Motivation and Identity in an American Irish Music Community

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MOTIVATION AND IDENTITY IN AN AMERICAN IRISH MUSIC COMMUNITY

by

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A thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Colorado in partial fulfillment

of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

College of Music

2016
This thesis entitled:
Motivation and Identity in an American Irish Music Community
written by Cara R. Schreffler
has been approved for the College of Music

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol # 14-0363
“Music is about the people who play it, not the music itself.” This statement by Seán Keane, an Irish fiddler I interviewed in County Clare, Ireland, gets at the very root of Irish traditional music. People who seek out and play Irish traditional music do so not only for the sake of the music itself, but for a wide variety of personal reasons that have more to do with their own physical, mental, and emotional needs. The motivations behind this drive to musical participation are as varied as the people themselves, as are the effects these motivations have on personal identity. Motivation, musical participation, and identity are indelibly linked in a mutable and highly individual manner, and the depth to which these motivations and the music produced affects personal identity varies according to how important those motivations are and how meaningful are the personal rewards musical participation brings to the musician.

This dissertation examines the motivations of musicians in three Irish traditional instrumental music sessions in Albuquerque, New Mexico in which I conducted fieldwork from September of 2014 to November of 2015. I analyze motivations for participation in the Albuquerque Irish traditional music scene in three broad categories: music as a social outlet, music as therapy, and music as a learning experience. This three-part analysis reveals how different motivational factors impact the practice of Irish traditional music in America as well how those motivations and the music itself affect individual identities among participants in these groups. These findings have implications for how we
understand music making in settings where musical participation is not driven by the desire to enact an ethnicity, for financial gain, or in order to satisfy the expectations of others. A better understanding of why people participate in amateur traditional music groups can help us to understand the needs of those people and how music satisfies those needs and fulfills their desires.
To my family
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of my adviser Dr. Jay Keister, who has offered invaluable guidance, advice, and editorial contributions. I would like to especially thank Dr. Ben Teitelbaum for going vastly above and beyond in organizing and teaching an independent study seminar for me on music and identity, for being instrumental in helping me hone my interest into a focused topic, and for consistently being available at any time for my innumerable and occasionally ridiculous questions. I would like to thank Dr. Brenda Romero for reminding me to be practical, for holding me accountable for showing her drafts, and for her consistent support. Dr. Tom Riis has provided invaluable help with finding American sources and musics, and Dr. Elissa Guralnick has offered priceless advice that has made this document cogent and readable. I would be remiss if I neglected to thank Dr. Steve Burns, Dr. Carlo Caballero, Dr. Rebecca Maloy, and Dr. Austin Okigbo, all of whom have offered support, advice and guidance, answered questions, and given me nudges in the right direction throughout my studies.

My fellow graduate students have been sounding boards, editors, supports, and friends. I would especially like to thank Cassidy Grunninger, Chase Peeler, Kelsey Thibdeau, Jessica Appleby, and many more that I do not have space to name. Michael Harris was not only a great friend and listening ear, but ran errands for me and offered invaluable advice and help with this document. I am fortunate to have many long-standing friends who have stood by me for years, offered unstinting support, and have been important companions throughout many, many years. I can’t thank Jenny Wood-Stubbs, Evan Stubbs, Ona Crow, Stephen Glitzer, Byron Smith, and Julie Kelly-Smith enough for all they have done for me over the years—I am so very grateful to have them in my life. Eric Schaller has been especially supportive and has unselfishly shared his
time, a listening ear, skiing adventures, camping, unswerving friendship, advice, and his family with me for years. Many thanks also to my fellow skydivers at Skydive New Mexico, especially Kevin, Laurie, Ben, and Jimmy, who remind me that one can’t work all the time and who taught me that the best way to relieve stress is to fall at a hundred and twenty miles an hour.

My family has always been my anchor. I have never doubted they would always be there for me, and help me with anything I need. My grandparents not only funded a majority of my education and fieldwork, but also taught me that I was capable of anything and to chase my dreams. I wish they could have seen me finish. My parents are the best parents anyone could hope for: supportive, caring, generous, enthusiastic, helpful, and loving. I knew I could do anything because my parents believed I could, and I knew that they would do everything in their power to help me succeed. I know I can rely on my brothers for anything under the sun, from dogsitting to advice to help moving. I am extremely lucky and grateful to have the family I do, and I never could have succeeded without their unqualified love and support.

I would also like to acknowledge all the scholars who have inspired my own research and created the foundations for my studies. Sean Williams, Mirjana Lausevic, Diane Negra, Thomas Turino, and Fintan Vallely have all been particularly inspirational, even though I have never met them.

Thank you to all those I have named here and to those I have inevitably forgotten. This document is a testament to all of you and the impact you have all had on my life.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Musical activities in the United States traditionally associated with ethnic minorities are becoming increasingly popular among native-born Americans. Irish music has traditionally served as a cultural reminder for the Irish immigrant community, but in recent years it has been enjoyed by the wider non-Irish-born American population. Much has yet to be explored in terms of the relationship between Irish music and the identities of those who play it, whether or not they have Irish ancestry. In the modern world, personal identity and the establishment, portrayal, and defense of that identity has become an intrinsic part of people’s lives. How, then, is the identity of musicians of non-Irish American heritage affected by their participation in a group of musicians playing Irish music? What motivates these musicians if they are not enacting an ethnicity or gaining financial remuneration from their participation? The motivations for Americans to participate in an ethnic music tradition, when enacting an ethnicity and monetary gain are excluded as variables, can be placed into three categories: music participation as a social experience, music and music participation enacted as a therapeutic device, and music as a learning experience. The effects that motivations and musical participation have on the musician’s identity vary depending on multiple factors, but the identities of those who are motivated by music’s ameliorative effects on the mental and emotional state of the participant are the most profoundly affected.
Several scholarly works, such as Mirjana Lausevic’s *Balkan Fascinations*, explore the reasons Americans participate in ethically rooted musics, both as performers and as audience members. The majority of Lausevic’s book is an ethnography examining the Balkan music and dance scene in the United States, especially in music camps dedicated to the teaching and learning of Balkan musics. Lausevic particularly discusses how Americans participate in and structure their social practices around Balkan traditional music, although she focuses on performers with an ethnic heritage rooted in the Balkans. A discussion of the experiences of non-Balkan musicians active in the Balkan music and dance community is beyond the scope of her book. In her research, Lausevic found that an individual’s continued and deepening interaction with the music expands his or her interest and knowledge of the culture it stems from, and the involvement with music and dance can sometimes lead to an exaggerated sense of connection and intimacy with a culture and a people. Participants in the study often had difficulty articulating why they chose Balkan music to participate in, and they seem to not find a cultural home, but to build it from available resources. Participants in the Balkan music scene found a shared awareness of belonging within the group and chose to identify with the most distinctive part of their ethnic background, as it “adds a ‘safe color’ to one’s identity,”¹ just as Diane Negra argues is found in the Irish scene. Tellingly, Balkan music and dance are understood by participants as “precious remnants of the past”² and participants find the music and dance resonate with their perception of who they are, thus reinscribing musical meaning onto the repertoire.

² Lausevic, 62.
Many of these writings discussing the performance of ethnicity in music, however, tend to only discuss the experiences of musical participants who share an ethnic heritage with the music they participate in, leaving unaddressed the reasons why people who do not share that ethnic heritage choose that particular music to engage in. While there are numerous scholarly works researching the history of Irish music in America and the role it plays and has played in American society, none of these works has discussed the experiences of American participants in Irish music who do not claim an Irish ethnic heritage. This dissertation addresses the lack of scholarship by investigating how participating in an Irish music community influences the identity, self-perception, and self-representation of non-Irish American musicians who play Irish music and why they are motivated to participate in such a group. These issues are investigated through conducting field research and interviews with American participants in Irish music communities who do not claim an Irish ethnic heritage.

This is not to claim that scholars are ignoring the issue completely: numerous studies have been conducted regarding people playing musics that did not originate in their ethnic background. *Blue Nippon*, for instance, by E. Taylor Atkins, discusses jazz performance in Japan and the unique challenges Japanese jazz musicians face. Works discussing issues of appropriation, assimilation, and globalization, such as Philip Deloria’s *Playing Indian*, Perry Hall’s “African-American Music: Dynamics of Appropriation and Innovation,” and Mari Yoshihara’s *Musicians From a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music*, all study the experiences and dynamics of people participating in a music that is outside of their ethnic or cultural heritage, yet none of these studies addresses Irish music in America.
Studies of white Americans playing musics not part of their ethnic history have been written as well, including Jay Keister’s study of shakuhachi performance in America. Keister focuses on individual performance, however, as shakuhachi music for Americans tends to be a highly personal, contemplative practice linked to the Buddhist meditative roots of the instrument and the spiritual development of the individual. Regular participation in a musical style that is highly participatory and social is not relevant to Keister’s study, but it is the central consideration of this dissertation in the attempt to discover what happens when someone participates in a musical group that is focused on the community and the ensemble instead of the individual when the musician and the music do not share an ethnic heritage.

Irish music is uniquely suited to answer these questions for several reasons. It is a highly participatory music, with significant social interaction, it is prevalent throughout the United States, and it is recreational for the majority of the participants. Irish music and session culture in the United States are idealized and presented as utopian; as a community where everyone can participate, regardless of ethnicity, age, sex, musical ability, or other considerations. Participating in an Irish music session is supposed to be about the music and the community, not about a performance of Irishness as an ethnicity. Irish traditional music can be perceived by both participants and audiences as neutral, universal, and safe, in much the same way many Americans view Western Classical music.

However, session culture is not as egalitarian or utopian as session musicians would prefer to represent it. In her article “Becoming Irish or Becoming Irish Music?” Deborah Rapuano focuses on the Irish music session in America as a vehicle for the promotion and continuity of Irish ethnic identity. Rapuano argues that while participation in the Irish
music scene defines a participant’s identity, “outsiders [those of non-Irish heritage] are not always allowed to, nor can they fully identify with the culture in any case. Musicians, who are not Irish, cannot be Irish in the same way that a person born into Irish culture is Irish,” because Irish music has not been an intrinsic, assumed part of their life since birth.

Contrary to many session musicians’ claims to democratic and inclusive musical practices, boundaries and hierarchies are constructed and reinforced that exclude or include members based on a variety of factors, including experience, knowledge, musical ability, and ancestry. These boundaries, while they are exclusive, also contribute to a stronger maintenance of identity, an intense collective consciousness, and a high degree of solidarity. Among the myriad authors who write about Irish music and identity in America, only Rapuano begins to approach the problem of performers and consumers of Irish music who are not of Irish descent, but she does not address the results of this boundary construction on the identity of the non-Irish individual. Rapuano also does not take into account geographic considerations: are the “boundaries between the inner and outer circles” less prevalent or non-existent in areas where populations of people of Irish descent are less numerous, powerful, or prevalent?

When we consider Deborah Rapuano’s argument of boundary construction—that people are subtly excluded from the “inner group” if they are not of Irish heritage—in conjunction with Charles Taylor’s theories of the politics of recognition, it can be easily extrapolated that non-Irish musicians within the session community will either eventually abandon the community from lack of recognition or will claim an Irishness that they do not have in order to gain acceptance and recognition. Either of these possible outcomes would

have an impact on that musician’s self-identity, although the specific effects and the level of profundity would vary depending on the individual. We know from observation, however, that this is not always the case, as there are numerous musicians who have been part of the Irish music community for several years who do not claim Irishness. Some of these musicians have achieved renoun within the realm of Irish traditional music: playing professionally, winning competitions, and teaching others. Why did these individuals not react as could be expected? Is it purely a result of individual personality, or are there other factors?

The traditional music of Ireland has flourished in the United States, and is adopted by many as a way of expressing, constructing, or connecting with an Irish ethnic heritage. As Rapuano discusses, Americans performing traditional Irish music are more inclined to be concerned with tradition and notions of authenticity than the Irish, and base inclusion in the music community on a claimed Irish ethnic heritage and cultural knowledge. The terms “traditional” and “folk” are contested among music scholars, with a variety of definitions that span the spectrum of definitions, which include orally transmitted music, the music of the lower socioeconomic classes, informal music with unknown composers, music of undetermined, but great, age, and indigenous music particular to a specific ethnic or cultural region. In the context of this paper the use of the term “Irish traditional dance music” is simply pragmatic and used to denote musics primarily descended from an oral tradition and which are associated with Irish culture, although, of course, exceptions are common—for example, polkas, waltzes, Highland flings, and other dances imported from

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4 Rapuano, 109.
elsewhere and adopted by the Irish are considered traditional despite their non-Irish origins.

