

Dancing about architecture? Talking around popular music in film soundtracks

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Abstract

Music is seldom discussed in accounts of audiences' filmic meaning-making processes. This article describes focus group research which was designed to generate talk that would enable exploration of the ways in which audiences hear and relate to popular music in film soundtracks. Three contemporary romantic comedies – *Love Actually*, *What Women Want*, and *10 Things I Hate About You* – were discussed in four focus group interviews, recruited according to age and gender (under-25-year-old men and women, and over-45-year-old men and women). Although the participants did not often emphasise music in their conversation, close analysis of the music talk across all four focus group interviews suggests that participants drew on several different modes of engagement in making sense of popular music in film, including: evaluating the music according to a diverse range of criteria and categorisations; relating the music to life stages and personal memories; and managing perceived involvement with the films and their soundtracks.

Keywords: popular music; film; soundtracks; audience research; focus groups.

Elvis Costello famously quipped that 'writing about music is like dancing about architecture – it's a really stupid thing to want to do' (White 1983). Costello's assertion of the pointlessness of trying to describe music in words relates to particular issues in the investigation of audience responses to film music, a textual feature that some authors argue is not consciously attended to.¹ Jeff Smith (1996) has effectively addressed several inconsistencies in the theoretical model that assumes film music is 'inaudible', in particular the paradox that 'though composers intended their music to be unobtrusive or 'unheard', they also realised that it must nevertheless be 'heard' in some sense in order to serve any narrational function' (Smith 1996: 235). In addition, Smith notes that such models often deploy a strict dichotomy where

viewers either fully attend to music or ignore it: this disregards the varied and shifting ways audiences can make sense of music in film, ways which often do not correspond to formal Western music codes. Despite these critiques of theoretical models of film soundtracks, music – whether pre-existing or specially composed – seldom receives detailed attention in writing about filmic meaning-making processes. An attempt at investigating how audiences hear and relate to popular music in film soundtracks, therefore, involved careful strategies.

As the first phase of my doctoral research project in this area (Anderson 2009) I conducted four focus groups, concentrating on three romantic comedies (*Love Actually* (2003) *What Women Want* (2000) and *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999)) all of which had extensive compilation soundtracks. The research project was exploratory in nature: existing approaches to audiences' engagements with popular music soundtrack have been entirely theoretical, so the project used semi-structured interviews to empirically explore audiences' responses to popular music in film.² The focus group interviews were designed to generate wide-ranging talk around films rather than asking participants directly for their thoughts about the music: the goal was not to pre-direct participants' attention in any strict manner, and to enable a more naturalistic conversation that might show where and how music was meaningful for them. It soon became apparent that music was not something these audiences tended to make relevant in discussing the three films. Despite the paucity of music talk across the focus group interviews, however, close analysis reveals some interesting contrasts among the various ways these participants heard and related to popular music in the film soundtracks.

The four focus groups constituted friendship groups, recruited using a variant on the snowball method (I made contact with one person, and asked them to bring a group together for the purposes of a discussion). I was particularly interested in how gender and age might become relevant in audience meaning-making, so the four groups were distinguished along those lines: Group 1 consisted of five under-25-year-old women, Group 2 was six over-45-year-old women, Group 3 was four over-45-year-old men, and Group 4 was four under-25-year-old men.³ Each interview was conducted during the evening at a participant's home, and involved some generalised questions as well as re-viewing of 'favourite' segments of the films (as identified by participants in advance of the interview). The discussions were transcribed, and analysed according to discourse analytic techniques drawn from Foucauldian analysis, Discursive Psychology and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.⁴

The interview schedule was designed to elicit talk around three key areas where I thought music might play a role in the participants' interpretations: categorisation of films and their resulting expectations of those films; likes or dislikes (of a scene, film or genre); and relation to the world of the film and its narrative (including setting, theme, and characters). In addition,

I attempted to generate talk about what personal contexts might contribute to their interpretations by asking 'What is there about you personally that means you like or don't like the bits you've mentioned?' The questions were kept as open as possible, so that to a great extent the participants could determine the direction of the talk on a particular topic. My goal was to get them talking in ways that would reveal how they made sense of the various aspects of the film, and only in the subsequent analysis to examine whether, where and how the music played into this sense-making.

I concluded the main body of discussion by asking whether anyone had any final thoughts on what we had been talking about, before briefly explaining that my topic of research was popular music soundtracks and asking for their final thoughts on that. There is some debate about whether the researcher should reveal the topic of research to participants (especially in relation to concerns about moderator demand): I felt it would be dishonest not to tell my participants, who had freely given up their time, but also wanted to avoid steering the topic of discussion too strongly throughout the interview. Giving this opportunity to speak specifically on the topic of music in film at the end of our conversation was thus a useful compromise between these two concerns.

Having noted while transcribing the interviews that music talk was not very common in the participants' discussions, I decided to focus initially on what the focus groups could illustrate about how the participants related to the films more generally: it was necessary to contextualise the music talk against the broader patterns of response within the interviews as a whole to get a clearer picture of when and in what ways the music played into the participants' relations to the films in general. This article therefore follows my analytic process by offering a detailed discussion of some of the general patterns of response before delving into the particularities of the music-related talk.

One of the strongest patterns to emerge across all four interviews was the centrality of an evaluative response. Much of my first phase of analysis, therefore, centres on examining the participants' conditions for a 'successful' experience of the films (as well as, of course, conditions that led to a 'failed' or less successful experience. Indeed, the negative criteria were often most revealing). Looking across the interviews for 'repetitions ... connections ... distinctions ... implications [premises] ... key concepts ... modalities of talk ... and puzzles' (Barker and Brooks 1998: 52) revealed that key conditions for success and failure for the focus group participants included viewing contexts, characterisations, believability, quality and production issues, conceptions of authenticity and originality, and what the participants considered to be appropriate ways to engage with the films. Some fascinating contrasts emerged along these lines.

For the group of under-25-year-old women, the films were experienced primarily in relation to who the young women thought they were, what they valued in others, and what might be possible in their lives to come – that is, aspects broadly related to their (social and life-historical) sense of self. Particularly interesting conversation explored the women's imaginings for the future. This style of talk emerged in accounts of all three films. Some scenes were experienced as offering an account of what might be possible in life: the films contain scenarios that these participants discuss as if they see them as points against which one might measure one's own life. When talking about the scene in *10 Things I Hate About You* where Patrick serenades Kat with 'Can't Take My Eyes Off You' from the sports ground bleachers, Mel notes:

M Erm... I think like when I first saw it I was younger, and I was like 'oh wow, that would be amazing' and cos they always looked...cos they looked older, it was like 'oh, that must be what happens every time'!

