notions of identity" with a "new algorithmic identity" (Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p. 168). Through algorithmic individuation "the individual is not so much revealed as constructed by his or her data" (Prey, 2018, p. 1088), and then constantly reconstructed and re-evaluated. "Online, traditional categories of identity such as 'gender', 'race', or 'age' are not determined at the outset, but rather performed into being through the user's actions" (Prey, 2018, p. 1088). While this to a certain extent avoids rigid, normative, conservative identity systems, it makes way for new hierarchies and new powers that are much more hidden and beyond the users' control.

Nevertheless, as is the case with other algorithm-driven social media, we want to "emphasize the mutual shaping of technology, economic models, and users: while platform mechanisms filter and steer social interactions, users also define their outcome" (Van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 5). Through collaborative filtering, what we listen to informs what is suggested to us, and vice versa, which makes it hard to discern cause from effect. Also, as Van Dijck et al. (2018) state, "it is important to realize that personalization is precisely the reason so many people are attracted to platforms. Customization and personalization also empower users as consumers and citizens" (p. 42), and we cannot and should not think of hundreds of millions of users to be mere helpless victims of the omnipotent evil that is Spotify.

As MacKenzie and Wajcman (1999) have argued, "it is mistaken to think of technology and society as separate spheres influencing each other: technology and society are mutually constitutive" (p. 41). Spotify is not a space

devoid of societal power and identity structures or cultural and music conventions, and "it is quite possible that listeners are merely collecting, listening to and passing on music that reinforces their pre-existing and socially acquired musical tastes" (Prior, 2018, p. 51). Even within the digital sphere, a range of other media (YouTube, radio, TikTok, Twitter, etc.) are complexly connected with the music-streaming platform. Enduring ideas about the gendering of certain genres and artists may persist and remain instructive in people's online music practices, especially when these are public. For example, Hagen and Lüders (2017) report how an interviewee was worried about his preference for pop ballads not being "typical boy music" (p. 651).

The (Re)Creation of Canons

Spotify features over four billion playlists. Of Spotify's own playlists, a vast number of personalised playlists and recommendations make use of user-driven algorithmic input – of which the precise workings remain hidden – while other shared playlists, so-called 'editorial playlists', are curated by humans to whom artists "can pitch unreleased music to be considered" (artists.spotify.com). Next to these playlists, there is an overwhelming amount of user-curated playlists, although these too are dependent on algorithms, indirectly (through their general discovery of music) or directly (through the help and suggestions in making playlists). Spotify playlists and user playlists feature alongside each other and can only be discerned from each other by those who know they have to look for "the little Spotify logo in the top-left corner of the cover image" (support.spotify.com).

Regardless of their curational origins, through the playlists, "Spotify not only co-constructs individual tastes, but also – given its widespread cultural influence – arguably contributes to the reshaping or invention of musical canons for particular styles and genres" (Dhaenens & Burgess, 2019, p. 1195). When users make use of the Spotify search bar or the many preselected genre and mood categories to get acquainted with new genres (e.g., 'deep house', 'pride'), and listen to the playlists presented, the music included will naturally come to represent and define these genres. The more followers a playlist has, the more prominent a place it gets through the search function and the more cultural legitimacy it is believed to have. This way, Spotify not only co-constructs musical styles and genres but also mediates more social-musical phenomena like music scenes, music communities, and social groups, since genre labels like 'deep house' and 'metal' feature alongside social-cultural labels like 'Pride' or 'Girl Power'.

On Spotify the expert-based selection of radio stations and music magazines is largely replaced by user-driven and algorithm-driven selection. While this may appear to be more democratic, hegemonic power structures remain instructive (see above) and this "user-driven" selection is "also constituted through often black- boxed techno-commercial strategies" (Van

Dijck et al., 2018, p. 41). Since social media algorithms "measure popularity at the same time and by the same means as [they try] to influence or manipulate these rankings" (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 7), this means that a dominant interpretation might be presented more prominently, and thus become increasingly dominant. With respect to LGBTQ music cultures, Dhaenens and Burgess (2019) found that Spotify is "returning the user inexorably time and again to – and thereby reinforcing – a canon of Western-centric LGBTQ music culture" (p. 1208).