When people talk about “Irish traditional dance music,” in large part the musics under discussion are instrumental dance musics that came together as a musical genre throughout the eighteenth century and solidified and refined throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the later musics that have been created in that style and with that influence. It is a dynamic practice, and tunes are constantly being made and remade. There is no age limit; no sense of the ancient: tunes from the seventeenth century are played right along with tunes that were created the evening before. Since the advent of the recording industry, however, a codification of the style has been taking place: as music is recorded and then disseminated through recordings, it becomes more homogenized. Music is learned from recordings, instead of passing from person to person, with each musician adding their own individual interpretation and stylistic and aesthetic choices, and the way a tune is performed on popular recordings, or by popular musicians or ensembles become the standard, the “right” way a tune is played. Historically, however, Irish traditional dance music revolves around the individual, the intimate, and the local. People learned orally from others in their region, which led to regional differences in style, popular tune types, and popular instruments (i.e., Kerry is known for slides and the concertina is associated with County Clare) and the music created a sense of place and of history. Each musician was expected to take the skeleton of a tune and make it their own, to add individuality, personality and style.

Irishness has emerged as an idealized white ethnicity, one with which large numbers of people around the world, and particularly in the United States, choose to
identify. Irishness is seen by many white Americans as a white ethnicity can be easily assumed and that does not carry with it the “guilt” of belonging to a colonializing or oppressive ethnic history. The collection of essays included in the volume *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, edited by Diane Negra, is devoted to the exploration of the performance of Irishness in popular culture. In the introduction to the volume, Diane Negra writes, “Irishness now seems increasingly to serve as the ideal guilt-free white ethnicity of choice, subject to a predominantly (and peculiarly) ecumenical vision” and as a form of celebrated “enriched whiteness” that counters the “emptiness” and lack of meaningful ethnic roots, culture, or substance.

Negra also discusses the assumption or adoption of an Irish ethnicity as a symbolic ethnicity, although she refers to it as an “a la carte ethnicity,” whereupon a person receives all the standard benefits of the white culture, such as the safety in invisibility and sameness, but also gets to have the history, roots, culture, and color of having an ethnic history. Negra’s concept of “a la carte” ethnicity is paralleled by the concept of symbolic ethnicity as discussed by other scholars, including Gans, who first introduced the concept, and Negus and Velazquez. Many musicians involved in the Irish session scene are expressing a symbolic ethnicity, and that ethnicity is “not a fixed category, but a process,” achieved, rather than ascribed.

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6 Negra, 1.
7 Negra, 2.
8 Gans, 146.
10 Rapuano, 105.
Topics dealing with issues of music and identity are rapidly evolving and growing. The two main theories of music and identity state that music either helps to construct identity or that music helps to reflect identity, ethnic or otherwise. The anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce has noted that music is an important indicator of identity along with dance and the other arts. Royce, in her book *The Anthropology of Dance*, credits the emphasis on identity with the revival of traditions that have long since disappeared, a statement that applies not only to the indigenous dance traditions Royce examines in her book, but to the revitalization of traditional Irish culture through music and dance as well.

When we remove ethnicity as a motivating factor behind musical choice, however, we are left to determine what motivates the musician to participate in a musical tradition of an ethnic origin other than their own and how those motivations and the music itself impacts aspects of the both the self-identity of the performer and how the performer’s identity is perceived by others.

There could be several possible solutions to this problem. Musicians could be seeking the social camaraderie and sense of belonging that comes from participation in a musical group, as Turino discusses in his *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. In this study, Turino theorizes that social interaction in music leads to real community and the construction and maintenance of affinity groups, so some musicians participate because they share an affinity for that music due to their own personal tastes and inclinations. Often, people are interested in a particular culture and look to music to reinforce or expand their cultural knowledge, or they are interested in “folk” music in general and the particular type they participate in may be their only option, or the ethnic

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11 Royce, 109.
music they are interested in is not represented in their locale. Many turn to music as a form of therapy or stimulation, be it physical, mental, or emotional. This brief list is incomplete: there are likely as many reasons to participate in an ensemble as there are participants. I have explored one aspect of this larger topic of motivation and identity, investigating why Americans who do not claim Irish descent participate in these communities and how that participation affects their self-perception. There are regional and geographic differences in American Irish music communities, both in the participants stated reasons for participating as well as in the perceptions of non-Irish musicians, and differences in attitude based on the length of time a musician has been participating in the group, their musical experience, and their access to not only the music itself, but to opportunities for musical learning, travel, and equipment. Due to these factors, I strove for a broad range of experiences within a limited geographic region with a highly ethnically diverse population.

I have closely worked with and participated in three Irish music sessions of differing experience and ability levels in Albuquerque, NM, augmented by music and folk festivals as well as other musical events where Irish music is present in the area. Interviews and other interactions with musicians who do not claim an Irish background are my primary source of ethnographic information, but significant supplemental information has been collected from musicians who do claim an Irish background, especially in both their reactions to and perceptions of non-Irish musicians, the validity of their own claims of heritage, and the degree to which they incorporate other aspects of Irish ethnicity into their day-to-day lives. Throughout the year and a half span of my fieldwork, I played in each of the three sessions. In the Thursday night session and the Third Saturday session, I played flute, and in the First
Saturday session I played harp.\textsuperscript{13} Although they are not relevant to this paper, I also participated in the Albuquerque Folk Music session and the Albuquerque Scottish sessions, both of which I became involved with through my participation in the Irish music community. Over time, I have developed personal relationships with some of the session members, and have played with some of them in non-public sessions and for private events.

Supplementing this fieldwork is four months travel in Ireland, where I participated in music camps and schools targeted to American players, sought out sessions targeted toward tourism, and attended festivals (including Galway’s “Coming Home” festival, celebrating American descendants of Irish emigrants), music camps such as Willy Clancy Week and the Scoil Eigse (music and dance school), competitions, including the Flead Cheoil, the “All-Ireland” world Irish music competition finals, which offers multiple categories on all instruments and at all age levels for American competitors. I participated in both the Willy Clancy week and the Scoil Eigse as a student, taking Irish flute and Gaelic classes as well as playing in the recitals cumulating the classes and in local informal sessions during the week.

While in Ireland, my primary goal was to speak not only to other American musicians at camps and competitions, but to speak with American tourists participating as audience members at all music events, as audience members are not to be forgotten or ignored as musical participants. Their assumptions, reactions, and presumptions when they see a non-Irish musician performing have enormous impact, as audience reception influences a musician’s self-perception. Tourism is a major economic force in Ireland, and

\textsuperscript{13} See “Chapter Three: The Albuquerque Sessions” for a description of each session
traditional music is a major draw for many American tourists. Irish music has become a commodified art form in Ireland, and authors such as Adam R. Kaul have argued that the tourism industry has influenced significant change in Irish musics so those musics better reflect the expectations of tourists. Major guide books, such as Lonely Planet’s *Ireland*, devote a significant amount of space to finding traditional music events and locations in Ireland, discussing music festivals, calling the town of Doolin the “centre of Irish traditional music” and recommending pubs based on their reputations for having good sessions.

The majority of this dissertation centers on the experiences of participants who do not claim an Irish ethnic heritage, their self-perceptions, and their motivations for participating in this musical form. Americans of non-Irish descent who participate in Irish traditional music do so for the social experience and to be part of an affinity group, to learn a new skill, and for the therapeutic benefits associated with playing music. Among audience members, the main reason for remaining an audience member and not an active participant in the group is a self-perceived shortcoming: either that person claims to “not be musical” or they don’t feel their participation is valid if they are not of Irish descent.

In the modern world, personal identity and the establishment, portrayal, and defense of that identity has become an intrinsic part of people’s lives. Charles Taylor’s theories on the politics of equal dignity and the politics of difference, discussed in his *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, are relevant, but it is his theory that damage can be caused by mis- or non-recognition that is particularly pertinent in this

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case. As certain stereotypes are imposed on a minority group by the hegemonic culture, that minority group may gradually begin to live up to the imposed stereotype. The cultural values of a majority group may also be imposed on members of another culture group.17

Both of these types of imposition were impressed upon the immigrant Irish community, events obliquely referred to by scholars who study Irish music in America, including Catherine M. Egan, William H. A. Williams, and Robert Grimes. Turino discusses the strategic use of group identities for political ends as well as referring to the struggles over who has the right or ability to control public representations of particular groups that, in turn, affect the social status and life chances of group members.18 Identity politics often involve expressive cultural practices like music and dance as publically recognized identity signs for particular groups.

Researchers are only beginning to explore the tight links and reciprocal relationships of motivation and identity, primarily in the context of education in the public schools. The theories and writings of scholars such as Jere Brophy, Jacquelynne Eccles, K. Ann Renninger, Daphna Oyserman and Mesmin Destin regarding the links between motivation and identity, however, do not only apply to school-age children. Identity and motivation share multiple reciprocal relationships, and, as identities evolve and change, those new or adapted identities or facets of identity provide motivation to explore new experiences. Likewise, identity can be affected by motivators: a person motivated to participate in a musical group for the socialization inherent in such participation may come

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to see themselves as outgoing, extroverted, or social because they recognize their drive to participate in social situations.

While numerous scholars have written about the history of Irish music in America and the role it plays and has played in American society and Irish-American identity, none of these works has discussed the experiences of American participants in Irish music who do not claim an Irish ethnic heritage. This dissertation addresses this lack, discussing what motivates participants and how their participation in an Irish music community influences the identity, self-perception, and self-representation of non-Irish American musicians. These issues are explored through field research and interviews with American participants in Irish music communities who do not claim an Irish ethnic heritage. Many musicians—although by no means all—are interested in making music for its own sake, not as a performance of ethnicity. How, then, is an individual’s identity affected when he or she is expected to perform an ethnicity in order to be fully accepted into a musical community? Is it possible to be satisfied with musical participation when one is also expected to perform an ethnicity? Does ethnicity play as large a part on musical choices and musical participation as Rapuano suggests? If not, what drives people to participate in music and how do those motivations impact the identity of the musician?

Based on fieldwork conducted in Albuquerque, New Mexico over a year and a half (the fall of 2014 through the spring of 2016) and four months of fieldwork in Ireland (June-September 2014), the research material for this dissertation has been gathered primarily through informal conversations, and planned, structured interviews with other participating session musicians who are not of Irish ethnic descent as well as the author’s observations as a participant in two monthly Irish sessions and one weekly Irish session
held in the greater Albuquerque area. Topics of discussion during interviews included the participant’s interest in both Irish and other music genres, appealing factors for his/her involvement in sessions, if participating in the session has influenced how they see themselves and how they represent themselves to others, and why they participate both in the musical culture in general and that particular session specifically. This dissertation addresses the motivators behind the participation of several musicians without an Irish ethnic heritage in Albuquerque's Irish traditional dance music scene and how the identity of those participants is influenced and affected by their musical participation, the music itself, and their motivators. Chapter two provides a synopsis of the characteristics of the music itself, providing context and a point of reference for readers unfamiliar with Irish dance music. Chapter three discusses the sessions themselves and the demographics, purpose, and musical repertoire of each session, and chapter four discusses the links between music, motivation, and identity. The social experience of Irish music as a motivating factor is examined in chapter four, Irish music as therapy—physical, emotional, and mental—is discussed in chapter five, and participants motivated by a desire to learn are the topic of chapter six. Appendices consisting of repertoire lists for each session under discussion, an interview transcript, and demographics follow the body of the dissertation.
Identity began to be used as a sociological term by psychologists in the 1950s, and, after that adoption, social scientists began using the term as a catchall for cultural, social, and national characteristics. There are two different approaches to identity: identity understood as something internal that persists through change or as something ascribed from without that changes according to circumstance. Problems of definition arise when scholars do not distinguish between these two approaches and the term identity is used in a generic sense, with no explanation or discussion of how that particular scholar is applying it.

According to the developmental psychologist Eric H. Erickson, identity concerns “a process ‘located’ in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities.” Identity, in other words, is formed by both the development of an individual personality and the development of a sense of self from participating in society and internalizing a culture. Both these types of development interact to create a personal identity, a sense of self, and a sense of belonging within a larger social structure. Identity is historically and culturally situational, and social and political situations are highly influential: Regina Bendix defines identity as “an individual’s self-construction in constant interaction and communication.

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with others.” Charles Taylor expands on this idea, writing that identity is shaped both by recognition and acknowledgement of an expression of identity as well as mis- and non-recognition, as people are forced to internalize a picture of themselves that is imposed by others. Taylor writes: “Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.” People—and cultures—can be forced into enacting negative stereotypes, to be self-deprecating, and to be incapable of taking advantage of new opportunities when they arise if the identity mirrored back to them by the people or society around them is confining, demeaning, or contemptible. Music can play a role in both the recognition and mis- or non-recognition of an identity, as people can be expected to participate in musical cultures that are seen to represent their identity, regardless of how they personally feel about the music imposed on them.