Now that Mel is older than the age represented in the film (and presumably without having had anyone serenade her in her school sports ground) she has re-evaluated the sequence and no longer sees it as realistically representing what might be possible in the realms of romance. She now sees the scene as 'not really realistic, and everyone looks perfect and smiling and happy and .. erm, very American'. This shift in perspective highlights the way these young women relate to the films over time as opportunities to imagine romantic possibilities for their futures.

In contrast to the *10 Things* sequence, the wedding in *Love Actually* where several members of the congregation contribute to the processional (a rendition of 'All You Need is Love') seems not to have been subject to such a strong re-evaluation. It is discussed as follows:

R ...I just think it was absolutely hilarious, and there's just like these two really funny dudes on their flutes as well!

G/L? Maybe that's slightly over dramatised?!

(laughter)

R (excited) But it's also..it could happen! (laughs)

M See that's like [indist.] one thing, you're like 'ooh, I could (slower) have that'

R Yeah, I just think it's so nice!

Despite the acknowledgement that this sequence might be 'over dramatised' like other 'American' film sequences (which can be 'the extremes of anything that would be extreme'), eventually there does seem to be agreement that this sort of happening might be possible for the participants at some stage in their own futures (Rebecca even added 'I think I'd just like that at my wedding!').

The importance of these imaginative possibilities that the films offer is outlined by Mel, who explains how being able to imagine herself in the situations depicted in the films often correlates with whether or not she likes the film:

M [...] And, yeah, *Love Actually* I saw it in the cinema and it was just before Christmas, cos it's based all round Christmas, and it's got like all...(tentative) this could be me. (faster) I think a lot of the times, yeah, I'll kind of almost want..you kind of put yourself in those situations kind of like, 'ooh, that could be me'. (others laugh a little) Erm, I could be...I don't know, whatever. Erm. (pause) Yeah I suppose in *What Women Want* you can't really do that to any of the characters, which..I suppose I..I don't personally like connect to any of the characters so.. I guess I don't really like it as much, as in... Whereas in the other ones I think I know..or feel like I know the characters better, so ..

In similar ways, the possibilities a film offers in terms of such imagining, and how such imagining is re-evaluated over time, seem to correlate with several participants' evaluations of whether a film is worth repeat viewing. *Love Actually* had been watched several times by all five participants: Rebecca could not remember when she first saw the film because she had seen it so often. While they had all seen *10 Things I Hate About You* several times in the past, they commented that they now find this film a bit 'young', and they would be unlikely to view it again, apart from the above singing scene:

R Erm, *10 Things I Hate About You*... I think it's an OK film, er, I probably wouldn't want to wat...the only bit I re-watch is that one scene where he sings. But..I probably wouldn't ..

Ali conceded that she might watch *10 Things* again but only for a very specific purpose:

A I think maybe if I got together with a load of school friends, like a reunion or something, it would be the sort of thing we would watch and it would be a..you know, a hilarious thing to do all together ... but that would be principal..principally just to kind of remember what we did at school. I wouldn't ... I wouldn't really catalogue it as a kind of a 'must watch'

Ali's comment here stresses the importance of the viewing context: she and her school friend would not watch the film for the film's sake, rather they would watch it in order to re-live something they had done frequently together in the past, and which had brought them enjoyment. Again, then, successful or unsuccessful experience of this film is tied to age: when they were 'younger', it was an enjoyable film to watch, but now it seems to have crossed into being 'too young'. I would further relate this changing perception over time to what is deemed 'imaginable' for the future: it would be interesting to see these women again after they had themselves been married, for example, and find out whether the wedding processional scene in *Love Actually* was still considered 'possible' and 'real'. It is worth noting that age is not defined chronologically; rather, the terms 'younger' or 'older' seem to be used in relation to a sense of having reached a point in one's life according to 'experiences experienced'.

Finally, and in relation to this last point, it is worth noting that where something was deemed a 'potential future event' in this interview, it was often tied to a notion of 'realism' ('that could happen'), which was, in turn, tied to an understanding of 'Britishness'. 'Britishness' was used to evoke ideas of realism, normality, and conceivability within 'real' life (it was perhaps no accident that *Love Actually* was by far the most positively received film among these young British women). These ways of experiencing the films did not seem to be as clearly tied within their talk to the 'girly' aspect of their enjoyment of the film that was also dominant in their discussion, but a link was evident between the romantic possibilities seen in the sequences that 'could happen', and their own links between being 'a romantic' and being 'girly', as seen in these separate comments from Lorna and Ali:

L Why? Erm ... Ok, I..I have grown up being quite tomboy, right, and I only recently realised I had become a bit of a romantic!

[...]

A Erm, well I think it was probably a ... I mean we used to watch things like Dirty Dancing and Pretty Woman it's in that sort of same vein. Definitely being a..sort of a girls' film. [...] Not a lot else to do at the weekend in boarding school! Errm... I think, I think I'm quite a romantic.

Overall, then, these films are experienced as tied in to the way these young women understand aspects of their self-identity, to their social values, and their expectations towards life. The ideal context of viewing is tied to an understanding of 'girly'-ness, while the films, characters and scenes are evaluated according to ideas of life possibilities. This imagining of what is possible is in turn tied, by these young British women, to an understanding of

'Britishness' that is used to determine how realistic the films are (Mel: 'if we're going for American/British, the British ones would just be a bit more real.').

Ideas of 'realism'⁵ also emerged in the interview with the older women. For these participants, however, the modality judgement was made in relation to their life histories, rather than imagined futures. Much talk around successful (usually realistic) and unsuccessful (usually unrealistic) scenes either explicitly or implicitly stressed this concept, or, to use the words that most often occurred in the interview, 'believability' or 'credibility'.

Some judgments about realism or believability seemed to involve measuring what was seen in the film against these participants' real life experiences. For example, Kati explained that she had once worked in advertising, which she describes as having been a 'very chauvinist business'. For Kati, the thought that a 'macho male' advertising executive would actually try out the women's products (leg wax, mascara, etc.) as Mel Gibson's character does in *What Women Want* just 'didn't fit' with her recollections of working in the industry. Similarly, both Amelia and Rose noted emotional similarities with Karen's story in *Love Actually*:

A I think you.. you *feel*, you know, like, some of us .. gone through infidelity and that and you know a particular friend of mine something similar happened to her at the time, and I think that's why I was quite upset then.

[...]

R ...you can associate with it, really, because when you've been in a situation where you're feeling a bit sa..upset for some reason, but you have to *try* and act normally, erm ... It's hard.