Spotify as an Intimate Place for Negotiating and Constructing Identities

When studying the relations between social media and identity work, especially when focusing on intimacies, gender, and sexuality, we should not merely focus on the social, interactional practices they afford, but also direct our attention towards the *private* and *intimate* practices people might engage in. On Spotify, 'private sessions', 'secret playlists', or even the momentarily intimate curation of playlists before making them public are instances where people negotiate their (musical) identities, not in an a-social vacuum, but in relation to social and societal conventions, and inevitably mediated by the affordances of Spotify's architecture. Spotify then illustrates how intimacy cannot and should not be rigidly interpreted as a supposed straightforward 'private' matter, as opposed to a non-intimate 'public' matter. Such rigid dichotomies "are considered by many scholars to be archaic formations, legacies of a Victorian fantasy that the world can be divided into a controllable space (the private-affective) and an uncontrollable one (the public-instrumental)" (Berlant, 1998, p. 283). The private and the public – the intimate and the social – inform, mediate, or even contaminate each other.

Through Spotify listeners are provided with a (somewhat) private and (somewhat) controllable space where they can discover artists, negotiate their position towards these artists, and consequently shape their music tastes. Even though the above-mentioned algorithmic architectures might considerably interfere, Spotify users can roam through music in an intimate environment, undisturbed, at their own pace and on their own terms. Before, music consumers were dependent on radio programming, with little space for personal choice, or on record stores and libraries, offering more possibilities for personal choice but less room for casual exploration and eclectic curation. These outlets took music exploration automatically and immediately into the public sphere.

As has been said, "one of the primary social functions of music lies in establishing and developing an individual's sense of identity" (Hargreaves et al., 2002, p. 5). Music (and other culture) can provide important tools for people to construct and make sense of their identities, even more so for non-normative identities. As Dyer (2002) states, "culture is part of that more conscious process of making sense of the world[,] the social group's

production of *knowledge* about itself and its situation" (pp. 15–16). Coming into contact with (and producing) a variety of (non-normative) music and through it negotiating one's own position has been a prominent part of identity work of people with ethnic minority identities (Slobin, 1994; Radano, 2012; Gilroy, 1991) and queer identities (Dyer, 2002; Taylor, 2012). In the age of music streaming, music "remains an important resource for LGBTQ people to find and express comfort, pleasure, belonging, and recognition" (Dhaenens & Burgess, 2019, p. 1206).

A primary way of engaging in identity work on Spotify is by creating and curating playlists. These playlists can be "used as a means of individualization: control over this content, that is, implies control over the self" (Hagen, 2015, p. 642). Because of music's innate elusiveness and plasticity, and its intricate links to identities, creating, arranging, and rearranging playlists is a way of negotiating and making sense of the self, and performing "mastery over the self" (Hagen, 2015, p. 642). The logics behind these playlists are often based on "personal feelings and experiences", departing from deeply intimate motivations (Dhaenens & Burgess, 2019, p. 1205).

Two meaningful music practices relating to intimacy and identity are music's use for the navigation of everyday life and mood management. The role of music in this, famously examined by Tia DeNora (2000), has arguably intensified in the age of smartphones and music streaming. Using music as a soundtrack to everyday life is a means to exert control over the environment, to provide a background for negotiating the tasks of daily life, "to perform professional or personal tasks in desired conditions" (Siles et al., 2019, p. 4). This form of music engagement has been stated to be of special interest for individuals in urban, postmodern contexts. According to Bull (2005), postmodern individuals use portable music devices to "actively 'warm up' the city and its perceived monotonous rhythms by aestheticizing it, [while] they also withdraw from it by holding the urban crowd and its contingencies at bay" (Prior, 2018, p. 104). Compared to its predecessors the Walkman and the iPod, "the greater level of choice and convenience" of streaming services affords users "both greater control and integration of music into the everyday routine" (Sinclair & Tinson, 2017, p. 5). Many people turn to streaming playlists in order to "navigate the daily commute and work tasks through the use of carefully constructed playlists" (Sinclair & Tinson, 2017, p. 5).

While the soundtracking of everyday life often leads to ubiquitous music and inattentive listening (Kassabian, 2013), the use of music as a comforting, safe presence is pre-eminently personal and intimate, and even political. For example, in examining LGBTQ playlists, Dhaenens and Burgess (2019) argue: "the music may be chosen as personal background music for a generic activity like walking, or a workout, but the playlists still curate and perform a representation of LGBTQ culture" (p. 1204). The need for a protective shield of music in urban environments is also heavily gendered; Prior (2018) found that many women even "wore their headphones to signal

unavailability while having the device switched off in order to keep their wits about them" (p. 113). On the other hand, people can also use music to navigate daily life through more social practices and intimate engagement with others, like the sharing of earpieces (Prior, 2018, p. 108).