Music is a highly influential and important part of both personal and sociocultural expression and representation as well as having a presence in political situations, although the nature of the relationship between music and identity is a topic of contention amongst scholars. There are two major models in this debate: one model, a homologous model, argues that music reflects or enunciates underlying social relations and structures and that one chooses music to listen to or participate in based on their identity. Turino suggests that one of the roles music plays in human life is that people “identified themselves through

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musical style—sounds heard outside that represented how they felt and who they felt they were inside.”

The other significant model proposes that music has a formative role in the construction, negotiation, and transformation of sociocultural identities and that the music one listens to or participates in helps to shape one’s identity. Martin Stokes writes, “a sense of identity can be put into play through music by performing it, dancing to it, listening to it or even thinking about it.” Simon Frith, in his essay examining the aesthetics of popular music, “Music and Identity,” examines how a particular piece of music or a performance creates and constructs an identity that is both subjective and collective. Frith writes “the issue is not how a particular piece of music or a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience—a musical experience, an aesthetic experience—that we can only make sense of by taking on both a subjective and a collective identity.”

His argument rests on two premises: first, that identity is mobile and mutable, and is a process, not a thing. Second, our experience of music is best understood as an experience of this self-in-process. Music, according to Frith, seems to be a key to identity because it offers a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective.

Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, in their essay “On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music” argue that music can provide intimations or an impetus that contribute to new forms of identity. Furthermore, musical identities may be constituted in a more restrictive manner, used to reinforce existing identities, and to

impede change and cultural transformation. Bound to this is the assumption that music is implicated in a wide range of forms of identification, social belonging, and solidarity. The authors argue that this range between musical representations of identity and music that is driven by “sociocultural identities that are ontologically and sociologically prior”25 falls into four patterns along a continuum: on one side is purely imaginary identification, what they call “psychic tourism through music”26 contrasted by musical identities that come “after the fact, to be reinterpreted and debated discursively and, out of this process, ‘reinserted’ as representations into the changing social-cultural formation.”27 Between these poles, they suggest that the musical imaginary may “prefigure” potential emergent forms of sociocultural identity and culture.

Other authors argue that the relationship between music and identity is not straightforward, easily defined, or applicable in all contexts. Negus and Velázquez, in their article “Belonging and Detachment: Musical Experience and the Limits of Identity,” challenge the thought that the relationship between music and identity is a straightforward illustration of cause to effect. They write: “the term ‘identity’ often provides only simple cover for a plethora of very particular and perhaps non-transferable debates...concerning the status of the ‘subject’, the ‘individual’ and the ‘person.’” 28 They argue for the adoption of approaches that are able to embrace more nuanced and less reductionist notions of how music may connect with, become part of, or be totally irrelevant to our sense of self and collectivity. They also argue for a move outwards from a focus on the vocabulary of

26 Ibid, 35.
27 Ibid, 36.
identity. There is, however, an inherent essentialism built into projects and agendas of identity, as in order to be convincing of a bringing together of opposites, eventually those opposites must be defined and essentialized. Negus and Velázquez ask if it might be useful to direct our attention towards the way that music is associated with ambivalence and detachment rather than belonging, and what the temporality of musical experience means for notions of identification, musical community, and escape. They argue that there is a need to recognize that music can both construct new identities and reflect existing ones, or have little to no impact at all. The interaction of music and identity, both self-identity and socio-cultural identity, is constantly in a state of flux and has the potential to definitively shift the expression and perception of identity as well as to influence extra-musical events and aspects of culture.

Negus and Velazquez point out that music and music participation can not only shift the expression and perception of identity, but can also be associated with disaffiliation, ambivalence, and disengagement.29 Music can be used to produce a clear lack of belonging, and may create feelings of not being part of a group or not connecting with other members beyond a musical affinity. Feelings of detachment and outsider status can impact identity just as feelings of belongingness and community can, and it cannot be assumed that these impacts are necessarily negative. In addition to creating and nurturing identities, musical practices also allow for a retreat from identities and an experience of distance and detachment, of loss of ego and a retreat from socially made up identities,30 which can be experienced as freeing, individualistic, or as being able to forget the identity imposed by socio-cultural strictures and constructions.

29 Negus and Velazquez, 141.
30 Negus and Velazquez, 143-144.
Turino discusses how music helps to articulate and express individual identity, as sounds that are chosen represent how one feels and who one feels he or she is inside, our “self.” The self is the composite of the total number of habits that determine the tendencies for everything we think, feel, experience, and do. Identity involves the partial and variable selection of habits and attributes that we use to represent ourselves to ourselves and to others, as well as those aspects that are perceived by ourselves and by others as salient. When we conceptualize or talk about our identities, we usually do not include all possible aspects of ourselves but rather highlight what is relevant or productive within a given situation while downplaying other aspects. People typically shape their self-presentation to fit their goals in particular situations and rarely reveal all the habits that constitute the self. People are also constantly being identified by others because of attributes and deep-seated habits operating below their own focal awareness but clearly noticeable to others. We choose to foreground certain aspects of ourselves such as occupation, color, religion, gender, age, or musical preferences for self-presentation, or have those aspects chosen for us, depending on what is socially important in a given context and within the society at large.

Another important variable in the dynamics of identity formation is whether we are interested in differentiating ourselves from or uniting ourselves with those we are interacting with. The conscious use of a few aspects of identity to unite people for political ends or social advancement has been called strategic essentialism, which refers to the reduction of complex selves to a few emphasized aspects that are projected as fundamental.

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31 Turino, 93.
The term identity politics refers to the strategic use of group identities for political ends as well as to the struggles over who has the right or ability to control public representations of particular groups that, in turn, affect the social status and life chances of group members. Identity politics often involve expressive cultural practices like music and dance as publicly recognized identity signs for particular groups, much as Irish traditional dance music was identified with Catholicism and thus Republicanism during the Troubles, the Irish bid for independence from Great Britain.

Anya Royce, in her book *The Anthropology of Dance*, credits the relatively recent emphasis on identity with the revival of traditions that have long since disappeared, a statement that applies not only to the indigenous dance traditions Royce examines in her book, but to the revitalization of traditional Irish culture through music and dance as well. For many years, many Irish residents viewed traditional dance music as rural, “backwards” music that had no place in a modern, cosmopolitan society. This belief is rapidly changing, however, evidenced by large number of children involved in the performance and learning of Irish traditional music and dance. Children, whose parents have heavily invested both time and money in ensuring their children learn traditional music and dance, attend classes, music and dance events, music schools, and competitions. At both the Willie Clancy Summer School and the *Scoil Eigse* (the music school sponsored by Comhaltas Celtoiri Eirann that takes place before the *Fleadh Ceol*), children outnumbered adults in every class. In 2014 in Sligo, during the *Fleadh Ceol*, the international competition of Irish traditional music and dance, children busk on the streets and formed their own groups. Sessions in pubs have a large majority of adults, but children and adolescents are a significant minority

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32 Turino, 104.
and are visibly present. Irish musicians are no longer hiding the fact that they play traditional music, and traditional music and dance have become a source of Irish national and ethnic pride.

Linking a personal identity to an ethnic heritage is common worldwide. Americans are expected to identify with our ethnic heritage at the minimum of a superficial and broad level at the very least: we are asked to self-identify with a particular generalized ethnic group on the U.S. Census, on college applications, and on surveys, for example. With this emphasis on ethnicity as a factor of self-identity, it is a logical step to expect one of the enactments of ethnic identity takes place through participation in ethnicity-specific cultural art forms, especially music. In this case, ethnicity becomes the motivation for music participation. Lausevic explores the enactment of ethnicity as motivation for music participation in her *Balkan Fascinations*, for example, and Deborah Rapuano discusses the impact that *not* belonging to a particular ethnic group has on the identities of participants of music originating in that culture.

It is an incontrovertible fact, however, that not all members of an ethnic music ensemble belong to the culture from whence the music sprang. Several scholars have written extensively about people participating in music groups when they are not of the same ethnic origin as the music, often from the perspective that the participation in a musical tradition that is not part of a musician’s ethnic origin is either appropriation or assimilation. Philip Deloria’s *Playing Indian*, Johanna Kadi’s “Moving from Cultural Appropriation toward Ethical Cultural Connections,” and Perry A. Hall’s “African-American Music: Dynamics of Appropriation and Innovation” are some of a large number of scholarly works addressing issues of musical and ethnic appropriation. Other authors address how
musicians, in order to play a music representative of an ethnicity other than their own, adapt either the music or their own identities to their needs. Jay Keister’s “The Shakuhachi as Spiritual Tool: A Japanese Buddhist Instrument in the West” and E. Taylor Atkins’ Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan are two such scholarly works, and one such musician was early and mid twentieth century jazz musician Mezz Mezzrow, who faced disbelief and numerous challenges because he identified as African-American regardless of his Jewish genetic heritage and white skin.

A multitude of questions arise, however, when one removes the assumption that ethnicity in myriad forms, including a celebration of an ethnic heritage, ethnic appropriation or assimilation, attempting to establish oneself as part of an ethnic or cultural history and tradition, and ethnicity as nostalgia, is the motivation for musical participation. What happens when the desire to enact an ethnicity, symbolic or otherwise, is not the primary motivation for musical participation? Is the participation in the music from an ethnicity other than your own always a matter of appropriation or assimilation? Even if it can be classified as appropriation, questions of motivation arise. What motivations are present when one does not belong to the same cultural origins as the music one plays? If the desire to enact an identity or to create stronger ties to a symbolic ethnicity is not a driving factor for the majority of the participants in the Albuquerque sessions, then what are the motivating factors that drive participation? Following immediately upon this is a question that provides a direct link between questions of identity and questions of motivation, namely, what effects musical motivation has on identity and, conversely, the effects identity has on musical motivation.
All types of art, including music, can express signs of identity, both conscious and unconscious, through specifically chosen clothing, representations, and identifications as well as rhythmic articulation, movement styles, musical characteristics, and so forth that are products of deep socialization. Turino classifies these signs of identity, which result from one’s actual experience, as “dicent indices,” which are affected by the social position, experiences, and ingrained habits that they signify. In the reception of certain genres, such as traditional Irish dance music, both the audience and ensemble make evaluations based on the presence or absence of dicent indices, which serve as signs of authenticity. These indices, in Irish traditional music, can include physical representations of ethnicity, casual clothing, an overt and direct sense of humor, accent, and references to specific locations or events in Ireland, and so forth. If a performing artist or group is lacking these and other dicent indices, they may be judged inauthentic and thus dismissed by audiences. This can be a significant problem for people of color who play Irish music, as the most obvious dicent index of Irishness is absent in the absence of obvious physical representations of ethnicity, such as skin and hair color. These musicians are then judged ‘inauthentic’ and not credited with the ability or knowledge to play Irish traditional music, much as Deborah Rapuano discusses in her study of Irish music communities.

Rapuano addresses concerns with authenticity and appropriation that are certainly relevant, as many are concerned with the appropriateness of playing a music that they feel may not culturally “belong” to them. What may be more germane to this paper, however, is whether or not a musician feels as though he or she belongs in the group regardless of whether he or she has some claim to participation through ethnic heritage. In her article,

34 Turino, 9.
35 Turino, 64-65.
Deborah L. Rapuano focuses on the Irish music session as a vehicle for the promotion and continuity of Irish ethnic identity. Rapuano argues that while participation in the Irish music scene defines a participant’s identity, “outsiders [those of non-Irish heritage] are not always allowed to, nor can they fully identify with the culture in any case. Musicians, who are not Irish, cannot be Irish in the same way that a person born into Irish culture is Irish”36 because Irish music has not been an intrinsic, assumed part of their life since birth. If one follows this line of thought, no musicians born or raised outside of Ireland could be considered Irish. Thus, Rapuano holds that musicians involved in the American Irish session scene are expressing a symbolic ethnicity, and that ethnicity is “not a fixed category, but a process”37 achieved, rather than ascribed.

Contrary to many session musicians’ claims to democratic and inclusive musical practices, boundaries and hierarchies are constructed and reinforced that exclude or include members based on a variety of factors, including experience, knowledge, musical ability, and ancestry. These boundaries, while they are exclusive, also contribute to a stronger maintenance of identity, an intense collective consciousness, and a high degree of solidarity that comes from belonging and the desire to maintain that belonging. Along with her discussion of the Irish music session as a vehicle for the promotion and continuity of an Irish ethnic identity, Rapuano argues that the music and the session are used for the construction of an Irish ethnic identity. She maintains that “many non-Irish musicians are making a conscious choice to adopt this aspect of Irish culture as their own, some of them going so far as to invent links to an Irish heritage. Despite the growing evidence that people

37 Ibid, 105.
today are de-constructing boundaries, we find in these communities musicians who are still constructing and maintaining ethnic distinctions and other boundaries around identity.”