Likewise, discussion around some school-related scenes in both *What Women Want* and *10 Things I Hate About You* drew on life experiences to question the realism of the representations. Sue noted that the scene in *What Women Want* set in the girls' bathroom during the prom was 'so unlikely' because there was nobody being sick or crying. Most of the participants also agreed that the cast in *10 Things I Hate About You* looked too old to be portraying characters supposedly attending secondary school, and this was deemed 'not very convincing'.

Notably, in some cases the judgment on the grounds of believability or credibility seemed to be put to one side in favour of enjoying another aspect of the scene, such as humour. For example:

A I mean / liked the Hu..I know he wasn't credible, but I liked the Hugh Grant character, and I just .. oh I just thought it was really funny

[...]

It still makes me laugh! (laughs) It's probably cos it's so stupid!

Bill Nighy's character and his attempts to achieve the Christmas number one also elicited humour responses, but this time because of apparently heightened awareness of the real-life phenomenon being presented:

G ...And also it *is* such an awful thing to be singing isn't it?

J Yeah! (laughs)

A Ohh!

G ... (laughs) it's something that's so ghastly!

K ...But..but we all *know*...

G ...it's so naff!

K ...that there is *always* a Christmas song...

G ...yeah...

K ...and it doesn't matter how much we *hate* it...

G ...[so it is ... awful?]...

J ...there always is one, isn't there?...

K ...it's always going to be played time and time and time again!

This storyline is successful partly because they would not normally have expected Bill Nighy to be playing an 'aging rocker' character, but also because the Christmas number one is a loved-to-be-hated phenomenon that the participants appear to enjoy recognising within the film. So even though they use words here that indicate dislike ('naff', 'hate', 'awful'), the excited tone of their speech suggests enjoyment at seeing it represented in the narrative in this self-conscious way.

There is thus an interesting tension within these women's talk between the realistic=successful / unrealistic=unsuccessful aspects. Sometimes 'silly' or 'naff' elements and storylines are let off charges of realism or believability because of the value of the

humorous response: it is acceptable – indeed, welcomed – for something to be ‘unbelievable’ if it succeeds in being funny or amusing in some way.

As well as the references to specific similarities outlined above, some discussion implicitly refers to concepts of believability through notions of the ‘comfortable’, ‘familiar’ and ‘recognisable’. Several successful scenes, including, for example, the school nativity play in *Love Actually* were described in such terms, which also eventually came to be related to national identity (‘British’ and ‘American’). A comment from Kati clearly links the concept of ‘recognisable’ to an idea of ‘believability’:

K I th..I think that was the other thing, that..you know, maybe they were more believable because they were ... a mixed a...a...range of ages with (breathes out) I suppose similar ...

J ...British...

K ...British backgrounds and...things that ... we can all recognise.

Although there was much less talk about the differences between British and American films in this interview than in the interview with the younger women, it is still revealing that ‘British’ is ultimately associated with ‘credibility’, while ‘American’ is something to which the (British) participants say they cannot relate.

As with the interview with the younger women, then, there is much talk here that can be linked to aspects of identity. Here, however, the identity-talk seems to be related to a broader idea of a film’s ‘believability’: it seems that if these women recognise aspects of life that relate to their own lived experiences, they tend to deem a film or a character believable or credible, while films or characters that do not relate to their lived experience are seen as ‘contrived’ or unbelievable. Moreover, a successful experience of a film, as well as being believable and associated with familiar life aspects, is usually one that evokes an affective response (for example, Amelia says that she likes the ‘funny bits and the sad bits’). Whether funny or sad, what is important is that the affect is strongly felt.

Both groups of men held the films up for more critical reception, rather than relating the narratives and characters to their real or imagined life experiences as the women did. The four older men had a very clear set of ideas around what they considered to be a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ film: their criteria include textual features and construction of the film, as well as what they feel they experience in an encounter with a film. Two prominent threads of talk in the

interview indicated that for these men the generic elements of the films could stand in the way of a favourable reception, and that they conceived of the films as 'highly produced' texts.

In Group 3's talk about several textual features (particularly acting, concept, and music), it became apparent that these participants did not like being aware of formulae in films. If the generic aspects of a film (for example, soaring violins in the score for a romantic scene) were reasserted, the scene (or entire film) faltered in their estimation. These men seem to prefer not to engage with these films through their generic archetypes, rather they prefer to look for the moments in the films where something 'authentic' or 'original' is happening. The following exchanges exemplify this strand of talk across the interview. Gethin's comment is in the opening chat, while the exchange involving David and Mike is approximately quarter of the way through the interview.

G They're all a bit the sa.. the same as each other. You know, they're *all* sort of.. putting together a fairly .. *fairly* weak plots on the whole ... erm ... with the intention of ... having some ... sections of the film that are likely to be funny and some sections of the film that are likely to be sad, and maybe make people feel a bit tearful, but it's ge.. just really thinking, oh, we've got a formula here that kind of works, it'll.. you know, it'll get a decent number of people to the box office and we'll probably make a profit out of the film. Erm, and they don't really have to try *that* hard then, on the whole, erm, to put something *really* different and exciting and interesting together, really.

[...]

D (talking about Alex in *What Women Want*) Well, predictable was what I was going to say.

G That's what I mean. It's .. yeah, it's been done. It's nothing new is it ..

M It's *too* predictable

D It's...

M ...it's *too* predictable...

D ...yeah, definitely. You don't want it to be predictable, and it.. it was very predictable her character .. Like Gethin said, it's been done loads and loads of times. And there was no .. originality or quirks there that surprised you, it was just, yeah, very obvious.

The further related and important strand of talk within the interview was the sense of the film as an artefact made by 'filmmakers'. At various points of the interview, talk centred on how these filmmakers have constructed the film, and how these participants think the filmmakers expect them to react (an understanding of a kind of implied audience response, possibly

related to genre). I was struck by the frequency of the term ‘they’ in the interview: this abstract third-person pronoun was often used to apparently refer to the people who made the film (who were only occasionally specified as ‘filmmakers’). For example:

G It was just as if they’d run out of ideas, and it just went downhill then.

[...]

M I wish they wouldn’t *do* that in films, you know, we’re not stupid! We do get the message!

[...]

D were they trying to make it believable [...] or were they just trying to make it comic and funny and ..

‘They’ serves to create distance between the speakers and the films: these four men do not want to identify with the ways of thinking embodied by the filmmakers who have produced these ‘silly’ films.

Apart from the ‘lack of ideas’ mentioned here by Gethin (and discussed above) the main thing that ‘they’ were guilty of was overdoing things. The group agreed that bad films were often ‘overdone’: they ‘laid it on really thick’, were too ‘obvious’, were not ‘subtle’, and would unnecessarily ‘go from one extreme to the other extreme’ in depicting a narrative event or character. In contrast, a good film would, as David put it, contain ‘loads of pauses and space to think.. your own.. you know, make your own interpretation about what’s happening’.