People turn to Spotify not only to *create* a desired setting or mindset, but also "to *respond* to moods and emotions derived from specific experiences and activities" (Siles et al., 2019, p. 4). Importantly, "music is both an instigator and a container of feeling – anger, sorrow and so forth", and therefore often has a prominent place in people's mood management (DeNora, 2000, p. 58). Mood-inspired music selection might look for music that fits or even enhances a current mood, whether it be happy or sad, but it might also require music that goes against an undesired mood, hoping to leave it behind. A helpful way to manage one's mood is by engaging in fandom, "the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text" (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 8), and this "affective engagement" (Duffet, 2014, p. 7) with favourite music can be a source of comfort, empowerment, and strength.

For this purpose, people might turn to their own carefully curated playlists, but Spotify also offers a great deal of successful mood- and context-related playlists, such as 'Chill Hits', 'Dance Party', and 'Dinner with Friends', all amassing more than a million followers. According to a statistical study by Chartmetric, context-based playlists and hybrid context/content playlists are rapidly catching up with strictly music-based content playlists (Joven, 2018). Traditional genre categorisations are gradually making way for 'affective genres', constellations of music that are connected through affective bonds rather than musical similarities (Siles et al., 2019).

While pre-streaming practices of record-collecting and connoisseurship were often considered to be a primarily male preoccupation (Straw, 1997), music streaming might afford more 'feminised', affective, and intimate engagements with music. Eriksson and colleagues (2019) argue that mood management on Spotify is "portrayed as a female undertaking" (p. 127) and that Spotify's prominent placing of mood-oriented playlists tend to privilege an "entrepreneurial subjectivity" (p. 125), with women being the "entrepreneurial subjects par excellence" (Scharff, 2016, p. 109). However, the connection between music and mood has more straining consequences too, "as users are encouraged to direct their desire for change inwards and 'capably manage difficulties and hide injuries' [Scharff, 2016]" (Eriksson et al., 2019, p. 125). Under neoliberalism, entrepreneurial subjects are given not only the opportunity but the very responsibility to manage their problems and be happy, autonomous individuals (Scharff, 2016), and, consequently, "compete with the self, and not just with others" (p. 108). Spotify, as Eriksson et al. (2019) argue, frames music streaming as a "deeply personal and intimate – even happiness-inducing – practice" (p. 136), thereby in a certain way commodifying the emotional struggles of its users.

While people often engage in mood management and the soundtracking of everyday life subconsciously and routinely, for example, simply 'being in the mood for' or 'feeling like' listening to particular music, these are instances where music is used in the most intimate and delicate ways, relating directly to listeners' very practices and emotions. This way, music and music streaming are awarded a delicate position of intimate confidant that would not easily be given to humans.

Music streaming's relations to personal and emotional lives get more explicitly intimate when we take into account the many romantic, sexual, and date settings where music is present in the background, evoking or guiding a certain mood. With the use of Spotify in these contexts to "get in the mood" or "get going" (DeNora, 2000, p. 55), music becomes "a device of sexual-political negotiation or, put less combatively, a device for configuring the intimate environment" (p. 116). Through Spotify's playlist and queue affordances (whether curated by users or by Spotify), opportunities to select, curate, and arrange music that 'fits' the occasion have risen considerably when compared to pre-streaming times.

Lastly, we would like to point out Spotify's collaborations with dating apps such as Tinder and Bumble, where music streaming interferes quite directly with people's intimate lives. It is significant how applications that have the search for intimacy as their core business give Spotify a prominent place in its user profiles, next to obvious personality and identity features like pictures, age, and occupation. Apparently, music taste is an important and revealing personality marker, to the extent that it considerably informs romantic or sexual attraction. Interestingly, Spotify generates a few artists to choose from for dating app users, based on their listening habits, but users have the possibility to navigate these and display only the ones they think will help them find a match. In a way, Spotify lends its supposed 'neutrality' and 'authority' to the presented music – 'this is actually my music taste' – while in reality people still very much govern this self-presentation.