While it is understandable and expected that the acceptance within the Irish music community in the United States likely varies wildly from region to region and session to session, the subtle exclusion of musicians of non-Irish descent that Rapuano discusses in her article does not seem to occur in the American Southwest, especially in Albuquerque, the nexus point for my research. This is attributable to a variety of reasons, including a comparably low percentage of the population of Irish descent: according to the 2010 census, only 42.1% of Albuquerque’s population is white. It can be assumed that while the relative proportion of persons of Irish descent within the white population of Albuquerque may be comparable in its relative proportion of persons of Irish descent within the white population of Rapuano’s unnamed “Midwestern city,” the fact that there are proportionally fewer whites in Albuquerque suggests that there are fewer Irish-Americans in absolute numbers. It is also likely that there are fewer persons of Irish descent in Albuquerque because Albuquerque is a relatively small city. With a population of under 600,000, Albuquerque is significantly smaller than most major Midwestern cities. It cannot be ascertained if this is an appropriate argument, however, since Rapuano does not identify the cities she is discussing in her paper. A smaller population and a proportionately smaller number of persons of Irish descent would make Irish music sessions in Albuquerque much more accepting of persons of non-Irish descent, largely because if they excluded participants the sessions would rapidly disappear through lack of participants.

38 Ibid, 104.
Albuquerque is also extremely culturally diverse city, with large Hispanic and Native American populations. Historically, Albuquerque has welcomed a variety of cultures and cultural expression if only because of the wide variety of people and cultures living and making art within the city. Albuquerque is the largest city in New Mexico, a state unique in its long history of syncretic culture rooted in a variety of artistic forms. The article is outdated, having been written in 2001. Rapuano’s arguments do not apply Albuquerque’s session culture due to geographic and cultural factors as well as temporal distance.

Geographic and broad cultural contexts likely do influence the acceptance of non-Irish Americans within the American Irish music community. While I only met one person in Albuquerque who admitted to inventing an Irish heritage (which she later abandoned once she realized that the members of her dance group did not care about her heritage), I did meet several Americans in Ireland while conducting my fieldwork that had fabricated or exaggerated an Irish heritage. I had coffee one day with a young woman, May, who just completed her first year of college in Massachusetts. She is a dancer, and, in our interview, she confessed that she “stretched the truth” when it came to her ancestry: her ancestry is primarily English and Scottish, but, when people ask her if she’s Irish, she says yes, partly, but she doesn’t know much about it. She told me though, that in reality, while there may be Irish in her background, she does not know about it and, if it exists, it is a minimal and tentative connection.

When I asked May why she felt the need to invent or exaggerate an Irish connection, she said that exaggerating was easier than explaining why she was an Irish dancer when she did not have an Irish background. “People think that I’m an Irish dancer because I’m

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40 May W., Interview with author, July 8, 2014, Miltown Malby, Co. Clare, Ireland.
Irish, and it’s just easier to go with it than to have to explain that I’m an Irish dancer because I love the dance and I love the music regardless of my ancestry.” I asked if she’d told anyone who asked that she wasn’t Irish and, if so, what their reaction was. “You know, I don’t think I’ve ever told the truth to anyone about my heritage when I’ve been dancing. I mean, it’s not like I tell everyone I meet I’m Irish, but after a dance recital or show or competition or something, a lot of people will come up to me and ask if I’m Irish and it’s just always been easier to say ‘yes.’ I’ve never really thought of it before, I guess. So I don’t know how people would react!” She laughs. “How do you think people would react if you told them your ancestry was English and Scottish?” I asked. “I don’t know. But it probably wouldn’t be good. I figure I’d get a lot of weird looks from people who didn’t hear what they expect and are now wondering what a non-Irish girl is doing dancing Irish dance.” I asked why she was willing to tell me, a stranger she met not even two hours ago, the truth. “Well, you’re not going to judge me or think I shouldn’t be an Irish dancer if I’m not Irish.” “Do you feel like you don’t have a right to dance since you’re not Irish?” “Not exactly...I mean, it’s not like there is a DNA test the first time you step through the studio door or anything. But—what did you call it, claiming Irishness?—anyway, it feels like I’m more readily accepted or it’s easier to justify loving to dance if I’m Irish. And, honestly, it’s really just easier to say “yeah, I’m Irish” than it is to try to explain to a complete stranger that I’m not and that it really doesn’t matter to other dancers or judges, so why should it matter to them? But it does matter to them, so it’s just easier to lie.”

The Irish musicians I spoke with during my research in Ireland were universally accepting of anyone, from any ethnicity, learning and playing Irish music. The Irish generally do not see non-Irish musicians as appropriating or ‘stealing’ their music: on the
contrary, most Irish musicians are proud that their music enjoys worldwide popularity.

The Irish government-sponsored non-profit organization for maintaining and promoting traditional music and dance, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (The Association of Musicians of Ireland) has branches throughout the world, including Japan and South America. Seán Williams, in her paper “Irish Music and the Experience of Nostalgia in Japan,” discusses how Japanese people are “deeply drawn toward Irish music, culture, and notions of identity.”

Traditional Irish music is known throughout the world, and the Irish see this as evidence of an Irish presence in a transglobal culture and acknowledgement that their own traditional culture has value.

During Willie Clancy Week, a music summer school held in the tiny town of Miltown Malby, County Clare, I got to know a family of Irish musicians. The mother and father
played concertina and fiddle respectively, and the two boys, seven and nine years old, were
learning whistle and flute. I was in a flute class with the older boy, and got to know his parents and younger brother when they came to meet him after their classes. We would
walk back into town from the school where the classes were held together, and occasionally I would help them if they had something important to talk to someone about: the family was from Korea, and while they were all fluent in English, the Irish accent can sometimes be hard to understand. I spoke with them about their experiences travelling to Ireland to learn music and asked how the Irish people received them, and was met with smiles and enthusiasm. “The people here, they like us. They get excited, and ask many questions about how we play Irish music in Korea. They ask our favorite songs, our favorite instruments, how many people are in our groups, and more and more questions all the

time. Sometimes it is hard to get them to stop talking long enough for us to ask questions. They always want to hear us play.”

One day, during Willie Clancy week, I had a long discussion over coffee with a fiddler I had met walking the road into town. We discussed how Americans sometimes either fabricate or over-emphasize an Irish heritage, and he was horrified and surprised, exclaiming “And people really do that? It’s appalling. It’s horrible. Why would they do that?” I told him it was because, much of the time, musicians are not accepted into the group in a meaningful way unless they claim to be Irish, and that people seem to think that having an Irish heritage somehow gives a person ownership of the music or a right to play it. There is also an idea that the music is somehow “in the blood” and that people who have Irish ancestry are just somehow naturally better at playing Irish music than someone who doesn’t have Irish ancestry. He was genuinely bewildered by this view, and snorted. “Music may be in the blood, to be sure, but what is really there is a love for music, not some magical ability at a specific type. If you love the music, that’s all that really matters, not where your granddad’s from. Unless your granddad’s a musician and he taught you the tunes, I mean. Sure and it doesn’t matter if you’re Irish or not—if you want to play the music, just play it and it’ll be grand.”

I was invited to participate in multiple sessions in multiple cities in the southwest, and was never asked about my ethnic heritage, and there are several people of non-Irish ethnic heritage that participate fully in the sessions, including in what Rapuano would consider the “inner circle.” These people participate in the sessions because of the social experience, the need to challenge themselves, as recreation, or for many other reasons.

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42 Yong-Sun Sok, interview with author, July 10, 2014, Miltown Malby, Co. Clare, Ireland
including affinity—not to somehow explore Irishness as a specific ethnic identity or ethnic realization. The enactment of an Irish ethnicity was so far removed from the purpose of the sessions that no distinction was made between the Irish tunes in the repertoire or those from other parts of the world. If the desire to enact an identity or to more strongly tie to a symbolic ethnicity is not a driving factor for the majority of the participants in the Albuquerque sessions, then what are the motivating factors that drive participation? Following immediately upon this are topics that provide a direct link between questions of identity and questions of motivation, namely, the effects musical motivation has on identity, the affects identity has on musical motivation, and how those identities and motivations shape the experience of both the individual and the group as a whole.

Identity is never single faceted. In some cases, music is not a major component in the identity of amateur musicians, although the more serious they are about playing music, the more time, effort, and attention they devote to it, the greater the impact music has on how they self-identify as well as how others perceive them. All the participants in the Albuquerque sessions identified themselves as musicians to a greater or lesser degree. Many brush off their musical identity or are reluctant to admit the full importance that musical participation has in their lives, feeling as though they do not “deserve” to call themselves musicians if they consider themselves “not good enough.” “I’m not really a musician—I’m not very good,” 44 confides Julie. “I don’t talk much about playing in the session at work or with my friends. I’m worried if I talk too much about it they’ll think I’m better than I am. I think about it a lot, though, and I love coming and playing.” While music participation has a profound impact on the self-identity of Julie and others that feel the

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44 Julie N., interview with author, May 23, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
same way she does, it is a part of themselves they are only comfortable revealing to other members of their group.

Some members are reluctant to participate in sessions other than their regular sessions, largely through concerns about their own inexperience or discomfort in a new and unfamiliar setting. “I got invited to the Thursday session (the full-speed, ‘advanced’ Irish music session), but I just don’t know enough tunes and I don’t have them all memorized,”45 explains Derek. “Plus I suck at playing by ear, and I felt like a complete moron the couple times I went. Everyone was nice—it’s not like they made fun of me or anything—but I just felt like I was wasting everyone’s time and not really contributing. Plus it’s really awkward to be the only one just sitting there while everyone else is playing because I didn’t know the tune and I’m not good enough to pick it up in a repeat or two. So I stopped going. A couple of the guys asked me why I’m not going any more when I see them at the third Saturday session, and I told them it was because my work schedule changed and I didn’t have Thursday nights off anymore. I didn’t want to tell them I wasn’t going because I felt like a loser. They’d feel bad and I don’t want that. They didn’t do anything wrong. I love the Saturday sessions, though. They’re the right level for me, and I don’t have to play by ear since we use written music.” While Derek felt like an outsider during the Thursday session, it was largely his own perception and based on his self-perceived shortcomings as a musician, not due to his ethnicity. Derek is Asian-American, and has not experienced the type of ostracization described by Deborah Rapuano.

Many Americans have difficulty imagining what motivates someone to play Irish music if that person does not have an Irish heritage. In a musical culture where “getting in

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45 Derek C., interview with author, February 21, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
“touch with my heritage” is often a strong motivational factor, especially in a society in which people are looking to the past to give them a sense of identity and a rootedness in history, music gives people a way to express an ethnicity that is socially acceptable, even lauded, can be inexpensive, and is often readily available. Participating in Irish traditional music in America, for example, can be as simple as purchasing a ten dollar tin whistle, looking up free online video tutorials or buying a fifteen dollar instructional book, and finding out when the local Irish themed pub hosts a session. The obvious question, then, is what motivates this desire to learn and how does identity alter as a result of both the motivation and the learning, and how are motivation and identity linked?

In neuroscience fields, such as neurobiology, neuroanatomy, neurochemistry, psychology, and psychobiology, the links between motivation and identity have only recently begun to be explored. While much has yet to be researched in this matter, researchers and psychologists have explored many facets, notably the roles motivation and identity play in education and counseling psychology and the brain structures involved in motivation. Daphna Oyserman and Mesmin Destin, in their article “Identity-Based Motivation: Implications for Intervention,” published in Counseling Psychology, argue that identity is malleable and constantly re-constructed depending on context, interpretation, and socio-cultural norms. They write: “identities are dynamically constructed in context. People interpret situations and difficulties in ways that are congruent with currently active identities and prefer identity-congruent to identity-incongruent actions. When action feels identity-congruent, experienced difficulty highlights that the behavior is important and meaningful. When action feels identity-incongruent, the same difficulty suggests that the
behavior is pointless and “not for people like me.” Following this argument, musicians would be more likely to participate in a music tradition they already feel connected to; that feels as though it is already a part of their identity. The challenges inherent in learning a new music, new instrument, or new technique would be considered exciting or purposeful, whereas those same challenges, to a musician who did not feel connected to the music tradition they participate in, would seem overwhelming, pointless, or unimportant. It would be unlikely that a musician, feeling disconnected to a musical tradition, would continue participating unless there was some other motivation strong enough to override an “identity-incongruent” activity.