Two comments from Gethin suggest that something more might be happening here. The comments occur close together, in response to my question as to what the participants thought was going on in the bathroom leg-waxing scene from *What Women Want*:

G Well, as I said, try.. trying to make it, even *more* obvious, in case you were a bit slow on the uptake, that he didn’t understand anything about.. the way women think

[...]

G ...this is what we’re supposed to be assuming, I suppose, he’s never had any of these thoughts, that women might be thinking in a slightly different way from what he imagines.

These comments suggest that Gethin thinks filmmakers are underestimating his (and other viewers) abilities to follow the film. He also suggests there is a type of intended response meant by the filmmakers. In response to the same question ('what do you think is going on in that scene') David wanted to clarify, 'are you asking us what are the filmmakers trying to tell us, by that scene?' suggesting that what he thought they were trying to tell him might have been quite different from what he actually understood as occurring. His subsequent response went beyond a straightforward recounting of the scene and its narrative implications to include evaluation of how those narrative aspects were presented ('laying it on really thick').

David's comments, in line with Gethin's and Mike's ('we're not stupid'), suggest that the group have a preferred mode of imagined interaction with the filmmakers who are implicitly involved in film viewing: they do not like to feel as if they are being treated as if they are 'stupid' or 'slow on the uptake'. Instead, they prefer to feel as if the filmmaker had assumed they are thinking beings, who will appreciate opportunities for sustained, individualised, intellectual engagement. It is therefore possible that these four do not feel as if they are part of (what they perceive to be) the intended audience for these films. This aligns with their scepticism of the genre more generally, and the safe distance their constantly evaluative response creates between them and the films themselves.

This conception fits in with the overall impression that these four men value individuality, originality, quirkiness, and oppositionality. Towards the end of the interview they expressed surprise that they had managed to talk for so long (nearly two hours) about the films. David also seemed to question their value as an object for study: he asked 'I wondered why you'd chosen such *shallow* films' (while Mike, on the other hand, thought you could 'talk forever' on a film, no matter how poor it was).

As with the interviews with women, then, there was a lot of identity talk in this interview but it came through in a rather different way. Rather than being implicitly expressed in talk about personal values or attributes seen in characters or storylines, the identity put forth here emerges through this group's sense of themselves as participants in a wider film arena, where there are multiple potential positions of response in relation to films. These four men seem to have a very clearly defined (perceived) position from which they engage with films, and that position affects how they react to them. This position further affords them very clear (if not necessarily clearly articulated) criteria for categorising 'good' and 'bad' films.

Like the older men in Group 3, the younger men in Group 4 were also aware of the films' genre, but they took a different approach. For them, a film's perceived type determined a particular level of engagement and specific evaluative criteria. The group's descriptions of when they had first watched these films, and when and how they might watch them again, revealed much about the level of engagement they saw as appropriate for the type of film

they describe late in the interview as ‘chick flick’, ‘suitable for parents’, and ‘easy watching’. Most of them had seen one or more of the three films either with a girlfriend, in a group outing organised by ‘the girls’, or with their mother. In most cases they agreed that they had not necessarily wanted to watch the film initially, but had in the end quite enjoyed it and would not mind watching it again.

Although they said they had enjoyed the films, it became apparent that this success was in part due to using the appropriate level of engagement, as all four participants outline in the following exchange:

T I think they all sort sa.. fall into the same brackets, I think, of decent films, happy to .. watch, when you’re not inter.. you don’t want to sit there and think too much [about them?]....

P ...no, if you’ve had a hard day, you don’t want that...

T ...yeah, you just put it on, and just, either have it in the background or just .. for the odd par.. part of it...

D ...It’s a compromise film, isn’t it? You know, I’ll watch my film tomorrow, you can watch your film tonight.

T Yeah.

D And you end up watching 10 Things I Hate About You, not really paying attention but you haven’t still missed the plot.

(general sounds of agreement – ‘mmm’)

T Yeah.

D ...and then you can watch...

T ...Yeah, it’s not so much of a *serious* film, it’s something you can...

D ...[indist.]...

T ...happily watch...

B ...you can tune in and out of, can’t you...

T ...Yeah. Wouldn’t watch it every week but every now and again you’re happy just to put it on in the background [and watch/whilst].. you read the paper or something.

Dav’s explanation of the term ‘compromise film’ relates back again to the notion of watching these films with a girlfriend, and also to another statement that these three films ‘aren’t our

favourites'. The agreement here seems to be that re-watching these films is most enjoyable when you do not direct all of your attention to them: they are simple enough that you can follow the narrative without having to concentrate intently, and they serve the purpose of being entertaining enough without requiring mental exertion.

This level of engagement corresponds with the type-specific evaluative criteria applied to the films: as Tom says above, the three films are 'decent', that is, of an acceptable standard. Ben and Dav explain:

D It is pretty much.. what it says on the tin, isn't it? But that doesn't mean it's *bad*, it's just.. it is what it is.

[...]

D But they're all good for what they are.

B Oh yeah. For what.. for what they do..

D For what they do, they're quite good.

P They don't pretend to be anything else, do they?

D No

B They do what they do well, but it's not much.. they don't actually do much, but they do it well.

D Yeah.

That is to say, these films succeed according to the criteria applicable to their type ('easy watching', etc.), but the implication is that if other evaluative criteria were applied they would not be deemed as successful: as Dav quips 'we're not watching Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* here, we're watching [...] *What Women Want!*' (These alternative evaluative criteria are never explicitly explained, but they do hint at a cultural hierarchy between films, as perceived by these four participants). The comment about 'pretending to be anything else' will be discussed in more detail below, as it aligns with another strand of talk.

A different level of engagement is implied in the group's enjoyment of 'funny' scenes, and professed dislike for 'deep sappy stuff'. The discussions of humorous scenes centre on their lightness: they are enjoyed simply because they are funny. Dav explains:

D [...] I like to.. to see funny things, er, maybe that's why I liked the, er, cos he's not.. you can't read much into it..

LA Mm-mmm.

D ...er, and I [think?]. what I dislike.. *intensely* .. is people who read things into things that just *aren't* there. Er, it's just.. really annoying. It stems back from Year 8 English where you go.. look at a poem and just come out with bullshit just in an essay...

B ...yeah, and the teacher would all say 'yes, yes'...