Spotify as a Social Place for Self-presentation

If, as Hesmondhalgh (2008) argues, music in general "represents a remarkable meeting point of the private and public realms, providing encounters of self-identity (this is who I am; this is who I am not) with collective identity (this is who we are; this is who we're not)" (p. 329), then the same can be said about Spotify. Much like 'traditional' social media like Facebook and Instagram, Spotify affords social interaction and self-presentation through constructing a profile, following friends, sharing artefacts with these friends, and keeping up with them.

In 2002 Hargreaves et al. argued that "music can be used increasingly as a means by which we formulate and express our individual identities. We use it not only to regulate our own everyday moods and behaviours,

but also to present ourselves to others in the way we prefer" (p. 1). While other (previous) identity markers such as a vinyl collection or artists' merchandise are more tangible and perhaps more straightforward markers of taste, people's music-streaming profiles and featured playlists are important presentations of identities too. Analysing the iTunes environment in 2005, Voida et al. stated that individuals carefully negotiated "what identity to portray through [their] own music library" (p. 194). According to research from Belk (2013), "digital, sharing and access modes of consumption can provide valuable resources for constructing identity if not greater opportunities in which identity can be controlled and communicated to a greater number of people" (Sinclair & Tinson, 2017, p. 2).

When music taste and consumption is believed to be closely tied to identities, and "you are what you share" (Leadbeater, 2008, p. 1), then the presentation of this music taste and consumption is subject to impression management. Following Hogan's (2010) exhibitional approach to social media, playlists are artefacts that feature in the exhibition that is a Spotify profile, where an audience can come by at any time. Goffman's (1959) original dramaturgical approach remains important, as Spotify also affords real-time self-presentation through the 'Friend Activity' feature, where one can see what friends are listening to in real time. When streaming music without enabling the 'private session' function or when curating a public playlist, users are in essence operating in front of a (possible) audience, which brings about a series of ideas, discourses, and connotations to reckon with, even if these are ultimately ignored or rejected. To negotiate the "perceived shareability" of their playlists, people employ highly personal but socially inspired requirements and parameters (Hagen & Lüders, 2017, p. 648). Many people can thus be considered selective sharers, and Hagen and Lüders (2017) further discern 'share-all users', who are willing to share their entire music consumption, and 'non-sharers', for whom "music listening was deemed too personal and intimate an activity to be shared at all" (p. 651).

The settings for managing what to keep private and what to make public are not always as transparent or easy to find: it is hardly indicated to users which features are private by default and which are public. There are some key differences between the smartphone and desktop version (e.g., 'Friend Activity'), and users are not notified when people start following their profiles or playlists. This means that Spotify users are susceptible to context collapses, where "the lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts" (boyd, 2011, p. 49). Spotify contexts (e.g., the private vs. the public) can collapse when artefacts meant to be private or only accessible for playlist collaborators are inadvertently, and often unknowingly, made public. This unintended disclosure of intimate matters might concern music taste ('guilty pleasures'), but also more intimate issues ('sad' playlists or 'sex' playlists) or socio-political identity issues ('Pride' playlists that lead to unintended coming out), etc.

Spotify's social features might also have more collective social and political implications. The creation of canons, and the proximity of and interaction with peers with similar backgrounds, can install networks that can be considered communities or scenes. These are strongly tied to social networks in the offline world, and at the same time inform and mediate them. For example, existing offline ideas of what queer music cultures are are transduced (Mackenzie, 2002) to Spotify and then get reworked and reshaped through its algorithmic architecture and the combined and intertwined user practices. In this respect, "playlists on streaming services […] do cultural work" (Dhaenens & Burgess, 2019, p. 1193).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we took a social media lens to examine Spotify's relations to intimacies and identities. We argue that music-streaming service Spotify can be considered a social media platform, since it employs many of the characteristics found in traditional social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. First, Spotify affords users to engage and interfere with the music by rearranging and curating music into playlists and queues, so that the resulting curated assemblages can be read as "user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Secondly, through the public presentation and exchange of these assemblages, Spotify can serve as a place for Goffmanian self-presentation and impression management. Following Hogan's (2010) Goffmanian approach to social media, we argue that Spotify profiles are virtual exhibitions, where artefacts (playlists containing songs) are put on display for an audience that can come by at any time. Thus, users might carefully deliberate and monitor how they want to present their musical identities. Thirdly, Spotify attracts users and advertisers, and shapes user experiences through the key social-media actions of programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