Other authors agree. In a special issue of Educational Psychologist devoted to the subject of motivation and identity in 2009, Jacquelynne Eccles\textsuperscript{47} contends that motivated choices and behaviors assume their personal value from their potential to enact the content of the person’s identities; thus, musicians would be more likely to value their musical activities if those activities represent or portray their previously established self-identity, presumably even if that identity is largely symbolic. In turn, Eccles notes that some of these choices become themselves “life-defining,” thus influencing the development of people’s identities. If a person’s musicianship becomes an important part of their life, then it will either further develop a pre-existing identity as a musician or establish musicianship as a vital part of one’s identity. The construction of identity as a musician would build on itself: a person who sees him or herself as a musician would be motivated to participate in musical activities, and his or her self-identity as a musician is strengthened and expanded.

by that participation. Similarly, K. Ann Renninger views both interest and identity as comprising content as well as process: she defines interest as a predisposition to and the experience of reengaging in a particular content, and identity as the self-representation of oneself as a person who pursues a particular content. If one is interested in music, for example, one would be more inclined to pursue music and, as a result of that pursuit, define oneself as a musician. These definitions already point to the potential reciprocity between “being interested in” and “identifying with” certain subject-domains in school and elsewhere, which directly relate to music participation.

Mary McCaslin argues that people’s identities are constructed through their participation in co-regulated activities in socio-cultural settings; that “what we do and in connection with whom inform who we might become.” McCaslin emphasizes the environmental affordances and constraints on such action, which constitute differential opportunity structures for individuals within these contexts to form identity. McCaslin critiques motivational theories that focus on meditated choice as the prime expression of motivation and identity, because the opportunities for such choice are often limited, especially in educational settings. Instead, McCaslin suggests that we consider choice as only one venue among others for motivated action that informs identity. Choice is often limited in music education as well, when the majority of prospective public school music students are, for a wide variety of reasons, limited to learning Western Classical music. Recreational or amateur music participation, such as in an Irish music session, is often limited as well, by availability, by financial constraints, by lack of learning materials and/or

teachers, and for many other reasons. Frequently, a musician participates in a musical
practice not because it is exactly what they want to do, but because it is the closest they can
come to the musical practices they would actually like to participate in. There may not be
an opportunity for a prospective musician to learn Finnish traditional music, so he or she
may substitute Irish traditional music. Instead of focusing on choice, McCaslin proposes
two other possible venues for such action, struggle and negotiation, which, depending on
the opportunities available, may guide the emerging dispositions or identities of students.
The students’ identity is continuously emerging in a dynamic process that is affected by
personal, cultural, and social pressures that manifest through the various relationships in a
particular setting. While McCaslin is specifically discussing public education settings, her
theories are applicable to adults participating in Irish music sessions, who balance their
motivations for participating with the expectations of the group and their own identities.

Jere Brophy points to identification as a “basic motivational mechanism.” He
argues that socialization plays a crucial role in the promotion of motivation toward
adaptive values and identities and away from those which are less desirable. The reciprocal
relationships between motivated action, identities, and core values are embodied in
musical culture, which plays an important and complex role in affecting this dynamic
interaction. Cultural expectations, on both a macro and a micro scale, profoundly affect the
identity and motivation of a musician of any genre: they are driven to embody their identity
and to perform according to cultural and social standards. As they become more accepted
by the community through the embodiment of those communities’ standards, their identity
becomes more closely tied to belonging to that community and playing that music.

50 Jere Brophy, “Connecting With the Big Picture,” Educational Psychologist 44:2 (2009), 149.
In the Albuquerque Irish traditional music community, the motivations for participation fell into three extremely broad categories: music as a social outlet, music as therapy, and music as a learning experience. These motivations are complex and multifaceted, with a great deal of overlap and complexity. For example, music can serve as a therapeutic device for the amelioration of depression, but one of the ways in which it does this is by motivating a musician suffering from depression to participate in a social function. As will be explored later, music-evoked emotions can change brain activity in virtually all areas of emotional processing and have a physical and measurable affect on these brain structures, so music can also function as a therapeutic device in the treatment of depression by contributing to the physical alteration of brain structures, which, when functioning abnormally, cause depression. In this case, is a musician who suffers from depression motivated to play music because of its function as a social outlet or as a therapeutic device? Similarly, a musician who participates in a musical group motivated primarily by enjoyment of the music is not only participating in an affinity group, but having social and educational experiences as well. In all cases, I have asked the musicians themselves which motivating factor they felt was the most influential in their music choices and in how they self-identify at the time of their interview. At any given point in time, each of these musicians has been motivated by all of these motivational factors to varying levels of degree. People change, their identities change, and their motivations change.

Motivation itself can be an expression of identity or at least a unifying factor in a community. For example, musicians motivated to participation in order to fulfill a social

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need are the most likely to gather after a session for a dinner out and are the most likely to organize social and/or musical events outside the session, for example, while musicians who participate as a form of physical therapy are more likely to encourage and support each other and to be understanding of the physical challenges of playing an instrument. Identity and motivation also play a role in other factors of musical participation such as dedication to the group, time committed to individual practice and research, financial investment, interest in the historical and theoretical aspects of the music, tune and instrument preference, focus during sessions, timeliness, participation in musical or social events that may be organized by session members but are not part of the session itself, and their overall dedication to Irish music in general and the session in particular.

Motivation, musical participation, and identity are indelibly linked in a mutable and highly individual manner, and the depth to which these motivations and musical participation effects personal identity varies according to how important those motivations are and how meaningful are the impact and the reward music participation brings to the musician. People’s identities are constructed and manipulated through their participation in society, culture, and social activities. Motivation and identity are mutually effective and intrinsically linked, as motivation—and, by extension, choice—builds identity and the expression of identity provides motivation. Motivation and identity have a reciprocal relationship, where each impacts the other, although the degrees and balance of impact are largely dependent on the individual involved. As identities evolve and change, those new or adapted identities or facets of identity provide motivation to explore new experiences. Likewise, identity can be affected by motivators: a person motivated to participate in a musical group for the socialization inherent in such participation may come to see him or
herself as outgoing, extroverted, or social because he or she begins to recognize a drive to participate in social situations. Eccles\textsuperscript{52} contends that motivated choices and behaviors assume their personal value from their potential to enact the content of the person’s identities; thus, musicians would be more likely to value their musical activities if those activities represent or portray their previously established self-identity, presumably even if that identity is largely symbolic. Some of these choices become themselves life defining, thus influencing the development of people’s identities. If a person’s musicianship becomes an important part of their life, then it will either further develop a pre-existing identity as a musician or establish musicianship as a vital part of one’s identity. The construction of identity as a musician builds on itself: a person who sees him or herself as a musician is motivated to participate in musical activities, and his or her self-identity as a musician is strengthened and expanded by that participation.

“Music is about the people who play it, not the music itself at the end of the day,”\textsuperscript{53} notes Seán Keane, an Irish fiddler, during a discussion at Willie Clancy Week in Miltown Malby, County Clare. With this mindset underlying the very conception of Irish traditional music, it is no surprise that the people who seek the music do so not for the sake of the music itself, but for a wide variety of personal reasons that have a great deal more to do with their own physical, mental, and emotional needs. The motivations behind this drive to musical participation are as varied as the people themselves, as are the effects these motivations have on personal identity.


\textsuperscript{53} Seán Keane, interview with author, July 9, 2014, Miltown Malby, Co. Clare, Ireland.
CHAPTER 3

THE ALBUQUERQUE SESSIONS

While staged performances of traditional Irish music are common, the majority of traditional music events in Ireland and the United States take place informally in pubs. These are casual, highly participatory social gatherings where primarily amateur musicians gather to play together, socialize, and learn new tunes. These gatherings, called sessions (seísun in Irish), are focused on musical production within the group rather than on performance for an audience. Sessions are informal performing contexts for both experienced and novice musicians. Labeling an Irish session a “jam session” would be inappropriate, as a jam session implies spontaneity and is characterized by improvisation. Irish sessions are characterized by their specificity: specific tunes in specific rhythms, played in specific keys on specific instruments in a specific manner, although ornamentation is improvised. The interaction between musicians and audience is casual, as players will stop to chat with a friend, a listener may request a tune, and casual conversations are common. Because of the informal nature of the session, the atmosphere varies from venue to venue, and some groups have stricter codes and social mores.

Musicians or prospective musicians commonly choose ethnic music ensembles, such as traditional Irish dance music, to participate because these types of ensembles are frequently non-professional, easily accessed, and tend to be outwardly welcoming to new prospective members. Traditional Irish dance music, as it is practiced in Albuquerque, is an excellent format for music participation. The Albuquerque Irish music sessions, and session culture, are generally open and welcoming to all players regardless of experience,
expertise, or ethnicity. Many instruments are inexpensive and easily obtainable, and most session members are enthusiastic about helping an inexperienced player learn his or her instrument or learn more about Irish music in general. The Irish session culture has become a transnational, global phenomenon, with musicians interested in Irish traditional instrumental music and sessions found throughout the world.

Because of the prevalence of sessions, session culture, and recordings of popular groups, traditional music is usually perceived as group music, and solo work is often disparaged as “purist,” causing many different aspects of the music to be ignored. Only in the last 20 or 30 years has it become an ensemble tradition. Irish music, historically, was an intimate music, meant for small groups in informal settings. Contrary to the focus on ensembles in the last thirty years or so, historically the individual has figured most heavily in Irish traditional music. While ceili bands, such as the Kilfenora Ceili Band, figure heavily in dance music for a ceilidh (a group dance), a single player originally accompanied dancing. Individuals and couples are still accompanied by a single player at competitions and showcases, while ceili bands play for events with large numbers of participants. Cathal Goan, in a conversation during Willie Clancy Week in Ireland, reminded me “Don’t forget--even bands are made up of groups of individuals!”

Many of the most influential Irish musicians were primarily solo performers. Michael Coleman, for example, was an Irish fiddler who lived and recorded in America between 1921 and 1936. His recordings were exported to Ireland and became hugely influential for style and timbre as well as song choice and determining what tunes are played together as a set. Michael Coleman’s Set, for example, consists of the tunes “The

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54 Cathal Goan, in discussion with author, July 7, 2014, Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare, Ireland
Tarbolton Reel,” “The Longford Collector,” and “The Sailor’s Bonnet.” Coleman was popular and influential in America as well as Ireland, and the American fiddle sound is characteristic of Coleman’s style and timbre. Coleman was the first to record his fiddling with guitar accompaniment. Coleman’s sound, technique, and style have become the standard for how Irish traditional music and fiddling was “supposed” to sound. Coleman is known for his solo work, with or without guitar accompaniment, rather than for his contributions to a group or as a group member. While there is a significant social aspect to Irish music, primarily in the form of sessions and ceilli, the music and the tradition revolve around melodic originality, individuality, and experimentation within highly structured formal and metrical strictures. Many influential Irish musicians, including Tommy Potts, Patrick Kelly and Padraig O’Keefe, could not play in a session because of the extent to which they improvisatorily manipulated formal and melodic structure, rhythm, and meter. Tommy Potts, for example, would quote from other songs and genres, including Beethoven and the American pop song “Hey Mambo.”

While individual performances and musicians are extremely important to Irish traditional music, forming the foundation of the tradition and constantly adapting and evolving it, sessions are the center of the American Irish music tradition and the venue through which the large majority of Americans informally gather to play Irish traditional dance music in company. Sessions originated in the home, as family, friends and neighbors would gather for a social evening incorporating entertainment for the group, including music (both instrumental and vocal), dancing, and storytelling. Ireland was primarily rural farming communities and small villages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and sessions were opportunities for people that were primarily isolated on
farms to gather and socialize, share news, and converse with people they did not see on a day to day basis. The modern session, held in a public area, is of early twentieth century American origin, as Irish immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gathered mostly in neighborhood pubs. The Irish immigrant community could not gather in American urban family homes due to space limitations and noise complaints from neighbors. Private, in home, sessions still exist and are called ‘kitchen sessions.’ These private events are generally smaller groups of invited musicians that are typically personal friends of the host, although, as in other sessions, the membership can vary widely from city to city and session to session.

The membership of a session is usually casual and flexible, with one or more regular ‘core’ members, and others who come and go as they please. Music at a session is not predetermined and consists primarily of dance music, although solo pieces, such as slow airs or songs, are common. Until relatively recently, sessions were only found in cities with large populations of Irish immigrants and their decedents, and have only relatively recently become widespread, largely due to the increased access that the internet, recordings, and other technologies have allowed to what was once a local folk tradition. Sessions are an inclusive musical activity that is attractive to many adults, regardless of their ethnicity or culture, and the session serves as the vehicle through which various motivations and expressions of identity are realized.

Three sessions specific to Irish instrumental dance music in the Albuquerque area and the participants in those sessions form the focus of this paper. Each session was targeted at a different level of player, and subsequently had very different repertoires, instrumentation, and population. There is some overlap of musicians who play in all the
sessions, often on different instruments. The sessions each have their own distinct characteristics, as each consists of a wide variety of musicians with individual needs, motivations, and personalities.