D ...yeah, 'ooh, yeah, it's really good', and it's not. Er. And so maybe, er, when thinking about, er, when you asked us to think about bits that.. I didn't want to pick a bit that you could ... basically just, talk rubbish for three hours. I wanted to pick a bit that really.. you can't really an.. analyse it, it's just something funny at that I quite enjoyed, and that's what that film is it... that's the thing is, it's not a [film I'd think about] it's a film that, actually, I quite enjoyed that. My clip I laughed at, so it's.. it's sort of, [seen].. meant to make people laugh, and it did. I think that's probably why I picked that.

Here Dav is very clear about the level at which he prefers to engage with these humorous scenes, and in fact with the films in general: these films are supposed to be encountered as 'just entertainment'. It is difficult to say more about what this distinction means for Dav, but it is possible that by so strongly emphasising his desire to keep films light in this way, he is suggesting that in these viewing situations he prefers to avoid complex or difficult responses.

This distinction was clearly evidenced by Dav's particularly vehement reaction to the opening sequence of *Love Actually*, which Tom had chosen as his favourite scene. This was the strongest expression of a failed scene in the interview.⁶ Dav described the sequence as 'lazy', 'awful', 'drivel', 'out of place' and 'sickening'. His main objection seems to be that, for him, this sequence marks a point where the film oversteps a line in terms of what it can claim to do: it moves beyond being 'just entertainment' and tries to put forward a social values message:

D ...I thought that was the *soppiest*, *laziest*, piece of writing...

(laughter; quiet sniggers continue under Dav's talk)

D ...I have *ever* seen in my entire life! I've seen *Oxfam* adverts that are more moving than that! It's like 'ooh look, it's just after 9/11, I know, oh, we're doing a film about love, er, let's try and get 9/11 in there somehow, just to make it topical!' 'Oh, I know, er, people made text.. people rang people when they were about to *die* in the towers, ooh, (forced 'obvious' tone) it's about *love*, it's about love, it's a serious film, it's not some kind of rubbish romantic comedy film, it's a serious film!!'. And we're meant to sit there and be emotional to that sort of...

B ...Pap...

D ...*awwwful*, awful abuse of people's feelings! (laughter from others builds) You know what I mean: you're kind of just sitting there, and you've lost your loved one *in* September 11th, and you're watching some *shitty* film by, like, Curtis, thinking to yourself, 'oh, actually, I did lose my husband in, er, in 9/11, but never mind it's in *Love Actually* at the beginning [indist.] by Hugh bloody Grant'.

Dav's first objection to the reference to the World Trade Centre attacks of September 2001 in a light-weight comedy film suggests that for him the film is breaching an important generic (and moral) boundary (trying to be a 'serious' film rather than a 'rubbish romantic comedy', with an unwanted assumption of an emotional reaction to the 'serious' style). Moreover, in his final comment, he seems especially to object to the mismatch he perceives between the levels of emotion and grief that people affected by the World Trade Centre attacks would be feeling, and what he thinks the film is trying to do, namely give them a straightforward and instant 'feel better' cure. There is thus a stark contrast between emotions felt in real life (constructed as genuine and real), and those felt in front of a screen (which are linked to the film industry's cynical manipulations of the audience). When the boundary between screen entertainment and serious 'real life' is crossed or blurred, the films fail in Dav's estimation.

A related key feature of the talk in this interview was the idea of what might be termed authenticity or integrity. This came through in a strand of talk that centred on 'not pretending to be more than you are'. It was evidenced in talk around these films in general (see the comment from Phil above that these films 'don't pretend to be anything else, do they'). Dav's comments about the opening sequence of *Love Actually* clearly show how trying to do more than the film's type 'should' do is an area of potential failure for these participants.

Authenticity and integrity were also valued character traits. The group enjoyed the portrayal of the Prime Minister character in *Love Actually* because it showed a different side of a real figure: he was 'personalised' by the inclusion of 'things that normal people do in a day to day life, like when he phoned his sister'. In addition, they appreciated the fact that he does not pretend to be able to dance:

T Yeah, yeah I find it quite funny the fact that.. again as a male, he doesn't project, er.. protest to be able to dance, it's just rubbish dancing!

(laughter)

T I mean, he's not doing some turns, and jumps, and twizzles, he's just.. just dancing like an idiot!

This pattern of talk is also evident in discussion of Bill Nighy's character, Billy Mack:

T Yeah I think you'd just say he's a sort of .. say he's the .. forty-year-old ex.. –rocker who's trying to make a comeback. Erm, but then he kind of endears himself to the fact that he doesn't hide that fact that he is rubbish.

B Yeah, rubbish.

T He'll say it's cheesy

[...]

B he.. he knows exactly why he's doing it, he's not doing it under any pretence of being famous again, or getting his music career back on track, or ... proving people wrong that he could actually sing, that sort of thing, he's just doing it purely for the fact that he .. the Christmas single novelty, and he can actually make something out of it for one last go of it, for the music sort of ...

D ...and again it's.. it's.. it's sort of distanced himself from these sort of politicians who try and be down with the kids by, again, I know it's a .. it's a joke that I really found funny.. the 'Ant or Dec' thing. It's like, y.. you knew.. you know if you had a politician there, they.. they would.. they'd have dossiers on who these guys are so they can research.. methodically who these guys are.. and he's like 'Anyway, Ant or Dec..' (laughs) He just gets into it, he just doesn't give a shit. (laughs) Er, so I like that. He's not pretentious, or anything, he's not ..

In both cases, the lack of pretension makes these characters successful: they are true to themselves, even though this means showing that they are neither talented nor particularly socially adept. This honesty and spontaneity is preferred to smooth over-preparation. Interestingly, this pattern of talk, whereby faults in performance are read as a sign of 'authenticity', mirrors discourses around authenticity in rock music (see, for example, Moore 2002)⁷, and parallels the participants' talk in Group 3, where 'originality' and 'scratchiness' were favoured.

Overall then, the talk in this interview suggests that these four men measured the films according to some complex and finely balanced conditions for success and failure. The films were generally considered to be 'decent' examples of their type, and the participants seemed happy to engage with them on that level. However, they derided moments where the films too obviously drew on generic formulae, or went over-the-top, or moved outside the bounds of (or claimed to be more than) what their perceived type would allow. This suggests that this 'success' is only a tenuous achievement.

To recap, then, the four discussions above reveal a multitude of ways of engaging with and making meaning in relation to *What Women Want*, *10 Things I Hate About You* and *Love Actually*. Some emergent patterns became evident across and between the groups. In particular, both groups of women drew the films in to their lives, measuring the films' representations of romantic stories against their understandings of what might happen or what has or has not already happened in their own lives. The women highlighted parts of the films that chimed in with their understandings of themselves and the people around them. Both groups of men, on the other hand, stood back from the films to inspect them according to more or less clearly defined evaluative criteria. The older men seemed to have more fixed criteria which would be applied to any film, while the younger men drew on relative criteria that were defined according to what kind of film they thought they were watching. In both cases, however, the men tended to dislike parts where formulaic elements of the romantic comedy genre seemed to (re)assert themselves.