While both popular music and social media have been hailed as possible utopias of tolerance and democracy, the relations between identities and Spotify, which operates at the intersection of both, have been more complex and less unilaterally positive. Firstly, through its algorithmic architecture and reliance on datafication, Spotify interferes in hidden but meaningful ways with the music discoveries and practices of users. User practices and algorithms are mutually constitutive, rendering music identities always provisional and to a certain degree uncontrollable. Furthermore, through its algorithm-driven playlists and recommendations, Spotify contributes to the (re)shaping and (re)invention of canons, not only of strictly musical genres, but also of social, cultural, and political phenomena. Social identities are thus mediated by Spotify, not in a clear-cut top-down power hierarchy, but according to the dynamics of a "post-hegemonic age" (Lash, 2007), where power works through the real and through everyday practices, and "has become ontological, intensive, factical and communicational" (p. 74).

Secondly, Spotify affords users to engage with music in private and intimate ways, to carefully and personally select music as a soundtrack for everyday life. Responding to the call in Berlant's seminal 1998 essay, we see intimacy not only as directly associated with love and sexuality, but rather see it as taking place through a "range of attachments" (Berlant, 1998, p. 283). Taking into account the popular music studies use of the term 'intimacy' as designating all affective, deeply personal, private practices, we see Spotify as one of "so many institutions not usually associated with feeling [that] can be read as institutions of intimacy" (p. 283). Next to more obvious links to intimacies, such as the use of certain playlists for dates or sexual occasions or the embedding of Spotify into dating apps, Spotify also mediates intimacies when users turn to music to make sense of the self or to navigate their moods, emotions, and everyday life.

Thirdly and lastly, Spotify affords users to socially interact and present (musical) identities to one another. Amidst Spotify's rather blurry and opaque private-public affordances, users negotiate what ought to be shared and what ought to be kept private. Context collapses might lead to unintended disclosure of (aspects of) one's music taste, personal situation, or social-political identity.

Through our analysis of Spotify as a social-media platform, we were able to transcend its obvious relations to music consumption, and instead explore its notable relations to intimacies and identities. When we aim to understand the relations between social media and people's everyday life, emotional worlds, intimacies, and identities, the role of Spotify is not to be ignored.

References

Beer, D. (2009). Power through the algorithm? Participatory web cultures and the technological unconscious. *New Media & Society*, *11*(6), 985–1002.

Belk, M. (2013). Extended self in a digital world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *40*(3), 477–500.

Berlant, L. (1998). Intimacy: A special issue. *Critical inquiry*, *24*(2), 281–288.

boyd, d. (2011). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 39–58). Routledge.

Brett, P. (1994). Musicality, essentialism, and the closet. In P. Brett, E. Wood, & G. C. Thomas (Eds.), *Queering the pitch: The new gay and lesbian musicology* (pp. 9–26). Routledge.

Bull, M. (2005). No dead air! The iPod and the culture of mobile listening. *Leisure Studies*, *24*(4), 343–355.

Cheney-Lippold, J. (2011). A new algorithmic identity: Soft biopolitics and the modulation of control. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *28*(6), 164–181.

Christina Scharff, "The Psychic Life of Neoliberalism: Mapping the Contours of Entrepreneurial Subjectivity," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33(6) (2016), 107–122, doi:10.1177/0263276415590164

DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge University Press.
DeNora, T. (2003). *After Adorno: Rethinking music sociology*. Cambridge University Press.
Dhaenens, F., & Burgess, J. (2019). "Press play for pride": The cultural logics of LGBTQ-themed playlists on Spotify. *New Media & Society*, *21*(6), 1192–1211.
Duffet, M. (2014). Introduction. In M. Duffet (Ed.), *Popular music fandom: Identities, roles and practices* (pp. 1–15). Routledge.
Dyer, R. (1979). In defence of disco. *Gay Left, 8*, 20–23.
Dyer, R. (2002). *The culture of queers*. Routledge.
Eriksson, M., Fleischer, R., Johansson, A., Snickars, P., & Vonderau, P. (2019). *Spotify teardown: Inside the black box of streaming music*. MIT Press.
Featherstone, M. (2007). *Consumer culture and postmodernism*. SAGE.
Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford University Press.
Gilroy, P. (1991). Sounds authentic: Black music, ethnicity, and the challenge of a "changing" same. *Black Music Research Journal*, *11*(2), 111–136.
Gitelman, L. (Ed.). (2013). *Raw data is an oxymoron*. MIT press.
Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.
Hagen, A. N. (2015). The playlist experience: Personal playlists in music streaming services. *Popular Music and Society*, *38*(5), 625–645.
Hagen, A. N., & Lüders, M. (2017). Social streaming? Navigating music as personal and social. *Convergence*, *23*(6), 643–659.
Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York University Press.
Hargreaves, D. J., Miell, D., & MacDonald, R. A. (2002). What are musical identities, and why are they important? In R. A. MacDonald, D. J. Hargreaves, & D. Miell (Eds.), *Musical identities* (pp. 1–20). Oxford University Press.
Hesmondhalgh, D. (2008). Towards a critical understanding of music, emotion and self-identity. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, *11*(4), 329–343.
Hogan, B. (2010). The presentation of self in the age of social media: Distinguishing performances and exhibitions online. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, *30*(6), 377–386.
Joven, J. (2018, May 13). The rise of the contextual playlist. *Chartmetric*. https://blog.chartmetric.com/spotify-the-rise-of-the-contextual-playlist/
Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, *53*(1), 59–68.
Kassabian, A. (2013). *Ubiquitous listening: Affect, attention, and distributed subjectivity*. University of California Press.
Lash, S. (2007). Power after hegemony: Cultural studies in mutation? *Theory, Culture & Society*, *24*(3), 55–78.
Leadbeater, C. (2008). *We-think*. Profile books.
Lecklider, A. (2006). Introduction. *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, *18*(2), 117–123.
Light, B., Burgess, J., & Duguay, S. (2018). The walkthrough method: An approach to the study of apps. *New Media & Society*, *20*(3), 881–900.
Mackenzie, A. (2002). *Transductions: Bodies and machines at speed*. A&C Black.
Mackenzie, A. (2006). *Cutting code: Software and sociality*. Peter Lang.
MacKenzie, D., & Wajcman, J. (Eds.). (1999). *The social shaping of technology* (2nd ed.). Open University Press.

Middleton, R. (2013). Mum's the word: Men's singing and maternal law. In F. Jarman-Ivens (Ed.), *Oh boy! Masculinities and popular music* (pp. 104–115). Routledge.

Prey, R. (2018). Nothing personal: Algorithmic individuation on music streaming platforms. *Media, Culture and Society*, *40*(7), 1086–1100.

Prior, N. (2018). *Popular music, digital technology and society*. SAGE.

Radano, R. (2012). Music, race, and the fields of public culture. In M. Clayton, T. Herbert, & R. Middleton (Eds.), *The cultural study of music: A critical introduction* (pp. 308–316). Routledge.

Ricci, F., Rokach, L., & Shapira, B. (Eds.). (2015). *Recommender systems handbook*. Springer.

Sandvoss, C. (2005). *Fans: The mirror of consumption*. Polity.

Scharff, C. (2016). The psychic life of neoliberalism: Mapping the contours of entrepreneurial subjectivity. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *33*(6), 107–122.

Siles, I., Segura-Castillo, A., Sancho, M., & Solís-Quesada, R. (2019). Genres as social affect: Cultivating moods and emotions through playlists on Spotify. *Social Media and Society*, *5*(2), 1–11.

Sinclair, G., & Tinson, C. (2017). Psychological ownership and music streaming consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, *71*, 1–9.

Slobin, M. (1994). Music in diaspora: The view from Euro-America. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, *3*(3), 243–251.

Straw, W. (1997). Sizing up record collections. In S. Whiteley (Ed.), *Sexing the groove: Popular music and gender* (pp. 3–16). Routledge.

Support.spotify.com. https://support.spotify.com/lt-lt/article/find-playlists/ (Accessed on 20 October 2021).

Taylor, J. (2012). *Playing it queer: Popular music, identity and queer world-making*. Peter Lang.

Van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding social media logic. *Media and Communication*, *1*(1): 2–14.

Van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & De Waal, M. (2018). *The platform society: Public values in a connective world*. Oxford University Press.

Voida, A., Grinter, R. E., Ducheneaut, N., Edwards, W. K., & Newman, M. W. (2005). Listening in: Practices surrounding iTunes music sharing. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 191–200). ACM Press.