**First Saturday Session: The Beginner’s Session**

The First Saturday session is held on the first Saturday of the month in the early afternoon for two hours, with a rest break after an hour. The group meets in the performance space of a local folk music store, Apple Mountain Music. While the venue is open to the public, there is rarely an audience. There is no fee to participate in the session, although voluntary monetary contributions to the venue as a token of gratitude for the use of the space at no charge are collected at the midpoint of the session, just before and during the break. While a start time is specified, it is not unusual for members to arrive early or up to half an hour late, and this is accepted, although late members will apologize. They are not castigated or excluded in any way due to their tardiness; on the contrary, several people will pause in their playing to wave or otherwise greet the new arrival, move to create room for them to sit, or get the latecomer a chair or a music stand. The session ends at a specified time and members clear the room quickly and on time, if only because another musical group needs the space. Members will frequently socialize afterward, either in the main section of the folk music store the performance space is located in or in the parking lot.

The First Saturday session is designed for musicians with little to no experience on the instrument of their choice or in music in general. These participants are predominantly
beginning musicians with little to no previous musical training, either on an instrument, 
singing, or reading musical notation. There is a significant minority in this session who are 
developing musical skills on a second or third instrument, or are returning to music 
performance after a significant break, having played a musical instrument in their high 
school band or orchestra and who have decided to return to their musical practice. I played 
harp in this session, with which I had no prior experience before conducting my fieldwork. 
I also tutored other members of the group in music notation, flute, and whistle if requested. 

The size of the group and membership fluctuates from month to month, but there 
are about twelve to sixteen members who are reliably present. The majority of the 
members of the group are retired, although there is one teenager who is learning piano and 
a handful of participants in their twenties, thirties, and forties. Women outnumber men by 
a slight majority, and women tend to be the most regular participants. It is not uncommon 
for the group to consist entirely of women on any given day, although it does not happen 
frequently. The regular membership self-identifies as the following: five Hispanic persons, 
two Native Americans, one African American, three persons of non-Irish European descent, 
and five who claim an Irish ethnicity. While this demographic composition of the regular 
membership was fairly stable, it also fluctuated, sometimes drastically and unpredictably. 
Demographics also shifted gradually as established members joined other ensembles, 
ceased participation for personal reasons, or as newer members became regular attendees. 

As the membership varies, so does the instrumentation. Although there are no 
specific regulations regarding instrumentation, all the instruments are predominantly 
“Irish folk” instruments, including guitar, hammered dulcimer, mountain dulcimer, Celtic 
harp, Irish flutes, various whistles, fiddles, concertina, bodhrán, and button accordion.
There is also a pianist who occasionally joins the group (a piano is always present at the venue).

The First Saturday session has a set tune list, consisting of forty tunes targeted to the participant's level of musical proficiency and chosen with the intention of being familiar to the participants (see Appendix A: Repertoire Lists). Having an established tune list for participants to choose from allows them to practice and learn tunes at home, then come to the session and have the opportunity to play their newly learned tune with the group or to request help with any difficulties they may be having. The music chosen is not exclusively Irish, but also includes tunes in the Irish traditional style that originate in America, England, Wales, Scotland, and Canada.

The tunes that are included in the repertoire for this group are played significantly slower than they would be played in a more advanced session; typically at least forty to sixty beats per minute slower than they are often played, although there is no standard tempo for Irish dance tunes, and the tempo depends on the desires of the performer and the dancers if dancers are present. Each tune is written in standard Western notation, with one tune per page, and extra copies are kept on hand for any member missing a particular tune. The notation of the tunes for this group is often simplified: note values are doubled, for example, to reduce the number of notes in each measure so that it is less overwhelming to a beginner learning to read music, while not substantially altering the rhythmic ratios or the melody. The music is often simplified in other ways as well, such as shifting the octaves so they lie in the most comfortable range for a particular instrument, changing the key to G or D major when necessary, changing the commonly played chords to easier chords for guitarists, and simplifying more complex passages by removing notes other than the
“skeleton” of the tune. Memorization is urged, and participants are also encouraged, though not required, to learn pieces by ear.

During the session, musicians sit in a circle facing inward. Chairs and stands are available for member use, and extra copies of the notation for each tune are available. There is a session leader, although “organizer” or “facilitator” may be a more apt term, who keeps the group on track, facilitates the dissemination of sheet music, and collects donations for the venue. The leader keeps track of the sheet music filing, makes copies if needed, emails reminders to the group, and organizes guest musicians. A different guest, who is a more experienced musician in the wider Irish or folk music community, is invited to “lead” the group every week. It is customary for this guest to bring a new piece of music to introduce the group to, although this is by no means a rule, and the new tunes do not necessarily remain a part of the active repertoire. The leader's job is not to conduct a rehearsal or to teach a piece, rather, his or her job is to keep the group on track, maintain a tempo, and arbitrate discussions as to tempo, style, form, and the simple ‘arrangements’ that individuals may suggest. The leader also discusses session etiquette, explains how the session is conducted to new members, and answers questions or makes clarifications regarding the sheet music. He or she answers questions specific to a particular instrument only if she plays that instrument, otherwise, the question is fielded by one of the other group members. Members rarely vocalize disagreements publically, preferring to “keep the peace” and defer to a more experienced musician. Occasionally, a musician will clarify or re-state a statement, or address details or subtleties, but generally wait until after the session has concluded. While members do experience frustration, they rarely express their feelings in public during the session. Members who disagree with the goals or structure of
the group will attempt a diplomatic resolution, but, if compromise is unwanted or unreachable, the frustrated musician generally quits.

Participants take it in turn to suggest or “call” a tune they would like the group to play and, depending on how many people are present, everyone generally gets to call three to four tunes during a session. The person who called a tune is expected to begin it and set the tempo, although if they do not want to (due to lack of knowledge, desire, or confidence), the group leader will either ask someone else to start or will begin the piece herself. Tunes are typically repeated three times: twice at a slow tempo and once at a faster tempo. Occasionally a piece will be repeated several times, especially if it is complicated, but tunes are rarely played fewer than three times. If a member wishes to repeat a piece more than the standard three times, his or her suggestion is usually followed. Experimentation is encouraged, and anyone in the group is encouraged to suggest an “arrangement” for the playing of the piece, with specific instruments playing at different times: for example, fiddles only on the first repeat and winds on the second, and so forth. Anyone in the group is welcome to perform a piece solo, to sing, or to interrupt and ask questions at any time, although this is subtly discouraged through body language and expression while the group is actively playing. A musician’s song choice is rarely challenged by the others in the group. Individual preferences are respected, as is the desire to work on a particular piece. If another musician does not care for the tune called, he or she will either play along with the tune, knowing their turn to call the tune is forthcoming, or they will take a break and leave the room.

Members learn from other members, either by mimicking or by asking questions. Generally, it is a very friendly and open group with a relaxed approach to music, and
prospective members who desire a more rigorous musical experience often get frustrated with the casual, nonchalant character of the session. Members usually either participate for only a few sessions before ceasing participation, or they become regular members: rarely do members participate for more than four months and then quit. Most new members do not continue their participation for any significant amount of time, and many do not return after their first session. The numbers of new members on a given day fluctuate wildly and are difficult to predict, although the months of January and February tend to have a greater number of new participants, possibly due to New Year’s Eve inspiring people to make a change in their lives. Some sessions can have upwards of thirty musicians, which is more participants than can comfortably fit in the session room, while some sessions have very few participants. The calendar year seems to influence participation: sessions occurring on or near holidays are not well attended, for example. Past members who have “graduated” to a higher level of musicianship, and participate in more musically advanced sessions often return to play with this group or continue to play regularly on secondary instruments. For the most part, the members of this group do not identify themselves as musicians, as most of them do not feel they have ‘earned’ that identity until they have achieved a certain level of proficiency. Participants are primarily motivated by the desire to learn, the social aspects of the session, and the desire to remain active after retirement.

**Third Saturday Session: Intermediate Celtic Session**

The Third Saturday session is held on the third Saturday of each month at Apple Mountain Music’s performance space from one to three in the afternoon, with a rest break
at the midpoint of the session. Members often refer to this session as a “slow jam,” and it is intended to give intermediate or advanced beginner musicians an opportunity to play in a group, further their skills, and learn a broader, though still limited, range of tunes. Members of this group have a solid grasp of the fundamentals of their instrument, and are expanding and improving their technique as well as refining their skills, and learning the ornamentation, style, and performance practice characteristic of Irish traditional dance music. The large majority of the members read music with ease and fluency.

There are eighteen to twenty members of the group who form the core of the session and regularly participate. Many other musicians participate sporadically or for only short periods of time, and there are typically one or two musicians at each meeting who come to only one session. The age range is broad, spanning from the mid-twenties to the mid-eighties, with the majority between thirty and sixty, and there are about the same number of men and women. Most of the members are college-educated professionals in a range of fields, and several members are retired. Ethnically, seven members self-identified as Hispanic, one as Asian American, one as Native American, two as African American, three as European of non-Irish descent, and seven members of Irish descent. Fiddle players form the largest group of instrumentalists, followed by whistle and flute players, and a fairly even mix of concertina, button accordion, guitar, bodhrán, and hammered dulcimer players. My participation in this group was as an Irish flute and whistle player.

The repertoire consists of one hundred and forty three tunes selected specifically for this session (see Appendix A). As in the First Saturday session, the specified repertoire list allows musicians to prepare in advance and gives them a solid group of popular Irish traditional tunes to learn. The music is written in standard Western notation, although
session members are encouraged to learn tunes and play aurally. The notation of the Third Saturday tunes is not simplified, music is played faster than in the First Saturday session, and the overall pace of the session is much quicker. Tunes are usually played three times, each time slightly faster until the tune is “at tempo,” which is a fairly arbitrary tempo designation. If a tune is particularly difficult or new to the group, it is repeated more than three times, while a tune that is familiar and comfortable to the musicians may be played only once or twice.

The First and Third Sessions are very similar, largely because the First Saturday Session is modeled on the Third Saturday Session and began when the Third Saturday session evolved to include a much larger percentage of intermediate players. Membership is more stable than the beginner’s session, likely because, by the time a musician believes him or herself ready for the intermediate session, they have demonstrated a certain level of commitment, if only to him or herself. The social structure of the Third Saturday session is much the same as the First Saturday session, with a leader to help to facilitate and organize and session members choosing tunes in turn. Members tend to be more serious about music learning and playing, resulting in a session that is more focused and direct than the First Saturday session. There is less talking in the Third Saturday session than the First Saturday session, largely because individuals have fewer questions and initiate fewer discussions. Members are more inclined to speak up when they disagree with the person playing a tune than are the members of the First Saturday session. Those who disagree generally do so not because they personally dislike the tune called, but because that tune has already been played, they feel the group as a whole is already proficient at that particular tune, or the tune is new to the group and deemed too challenging to play
together without giving the members an opportunity to practice it on an individual basis.
The session has more focus in comparison to the First Saturday session, but remains more relaxed and casual than an organized class or Western Classical music rehearsal.
Regardless, the musicians take their music seriously, they have devoted time and energy to reach their current level of achievement, and they are interested in progressing. For the most part, the members of this session see themselves as musicians who play Irish music. They are motivated learners, several of them have recognized the therapeutic possibilities in music performance, and they enjoy belonging to a group that shares their affinity for music in general and Irish traditional music specifically.

Thursday Night Session at Joliesse Chocolates

Every Thursday evening Joliesse Chocolates stays open late and hosts a traditional Irish music session. This session, unlike the First and Third Saturday sessions, is a more typical Irish music session, with advanced players playing from memory and learning new tunes from each otheraurally. Typically, there is no audience because the session is not advertised to the general public, but friends and family members of session members occasionally come to listen to the music and drink coffee. The session takes place from seven to nine in the evening and several session members routinely leave before the session officially ends. There is no charge for the venue or for participating in the session, although it is considered polite to purchase a cup of coffee, a snack, or chocolates from the shop during the session.
The membership is fairly stable, as the musicians in this group are committed and serious about their musicianship. When members cease participation, it is generally due to extra-musical commitments, conflicts, or constraints, such as schedule changes at their jobs. All of these musicians self-identify as musicians who play Irish music, and their musicianship is an important part of their life and identity. It is a relatively small group, with six men and five women between the ages of thirty and seventy, motivated primarily by the social interaction of the session, the opportunity to learn new tunes, and the positive physical, mental, and emotional benefits they experience when they participate in the session. Ethnically, two self-identify as Hispanic, one as Asian American, one as African American, one as European of non-Irish descent, and four who claim Irish ethnicity. Occasionally other musicians will join the session when they are able to resolve scheduling issues, work, and family time. Facebook is the primary source of communication for this group, as reminders and announcements are posted on the group's Facebook page.