This is not to say, however, that the men did not relate the films to their own values or life experiences. Instead, they did more performative or discursive work in the interviews because they did not necessarily perceive themselves as target audiences; they thus drew lines between themselves and potentially 'less critical' viewers by presenting themselves as more knowledgeable, critical and distanced. The women did some similar work in this regard: they could also be critical, but they had a kind of permission to give in to obviously formulaic elements and to admit their emotionality. They too, however, made particular boundaries relevant and judged the films according to their view of reality.

This comprehensive discussion of key features of the group discussions provides a clear background against which to examine talk focusing on the films' soundtracks. As already mentioned, one of the first things that struck me upon completing the focus group transcripts was the apparent dearth of talk that explicitly focused on music within the participants' discussions. This was obviously of concern, as the aim of the project was to investigate how audiences hear and relate to popular music in film soundtracks. However, I am concerned in my analysis *not* to overemphasise the music's presence in the participants' discussions of the films, nor to too starkly isolate the music talk from the context in which it emerged. I have thus provided this detailed overview of the wider patterns of talk in order that this account reflects both the body of materials, and the difficulties one can encounter in trying to research audiences' relations to a formal element that is not often discussed within professional or informal film analysis and critique. As outlined at the beginning of this article, these focus groups had been designed specifically not to steer discussion towards the music, in order to generate as naturalistic a conversation about the films as possible within the semi-structured interview context. Having ascertained the general patterns of response, a second phase of analysis involved turning my attention to any evident music talk within the interviews.

In order to obtain a clearer picture of the music-related talk, I extracted all relevant sections of talk from the transcripts, and analysed them more closely for emergent patterns and trends.⁸ The music talk is characterised by its diversity. There is no clear pattern of talk that would suggest a single, unified account of how audiences experience popular music in film; instead, comparing the participants' levels of enthusiasm for various aspects of the films and their soundtracks reveals a complex web of commonalities and contrasts among the variety of responses. As the following section will show, the focus group talk that centres on music reflects the broad patterns of response to the films outlined above.

Before exploring the complexities in more detail, it is worth outlining the commonalities in responses to music across the four focus groups. All four groups of participants spoke of music as a memory trigger. For example, the under-25-year-old women said they always think of Patrick's serenade when they hear 'Can't take my eyes off you' (Group 1), and Dav commented that Girls Aloud's version of 'Jump' always reminds him of Hugh Grant dancing (Group 4). Further, in all examples given where music would set off a memory, the music seemed to be reminding them of films or scenes about which they were relatively enthusiastic. No one mentioned a situation where music had triggered a memory of a scene or film about which they had not been particularly keen.

In addition, nearly everyone spoke at some point about music matching the mood within a scene, or the mood of a character, or as conveying a particular mood to the audience. This attribution did not seem to relate so closely to levels of enthusiasm and seemed to be spoken about in a more objective tone. This may be because most talk of mood is in relation to Nick's use of music in the bathroom sequence from *What Women Want*, which was generally disliked (see further discussion below). Here participants responded that Nick was using music to 'create a mood for himself' or 'to get him in the right mood'. The other key reference to mood is Lorna's (Group 1) comment that the music during Jamie and Aurelia's proposal scene 'captures the mood of romance' (although Gethin (Group 3) denounced that same music as 'unashamedly tearjerking').

Further patterns also become evident when comparing the levels of enthusiasm within music-related talk across the two gender groups. It is useful to start by considering which points or scenes involving music resulted in an enthusiastic response. For the groups of women, these tended to be scenes that they related to their own lives in some way: as I indicated in the earlier overviews, both groups of women generally enjoyed seeing aspects of themselves (either their past, present, or future selves) within the films, and this pattern remains apparent within the music-talk across the interview as a whole.

Thus, for example, the older women (Group 2) were not enthusiastic about the two 'American' films, and their dislike was also evident in their talk about the music in these films: Amelia had not noticed the music at all, while Sue and others commented on how intrusive it was. In contrast, they generally expressed enthusiasm for *Love Actually* because it was 'so familiar', and they also speculated that the music in this film was also more enjoyable because it was familiar and 'generational' (that is, related to their age group). Further, although at first glance one would not recognise their response to the 'awful' Christmas number one as enthusiasm per se, their excited and animated tones seemed to reflect an eagerness for recognising something within the film that they 'love to hate' in their day to day lives. For these women, 'familiarity' seems to be a common and comfortable entrance point for an enthusiastic response not only to the music within these films, but to this kind of film more generally.⁹

Interestingly, several participants in Group 2 were very enthusiastic about Emma Thompson's key scene in *Love Actually* (where she does not receive the necklace she had expected from her husband). This scene had already generated strong responses from these women before we watched it again in the interview; two of the participants had chosen it as a 'favourite' scene. However, three women commented that they had not 'noticed' the music before watching the segment again in the interview context.¹⁰ Upon re-viewing, they noted how powerful the music was, and how it gave an extra 'kick' to the scene that they had not realised before. In later discussion of the intrusiveness of much music in film and television, they made a point of coming back to this scene and explicitly pointing out how its structure excluded it from such criticism (there was no dialogue competing with the music).

For the younger women (Group 1), a different kind of talk was noticeable in talk around the scenes that garnered an enthusiastic response. As was evident in their general talk across the interview, they sometimes seemed to enjoy scenes that provided space for them to imagine possible futures, and the scenes discussed at such points often involved music (both examples discussed earlier involve song: someone serenading them in a school sports ground, or a congregation breaking into song at a wedding). As I outlined above, these filmic musical moments were carefully measured against life stages: the women reflected from their current life stage that, for example, they now realised the *10 Things I Hate About You* scenario would not actually happen 'in real life'. However, while this re-evaluation over time had dampened their enthusiasm for the film as a whole (*10 Things* now being considered 'too young') it had not entirely snuffed out their enthusiasm for the singing spectacle scene; it was described as the only reason they had for going back to watch the film again. Importantly, their current enjoyment and enthusiasm for the scene seems to be quite different to the initial pleasures they described: now it seems to be the physical slapstick comedy, or sometimes a nostalgia for the earlier imaginings of romantic possibilities, that provide pleasure (rather than

the imagining for the future), and the song is still considered 'just lovely'. That is, this particularly musical scene is still *liked* even though it is no longer considered 'realistic'.

While several of the scenes the young women spoke most enthusiastically about in the interview contained music, the music itself did not always feature as an explicit point of discussion. On the two occasions where an explicit question was addressed to such music, the responses were minimal or vague. In regard to the song (The Pointer Sisters' 'Jump') accompanying the Prime Minister's dance through Downing Street, Rebecca commented, 'works well, but I think it'd be funny with any song that he did': here she seems to dismiss the music as an element contributing to her enjoyment of the scene – for her, it was definitely about the dancing. However, these young women did comment about the significance of the radio station the Prime Minister is listening to: having recognised Jo Whiley's voice as the DJ, they commented that you do not normally expect the Prime Minister to be listening to Radio 1, rather you would expect him to listen to Radio 4.¹¹ They seem to thereby articulate an enjoyed contrast between music, setting, and character via the significance of the source or provenance of the music (that is, the radio station) and its associated connotations (these connotations were not explicitly expressed: the group appeared to have a commonly held, but unstated, set of meanings that they linked to Radios 1 and 4, possibly along oppositional ideas of low- and high-brow entertainment).

There thus appears in part to be a lack of a satisfactory way to discuss music. Mel (Group 1) attempts to discuss the song in her favourite scene from *10 Things I Hate About You*: 'It's just such a lovely scene, and that...the song's so nice ... that it just, I don't know, it's so good...'. The struggle she seems to have expressing herself could imply that she would like to find a way to talk about it, but does not have the means (yet?) to go beyond her evaluation that it is 'lovely', 'nice' and 'good' (this might be because she does not feel equipped to draw on other formal ways to talk about music). In contrast, the older women seemed more articulate in their attempts to talk about the music in their 'enthusiastic' scenes: music was described as 'beaty', 'lively', and 'generational', and they brought up the music without prompting from me. Interestingly, neither group of women were very enthusiastic about *What Women Want*, so the scene I showed from it (the bathroom sequence with a significant change in music) did not receive particularly positive responses. Some enjoyed the humour of seeing a man try to wax his legs, but the conversation stressed the overall credibility (or lack thereof) of the sequence. Here, Mel (Group 1) mentioned the music as an interesting part of the sequence, and in these comments she was much clearer in her analysis of the song than she had been in the above comment which related to her favourite scene: in relation to the use of Meredith Brooks' 'Bitch' to accompany Nick's bathroom antics, Mel explained that the music was achieving a marked contrast to the character's actions and apparent intentions. However, when I posed an explicit question to the group about the change in music within the scene, the conversation

was stopped by Lorna's comment that it had not represented anything. If I had probed a bit more here for the others' responses, they might have differed, but it was my sense during the interview that the other participants agreed with Lorna's assessment of the change. It is interesting that Mel had expressed articulate comments about the music, but when explicitly asked the discussion dried up.

The older women had similar responses to my question about the music in this scene (comparing it to character motivations, etc.), but, as indicated above, this was not such a contrast to the responses they gave about the scenes they were enthusiastic about. As also noted above, however, when they were particularly unenthused about a film overall, they either did not notice music at all, or they found it intrusive (it may be that the intrusiveness fed into the lack of enthusiasm, of course). Their articulate comments about the scene from *What Women Want* may thus be in part due to having watched it again during the interview: this group's responses to the Emma Thompson scene from *Love Actually* were more focused and detailed than they had been before re-viewing, so it might be that their responses to this scene had also been influenced by having only just seen the clip again.

As discussed earlier, the male participants were not very excited about the films in general. The older men (Group 3) remained unenthused on the whole, though they did suggest that parts of *Love Actually* and *What Women Want* were meaningful. Despite the younger men's expression of an initial lack of enthusiasm to see the films ('the girls' had organised the trips to the cinema, for the most part, and these three films were described as 'not our favourites'), they ended up quite enjoying the films, 'for what they were' (Group 4). This group's relative evaluative criteria allowed them to be fairly enthusiastic about some elements of these films, and the points where their enthusiasm emerges (discussed below) are revealing.

I explained above that the talk from both groups of men was characterised overall by what seemed to be a more distanced tone: they saw the films as constructs to be measured and evaluated in very particular ways. This mode of talking sometimes also applied to the music: it was seen as simply another element within the construct, to be read in the same way as dialogue and set, props and characterisation, and subject to the same industrial processes as any other element of films:

D It's str.. it's strange though.. though sometimes it's a bit misleading cos you hear 'Jump' and you thought the Girls Aloud song was in the film, but it wasn't, it was the original song.

T? Mmm.

D Er, and that's a.. maybe it plays tricks on you.. or maybe people that *callously exploit* film, er, to make money, er, out of.. like Girls Aloud do, probably, in that film. Or their management did ...

(Group 4)

Further, the younger men retained their 'relative' evaluative criteria when talking about music: in a similar vein to the young men's use of particular genre-appropriate criteria when appraising these films, Tom, for example, commented that the Pointer Sister's 'Jump' was not a favourite song, but 'for that moment.. that type of scene it was OK' (Group 4).

Neither the younger nor the older men were enthusiastic about scenes where the music was part of a spectacle or a gimmick. In *10 Things*, the young men agreed that the bleachers serenade scene and the band performing on the roof of the school at the film's conclusion 'just wouldn't happen' and they expressed disdain for the scenes because of this. Similarly, the older men felt that Patrick's serenade from the school bleachers marked the film's turning point from potential success into definite failure:

G ...definitely. I've..I think the turning point was when he started to do that singing.

LA Right.

G In the big, er, stadium. And I..I..I thought 'this is getting really silly'...

M ...yeah, he just didn't..he just didn't get away with that.

G And it w..it was just as if they'd...

P ...[indist.]

G ...run out of ideas, and it just went downhill then.

M He didn't get away with that as an actor *or* as a character.

G No!

M Or a singer!

(Group 3)

In contrast, it seems that in some other cases the music provides space for the men to be enthused about a film they are not keen on, or for them to become more engaged with something they would not otherwise pay so much attention to. For the older men, sometimes music could redeem an otherwise disliked film: Mike stated that the best bit of all the films had

been the music and that 'You've definitely gotta have music in those films otherwise they would be no good at all' (Group 3). Gethin agreed that in some cases the music helped his experience of the film: otherwise he would have been 'bored with the whole thing' (Group 3). Similarly, Tom enjoyed the opening of *Love Actually*, and cited the music as playing a role in his re-assessment, while watching this sequence upon first viewing, that this film was not going to be the same as other romantic comedies (Group 4). The music was part of the sequence that caused him to prick up his interest and start to gain something more than he had expected from the film, that is, the opportunity to reflect on the state of the world today.