The instrumentation of the regular attendees consists of three fiddles, banjo, two flute players (including myself), two guitars, mandolin, concertina, and button accordion. Members sit in a loose, uneven circle due to the rectangular shape of the performance space, and take it in turn to lead tunes. Instead of taking turns travelling around the circle, as the Saturday sessions do, the role of tune leader is passed to whoever would like to lead a tune. It is an unspoken rule that a musician does not lead twice in a row, unless no one else speaks up. If there is a member who has not led a tune yet that evening, other members will ask that musician to lead a tune, as there is a group endeavor to ensure participation and feelings of inclusion from all members. When a musician is leading a tune, he or she will announce what he or she would like to play, and will frequently suggest a set
of three tunes that fit together well. Tunes may occasionally be suggested if the tune leader requests suggestions, but it is considered rude to argue or disagree with the tune called.

Many members of the Thursday session have begun their music learning in the Saturday sessions at Apple Mountain Music, and, as a result, the repertoire is anchored in tunes learned in the Saturday sessions. The repertoire is not limited to those tunes, however, and there are many tunes that the session frequently plays that are not played in the Saturday sessions. Members are encouraged to “bring a new tune” to the sessions, and it is common for members to discuss the tunes they are currently learning or ones they would like to learn in the future. The participants are especially excited when someone learns a tune none of the rest of them knows, and they will dedicate a significant amount of time during the session to learning the new tune.

When a musician comes to the session with a new tune, he or she will most often wait until it is their turn to lead a tune and announce that he or she has a new tune to play. The other members of the session will listen to the tune two or three times, then join in. At this stage of music learning, the tune is repeated as many times as necessary for the majority of the session members to have a decent grasp on the melody and rhythm, even if they do not have the entire tune learned and memorized. If there is a complex or difficult passage in the tune, that section is isolated and repeated until mastered by the majority of the musicians, then put back into context with the remainder of the tune. The majority of the members record new tunes, so they can continue to work on the tune on their own outside of the session.

The First Saturday, Third Saturday, and Thursday sessions provide an interesting example of how successfully much of Irish music has become at least somewhat familiar to
the average American. Irish instrumental dance tunes are played in these groups, and the musicians do not perceive them as unfamiliar, unexpected, or as an exoticism. The cultural origins of any of the music played in these sessions are unimportant to the members. Only once was a tune’s origin questioned in a Thursday session: That tune was “Maison de Glace,” and the question was not “why are we playing a French tune in an Irish session?” but rather “is this tune Cajun or French Canadian?” The geographic origin of the tune did not matter to session members—they were only curious as to why the tune’s title is in French. This particular piece, often called “The Glass House” or “House of Ice,” is popular in Irish sessions, and was written in 1997 by Réjean Brunet, accordionist and bassist for the Québécois group Le Vent du Nord.55

This tune is an excellent example of how new music is adopted into the Irish traditional repertoire. It is a relatively new French Canadian tune that is accepted and popular in the American Irish music community, and that has already achieved “folk” and “anonymous” status. Brunet is not listed as the author and the sheet music handed out in the session lists no composer at all. In the Albuquerque sessions, notions of authenticity, tradition, or ethnic origin are not important in the selection, performance, or enjoyment of a piece of music: the musicians are more concerned with musical aesthetic, approachability, and appeal. They want to “like the melody” and feel a tune is “fun.” What brings these groups together is not the performance of a particular identity or ethnicity; it is the social experience, the affinity for Irish traditional music, a desire to learn music in a session environment, and the way the music makes them feel.

CHAPTER 4

IRISH MUSIC AS A SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

Western society tends to place emphasis on music as a commodity and music in the form of recordings—a musician is not considered truly successful if he or she has made a recording, especially in popular music. Music as a commodity is by no means limited to the popular or classical musical worlds, and Irish traditional dance music is undergoing (or has undergone) commodification. Adam R. Kaul discusses this commodification in his article “The Limits of Commodification in Traditional Irish Music Sessions” and further explores the effects the commodification of music has had on the tiny town of Doolin on the west coast of Ireland in his book *Turning the Tune: Traditional Music, Tourism, and Social Change in an Irish Village*. Despite this shift of the cultural conception of music toward recordings, there is a multitude of participatory music activities that do not involve formal presentations, recordings, or ticket sales. These activities revolve around the making of music and the social interaction of participating in a musical activity rather than the creation of an artistic product or commodity. The making of Irish traditional dance music in America is focused primarily on participatory music making. In the Albuquerque Irish music community, financial gain is rarely a motivation for participation and is never a motivating factor in the sessions, as there is no remuneration for participating in the session. Several musicians have been offered paying gigs, and they frequently refuse

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payment for their performances if the person requesting music is somehow connected to the group, as in the instance of a young woman asking to hire musicians to play for her wedding. Her aunt is a member of the Third Saturday session, and several members gathered to play for the wedding as well as holding extra practice sessions for the specific tunes the young woman requested and to participate in the wedding rehearsal and other events. All the musicians refused payment, insisting that “Irish musicians stick together” and that their performances were a favor to the young woman’s aunt, who the musicians consider a comrade and friend. These musicians have gathered not to offer a commodity, but to provide proof that theirs is a social community that supports, encourages, and assists their fellow musicians in all activities, musical or not.

While there are certainly professional musicians and groups creating recordings of Irish traditional music in America and doing quite well, financially, the vast majority of participants in the Irish traditional music scene are amateurs of varying levels of proficiency and experience. They play Irish music for their own personal enjoyment, as a social outlet, to challenge themselves, to feel a part of a larger musical tradition, as a therapeutic measure for both physical and neurological maladies, and for myriad other reasons as individual as the participants themselves. These individual motivations have a variety of effects on an individual’s identity and the degree to which these motivations drive their participation also affects identity. The stronger the motivation, the more driven a musician is to participate and the more their identity is shaped by their music making. Conversely, but not in opposition, the closer their identity is aligned to music making, the stronger their motivations to participate, regardless of the specific motivation. For
participants who are motivated by the opportunity for social interaction, music making is the central activity of a social gathering.

Success of the session for those motivated by social interaction is gauged not on the quality of sound produced, but on the level of participation achieved and how the participants feel during the session. A “good session” is one where the facility ran out of chairs and flute and fiddle players stood to play. If only a handful of musicians show up, the session struggles and ultimately ends early and is described later as “weird” or “pretty horrible.” When inquiring how a past session went, it isn’t unusual to hear “It was awful—there were only three of us and we all wound up leaving early” or, conversely, to hear “It was incredible—there were so many people there we were looking over shoulders for the music! It was so much fun.” Variations on these phrases are heard over and over, depending on how many participants were involved in the session.

In 1624, John Donne wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself.” The idea that an individual person is ‘complete’ when in the company of others is as old as humanity itself. The psychologists Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary have asserted that feelings of belonging, including acceptance, inclusion, and welcome, are “a fundamental human motivation” and “the desire for interpersonal attachment may well be one of the most far-reaching and integrative constructs currently available to understand human nature.” Baumeister contends that it is “plausible (but unproven) that the need to belong is part of the human biological inheritance,” that the need to belong is part of our evolution and necessary for human survival, as bonding in small groups provided humanity with shared labor,


59 Baumeister, 522.

60 Baumeister, 518.
resources, and information as well as significantly diffusing risk. Cooperation would allow for achievement not possible for an individual. Baumeister, using belonging as a biological human need as a tentative working assumption, argues that belonging as a human motivation is not derived from any other motivation and that it is universally present in all humans.

A relationship, on its own, is not sufficient to fulfill this basic human need: people need group interaction as well as an ongoing relationship bond.\(^1\) Having a loving life partner creates a strong relationship bond, but if that partner is absent much of the time, social interaction may be missing, and so the relationship does not fill the human need for belonging. The need for interaction, though, may be met in a variety of ways, and participating in a recreational, non-professional music group is an excellent venue for interaction as the participant shares an affinity for music, there is a common goal, and a casual music group does not generally and purposefully impose stress or undue pressure on the participants. The ongoing relationship bond is also a human need, and is not necessarily romantic, but can be satisfied by any relationship, including familial and platonic, that demonstrates longevity, affection, and trust as well as inclusion and acceptance.

Baumeister writes: “the special patterns of processing information about the self are sometimes used for information about relationship partners as well. Thus, both actual and potential bonds exert substantial effects on how people think.”\(^2\) Thus, identity influences the kinds of relationships people form as well as influencing the people they form those bonds with. “Information about the self,” or our own sense of identity, is our most

\(^1\) Baumeister, 512.
\(^2\) Baumeister, 505.
important reference to gauge others. What we personally find important, what matters the most to us based on how we see ourselves, drives our preferences, tastes, and choices, so how we see others is a reflection of those values. While we perceive another based on his or her expressed identity and how they present themselves, how we interpret aspects of his or her identity and the priority we give those aspects is based on our own preferences, likes, dislikes, morals, motivators, and priorities. For example, a person who likes dogs is more likely to desire or instigate a relationship with another person who likes dogs. Relationships of any sort are formed when the need to belong is matched by aspects of identity that are shared between two individuals.

Much of identity is culturally driven, so there is generally some shared aspect of identity between two people who share a culture. Even if two people do not share a culture, some universalities that are found in people of all cultures—such as the need to belong or an affinity for music—are enough to inspire the early stages of forming a relationship, and form a foundation for the exploration of other shared aspects of identity. Thus, participants in an affinity group, such as an Irish music session, are more likely to form relationships than a group of randomly selected people. Participants in an Irish music session have many identity aspects in common: a partiality to music, specifically Irish dance music, the desire to accomplish at least some level of musical proficiency, and the motivation to belong, among other aspects. Members have also demonstrated that music-making is a priority in their identity, otherwise they could easily find other things to do on a Saturday afternoon. As inter-personal relationships within the session grow stronger, they provide both types of belonging that Baumeister argues are necessary: interaction as well as ongoing relationship bonds.
When people gather and play music together, driven by both an affinity for the music and a motivation for social interaction, it builds a community that supports relationships and interactions. While everyone shares an affinity for Irish instrumental dance music, subtle sub-groups tend to form, consisting of musicians who prefer a specific instrument (such as fiddle, concertina, or flute), specific type of music (airs, jigs, reels), and so on. These sub-groups are often small, sometimes consisting of two or three people, and there is some overlap. These divisions are most obvious in two situations: where people sit during the session (they tend to group themselves together within the larger circle) and, after the session has ended and the larger group has broken up, members of the sub-communities will gather outside the room or outside the building to discuss specific instrumental techniques, to share newly learned tunes, or to discuss non-musical matters. Occasionally, although not frequently, these groups will meet independently of the main group to focus on their particular unifying element. For example, the dulcimer players may gather at a member’s home to play music with only dulcimers present or to work on specific techniques, or those in the group who are public school teachers will gather for food and drink to celebrate the end of the public school semester. The larger groups have a much more pronounced set of sub-groups, and the smallest of the session groups has sub-communities formed more of a personal attachment of friendship and less of an affinity more specific than Irish music in general.

These sub-communities have a subtle but profound impact on the larger group. If a community member has a preference or dislike that is strong enough to encourage him or her to speak out, then members of his or her sub-community will tend to agree with him or her, regardless of their personal feeling. For example, a fiddler may call the tune “Chief
O’Neill’s Favorite,” which is a hornpipe. A flute player speaks up, asking that the group not play that tune because it has F naturals, which is a particularly difficult note to play accurately on Irish flute. Other flute players, regardless of their personal ability to play the note in question or their own enthusiasm for the tune, will support the flute player who expressed the desire for another tune and ask the fiddler to choose another, preferably without F naturals. Players in sub-communities tend to sit near each other, which leads to an almost “assigned” seating and perpetuates separation between members: two members who routinely sit opposite each other in the circle because they don’t play the same instrument (or are the same age, or have the same profession, or care for the same type of tunes) generally don’t know much about the other, aside from their instrument and their name. A subtle competition is fostered as well, most evident in comments such as “Wow, the fiddles are really outnumbered today! Guess we won’t be playing many fiddle tunes;” “Well, the girls outnumber the boys today! You’re in trouble now, Joseph” and “you know, you should learn concertina. It’s more fun than mandolin, and everyone knows concertina players are handsome devils.” Comments such as these are always presented in a jocular fashion and generally get a laugh from the rest of the community, but some discomfort is displayed in the body language of the group or person targeted in the comment: their chair may be back a bit from the circle, they don’t speak up as much as they normally may, and their posture is more slumped and turned inward. When a member of a particular sub-community is late to the session, the other members of that sub-community, who obviously no longer feel outnumbered, meet the returning member with relief and gratification. Occasionally, a musician, typically a player new to the group, does not settle into one of these sub-communities in a timely manner. Typically, a musician who does not “fit in” with
the group will discontinue participation, especially if he or she is motivated by the desire for social participation. Sometimes, however, their personal motivation provides enough impetus to continue participating despite the lack of developing social bonds.