The flip-side to this was that sometimes, for the older men in particular, music could spoil a scene they were otherwise enthusiastic about. For example, the Jamie/Aurelia storyline from *Love Actually* had received quite positive responses from three of the four participants: they had discussed the communication breakdown, the humour of the subtitled exchanges, and David had related the story to some of his wider perspectives on life and relationships. Yet the music in the proposal scene, the culmination of the story arc, was considered awful:

D That was actually spoiling a nice scene.

LA Which.. the music..?

D That bit that, erm, Gethin mentioned, with Aurelia and what's-his-name.. what was it?

LA Colin Firth, the actor. His name was Jamie.

D Yeah, that scene was spoiled by that music.

G If there'd been no music at all, then, I reckon it would have been a *hell* of a lot better.

LA Mm?

G A *hell* of a lot better, without *any* music whatsoever.

D Yeah, it was like.. Scarlett O'Hara coming down the stairs, wasn't it, that [bit?]

M (laughs)

G And I think.. what do you need it for, the scene's got plenty of, you know, punch in it really.

(Group 3)

A further commonality within the men's talk about the films in general was an emphasis on what I would term 'authenticity'. Both groups of men highlighted as important values of originality, difference, truth-to-self, and lack of pretension. These values remain evident within their talk about music in scenes they were enthusiastic about: Mike (Group 3)

appreciated that the characters were not pretending to be anyone else when they were dancing on their own; Tom (Group 4) noted that the PM does not pretend to be able to dance; and Dav (Group 4) appreciated that Bill Nighy's character knew he was rubbish but was singing anyway ('He was just being himself'). The notion of 'authenticity' seems to be crucial in their measurement of when it is appropriate to become really enthusiastic about a film of this type.

Finally, it is worth noting that for nearly all participants (of both genders) who discussed the Hugh Grant scene in *Love Actually*, it was not the song that was important but the act of dancing. In the talk around the Prime Minister's dance in interviews where it was discussed in detail (and where the clip was shown again), the song was not mentioned in detail unless I probed for further comment. Only Amelia (Group 2) mentioned, without prompting, that she liked the music, and said that it was not what you expected to come out of 10 Downing Street. The other participants were much more focused on the dance (Mike, who brought up the clip in the older men's interview, even though it was not a 'favourite', also focused on the dance without mentioning the song). In addition, it is notable that the dancing scene was so enthusiastically received whether or not the character was disliked (the older men and women found it a typecast role for Hugh Grant – 'It's just Hugh Grant being Hugh Grant again!' (Kati, Group 2) – while the younger men and women appreciated that David was not what you would expect to see in a Prime Minister (see Tom's comment, above, about the Prime Minister phoning his sister (Group 4)). The distinctive way 'dancing' was treated in the interviews may be a productive avenue for future investigation as it raises interesting questions about the uses of and stances towards music and movement, and its status within the diegesis.¹²

The selected extracts discussed in this article show that the ways these participants related to the films' music soundtracks reflected the ways they related to the films more broadly, evincing similar concepts of identity and critical evaluation to those that were applied to characters, scenes and narratives overall. The women's talk about music reflects their tendency to relate their experiences of these films to their experiences of everyday life and aspects of their self-identities, while the men's talk about music also reflects the groups' broader critical concerns with authenticity tropes within their discussion of the experiences of the films.

Despite my initial concerns about the potential difficulties in generating talk around music, and the lack of explicit attention to music across the group interviews, the patterns that did emerge are intriguing and point towards the potential productivity of more detailed research and discussion about the role of soundtracks in audience meaning-making processes, a hitherto under-examined area. Talking about music (in the form of compilation scores) turns out not to

be such a 'stupid thing to want to do' after all: it did, on occasion, seem difficult for participants to articulate their thoughts about music, but it is evident that closely analysing relevant talk can reveal meaningful and interesting patterns of response in relation to popular music film soundtracks.

Biographical Note

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Filmography

Love Actually. Dir. Richard Curtis, UK/USA, Universal Pictures, 2003.

10 Things I Hate About You. Dir Gil Junger, USA, Beuna Vista, 1999.

What Women Want. Dir. Nancy Meyers, USA, Paramount Pictures, 2000.

¹ For example, see the work of Claudia Gorbman, Kathryn Kalinak, and Caryl Flinn. These authors draw on psychoanalytic theories in their discussions of Hollywood film scores: music's 'inaudibility' (achieved by sneaking cues in at low volume or closely matching visual action) is understood to permit easier access to the viewer's unconscious processes, contributing to the suturing into a particular subject position.

² I later conducted a second round of individual interviews to further explore some of the issues raised in the analysis of the focus groups discussed in this article.

³ Participants gave their permission at the start of the interview for the use of their first names for the purposes of the research. The group members were as follows. Group 1: Ali, Gemma, Lorna, Mel, and Rebecca. Group 2: Amelia, Glenda, Jo, Kati, Rose, and Sue. Group 3: David, Gethin, Mike, and Peter. Group 4: Ben, Dav, Phil, and Tom.

⁴ For more detailed explication of the analytic strategies used, see Anderson, 2009.

⁵ I am aware that 'realism' is a contested term within film and cultural studies. What I am particularly interested in here are the modality judgments the participants make, that is, 'the immensely varied ways in which [they] accord trusted status to ideas, stories, characters, and images' (Barker et al. 2008, p.12; see also Buckingham 1993; Hodge and Tripp 1986; Messenger-Davies and Machin 2000)

⁶ It is difficult to tell, however, how much Dav's self-described 'rant' was hyped up for the benefit of an audience in the group interview context.

⁷ For further discussion of 'authenticity' in relation to popular music, see Lawrence Grossberg's 'The Media Economy of Rock Culture: Cinema, Postmodernity and Authenticity' (1993) and, more recently, Leslie M. Meier's 'In Excess? Body Genres, 'Bad' Music, and the Judgment of Audiences' (2008).

⁸ Using Microsoft Word's 'Find' function, I copied to a new document any section of talk that explicitly utilised the terms 'music', 'band' (or 'group'), 'song' (or 'singing', 'sings' etc.), 'dancing' (or 'dance', etc.), and 'soundtrack'.

⁹ It is important to note that they also expressed enthusiastic responses to music in other types of films – for example, the soundtracks of *Philadelphia* (1993, dir. Jonathan Demme), *Cold Mountain* (2003, dir. Anthony Minghella), and a film about Rwanda – but these films are all different genres, and also incorporate differing musical styles to those I focused on within this research.

¹⁰ These comments were made before I had revealed to the participants that I was specifically interested in the music.

¹¹ Radio 1 is the British Broadcasting Corporation's contemporary and chart-based popular music station, while Radio 4 broadcasts spoken-word programming, including news and political commentary.

¹² The concept of kinaesthetic empathy, as Karen Wood (2010) recently discussed in this journal, may be useful here.