Accessibility, rather than affinity, tends to be the driving motivator behind instrument choice of those who participate for primarily social reasons. If an instrument is easy to obtain and a teacher is available, those instruments are more likely to be chosen. The instrument doesn’t necessarily need to be easy to play: there just have to be others that play it. For example, there is a larger percentage of mandolin players than is often found in sessions, partly because the community college in Albuquerque has offered mandolin classes on a semi-regular basis. Most of the mandolin players in the session took the class or learned from someone who took the class. Flute players, however, are surprisingly rare, despite the overall popularity of the flute in general, and there are no Irish flute teachers in the area, and learning Irish flute would necessitate traveling or risking online tutorials. This begins to change, however, if a musician belongs to a sub-community that is not instrument based. One musician, Kristina, joined the Third Saturday session as a mandolin player. She discovered that the people she had the most in common with were not her fellow mandolin players, but a group of women who shared the status of motherhood. The majority of these women were fiddle and whistle players, and, within a year, Kristina had switched from mandolin to fiddle. This is a relatively easy switch, as the strings are tuned to the same pitches on both instruments and the fingerings are very close, but it still took considerable dedication and effort on Kristina’s part to switch instruments, to learn new right-hand techniques, and to learn fiddle-specific ornamentation and styles. Kristina had difficulty articulating the reasons behind her choice to switch instruments. “I guess it’s
because I listened to fiddle more than I had before, since the other ladies I carpool and go to play dates are fiddlers, so that’s what they listen to.” Kristina had more exposure to fiddle music in both the form of recordings listened to in the car during carpools to and from the session and in sitting with her friends during the session, strengthening her familiarity and affinity. Ultimately, however, in learning fiddle, she gained another aspect of herself that she could hold in common with the other women in her sub-community, giving herself another affinity and another foothold in belonging within her sub-community while not affecting her belonging within the larger community of the session.

Many of the strongest emotions people experience, both positive and negative, are linked to belongingness. Baumeister states, “evidence suggests a general conclusion that being accepted, included, or welcomed leads to a variety of positive emotions...whereas being rejected, excluded, or ignored leads to potent negative feelings.” If we take into account Koelsch and other neuroscientists who have presented evidence concluding that positive emotions promote healthy hippocampal neurogenesis and negative emotions can engender loss of function or atrophy of the hippocampus, then the type of emotions a person predominantly feels can actually cause those emotions to recur more and more frequently. There is a physiological explanation for the experience of many who suffer from affective disorders, that negative emotions lead to further feelings of increasingly negative emotions. Thus, the opposite would be arguably true: that positive emotions can lead to further feelings of increasingly positive emotions as the hippocampus is ‘repaired’ by positive feelings, such as are engendered by belonging, achievement, and acceptance within a social group. Baumeister concludes that “deprivation of stable, good relationships have

63 Kristina M., interview, January 2015.
64 Baumeister, 508.
been linked to a large array of aversive and pathological consequences. People who lack belongingness suffer higher levels of mental and physical illness and are relatively prone to a broad range of behavioral problems, ranging from traffic accidents to criminality to suicide...it therefore seems appropriate to regard belongingness as a need rather than simply a want.”

Music plays an important role in belonging and acceptance, as Turino argues:

The performing arts are frequently fulcrums of identity, allowing people to intimately feel themselves part of the community through the realization of cultural knowledge and style and through the very act of participating together in performance. Music and dance are key to identity formation because they are often public presentation of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique. Through moving and sounding together in synchrony, people can experience a feeling of oneness with others.

If people are excluded from sessions, as is discussed by Rapuano, this rejection or exclusion can have appreciable negative effects. Charles Taylor discusses the possible consequences when a person's identity is not recognized or accepted by the people around him or her as having the potential to be destructive, harmful, and/or oppressive.

Rapuano’s interlocutors who are being barred from the ‘inner circle’ of Irish sessions potentially suffer from their exclusion in that they are effectively being told that their expression of identity as musicians and the ways in which they express their musical affinity are invalid because of their ethnic background. Essentially, these musicians are being made aware that they are not welcome to participate in Irish music because of their ethnicity. This ostracization, being shut out of a group they desire to participate in, could

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65 Baumeister, 511.
damage their self-esteem, their desire to play music, their affinity for Irish traditional music, their willingness to learn and denies them the opportunity for social interaction in an affinity community as well as the potential to develop an ongoing relationship bond. The potential for negative effects is multi-faceted, when we consider that that being rejected, excluded or ignored leads to negative emotions and that negative emotions have a detrimental affect on the physiology of the brain and emotional state. Rapuano’s arguments that session members not of Irish descent are subtly ostracized from the inner group of the session are not observed in the Albuquerque sessions, possibly because Rapuano was writing about a city with a different demographic and likely larger population than Albuquerque, which is a small city with a very diverse demographic. Her work also reflects the late 20th century, not the early 21st, and session culture, like all cultures, changes and evolves over time. It is very possible that sessions have become more open and accepting in recent decades.

Participation in musical ensembles, such as traditional Irish dance music sessions, engenders social interaction that has positive emotional effects directly related to brain function and emotional state. Cognitive neuroscientists Steven Koelsch, Kristin Offermanns and Peter Franzke discuss not only music’s direct effect on the emotion centers of the brain (the limbic and paralimbic system, as discussed in the “Irish Music as Therapy” chapter), but how social functions are “automatically and effortlessly engaged when humans make music” and how that engagement fulfills a basic human need. The emotional effects of engaging in these functions include joy and happiness, while exclusion from these functions

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represents an emotional stressor and has deleterious effects on health. Koelsch and his team examine how music creates the same neurobiological emotional triggers as social experience, even when experiencing music alone or in a non-social situation, concluding that music can fulfill those human needs that are also met by social function.

Koelsch and his colleagues divide social functions of music into seven different areas:

1. Interpersonal contact: Being in contact with others is a basic human need, and social isolation is a risk factor for morbidity as well as mortality. Participating in a musical group necessitates interpersonal contact in a way not experienced in many casual social settings, as participants must communicate and work together effectively in order to produce music. The casual and elective manner of Irish music sessions in America suggests that participants are involved through their own volition, which potentially removes feelings of obligation or forced contact, creating a more fluid and accepting contact experience.

2. Social cognition: During music listening, individuals automatically engage processes of mental state attribution in an attempt to ascertain the intentions, desires, and beliefs of the individuals who actually created the music. Koelsch and his associates found that listening to music automatically engages areas dedicated to social cognition: the network dedicated to mental state attribution in the attempt to understand the intentions of another—in this case, the composer. This attempt to understand the actions and expressions of another is an exercise in empathy and the desire to understand the

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69 Koelsch et al, 308-309.
70 Koelsch, et al. 309
71 Koelsch, et al. 309
viewpoints and motivations of another person. During the sessions in Albuquerque, discussions occasionally crop up regarding composer intention (even though the composer is rarely known) and what the composer was trying to express or who he or she was paying tribute to: “Mrs. McCloud’s Reel,” for example, inspired a discussion after one session as to just who, exactly, Mrs. McCloud was: was she a wife? A mother? A sister? A lover? Someone the composer owed money to? A tyrant of a mother-in-law the composer was trying to appease? While the discussion may have devolved into pure silliness, with each person trying to come up with a wilder explanation than the last, the social aspect of the music session carried through to an extra-musical social setting.

3. Music making can engage “co-pathy” in that “inter-individual emotional states become more homogenous,” which decreases conflict and promotes group cohesion. Positive emotions, such as well-being, joy, and contentment are promoted in group music events while negative emotions, such as depression, anger, or anxiety are reduced. Co-pathy is explained as the phenomenon that “one’s own emotional state is actually affected in the sense that it occurs when one perceives or imagines someone else’s affect, and this evokes a feeling in the perceiver that bears strong congruency with what the other individual is feeling.” Co-pathy is actually feeling the emotions of others, whereas empathy is the phenomenon of thinking what one would feel if they were in someone else’s position. Co-pathy requires self-awareness and self/other distinction: the capability to make oneself aware that the affect may have been evoked by music made by others, although the actual sources of one’s affect lies within oneself. This effect is demonstrated in the Albuquerque sessions by comments such as “We’ve been playing cheerful and upbeat

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72 Koelsch et al. 309
73 Koelsch et al. 309
music so far today—let's change it up and play something really heart-wrenching” or vice versa: “enough of the sad songs about being homesick—let’s be cheerful and play “Mairi's Wedding!” In each case, the musicians are feeling the emotions they imagine the composer felt in each piece: they perceive an emotional quality in the music and are recognizing and experiencing that emotional quality for themselves.

4. Music involves communication. From infancy, music is an important tool for social and emotional regulation as well as for social, emotional, and cognitive development. Both neuroscience and behavioral studies have demonstrated the overlap between the processing of music and language on the level of neural and cognitive substrates. Musical information can also affect the semantic processing of language. When one is uncomfortable with expressing oneself through language, musical expression is often a more comfortable or accessible mode of expression. One of the musicians I interviewed at length suffers from depression, and he frequently finds it significantly easier to express his emotions musically rather than verbally. Expressing his feelings of pain, self-doubt, and self-loathing verbally was often too difficult, even when he was trying to verbalize his feelings to himself or his therapist, as he struggled with the social stigma of depression and being “allowed” to feel negative emotions. Playing music often gave him an outlet and a release for the feelings he could not express. Over time, he realized that playing music that “matched” his emotions—either previously composed Irish music, music of his own composition, or improvisation—helped to relieve those emotions and then he could slowly transition through the emotional and musical spectrum until he was playing cheerful and upbeat dance tunes, which, although they may not always leave him feeling cheerful and

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upbeat, mitigated the sensations of tightness, difficulty breathing, and overwhelming despair and self-loathing. He told me he began taking his instrument to his appointments with his therapist, and even holding it made it easier for him to express how he felt. Because music can be a means of communication, active music making can be used to train and enhance skills of nonverbal communication. Music students are taught to ‘emote’ the music they play in order to better connect to the audience, and some musicians have been criticized as too ‘dry’ or overly technical: these are all examples of non-verbal communication, such as body language, being used, or not, in musical performance. Skills in non-verbal communication that musicians use to better express a piece of music have direct applications in non-musical and extra-musical settings. Music making is a special type of activity that provides direct connection between participants, easing difficulties in and allowing for non-verbal communication.

5. Making music requires coordinated actions, including the ability to synchronize and keep a beat. Coordinated actions in a group of individuals appears to be associated with shared pleasure, which has certainly been borne out in the case of the Albuquerque sessions. One of the primary motivations for the participation in the sessions is the derivation of pleasure resulting from the coordinated effort of all the musicians in creating music. The personal identity of the participants, while it may not center around Irishness or musicianship, is certainly influenced by the pleasure and positivity they have received through participation. Participants, over time, increase the importance of music as a locus for personal identity, and the pleasure associated with participating in a group focused on

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75 For more on music and its affects on depression, see the chapter "Irish Music as Therapy."
76 Koelsch et al, 310.
coordinated actions strengthens the desire and proclivity to identify as a member of such a group.

6. Participation in a musical group requires cooperation between the players. It involves a shared goal, and engaging in cooperative behavior is an important potential source of pleasure. Cooperation increases trust between individuals and increases the likelihood of future cooperation between those individuals. In the Albuquerque sessions, the longer a member has been participating in the group the more likely he or she is to become members of other, related groups (for example, there is a lot of crossover between the first and third Saturday groups, even though the groups are designed for different ability levels) and musicians are more likely to become involved in the organizational and extra-musical aspects of the group, including emailing, collecting donations for the venue, and making copies of sheet music. While cooperation may not be a motivation as such, the responsibility that is assumed by participants is a significant motivating factor in his or her participation in that the more responsibility a participant feels the more he or she likely to identify themselves as a member of the group and the stronger the impact of that membership on his or her identity.

7. Music participation leads to increased social cohesion of a group. Numerous studies have shown that humans have a need to belong and a strong motivation to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments. Social bonds and the concern with shaping social bonds are powerful factors in the shaping of human thought and "the special patterns of processing information about the self are sometimes used for information

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77 Koelsch, et al., 310.
about relationship partners as well.”

One’s self-identity—his or her ’information about
the self’—shapes how he or she views relationships with others and with whom he or she
chooses to have relationships: people who view themselves as musicians are likely to
choose to interact and form relationship bonds with other musicians, which, in turn,
reinforces their own self-identity as a musician. Turino discusses music as a special form of
communication with an integrative function, as music, dance, festivals, and other public
expressive cultural practices are a primary way that people articulate the collective
identities that are fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups, which are, in turn,
basic to survival. The performing arts frequently allow people to intimately feel themselves
part of the community through the realization of shared cultural knowledge and style and
though the very act of participating together in performance.

Music is special, although not unique, in that it can engage all of these social
functions at the same time, which is presumably one explanation for the emotional power
of music. Therefore, music serves the goal to fulfill social needs, and, in this regard, music-
evoked emotions are related to survival functions and to functions that are of vital
importance to for the individual. The majority of the members participate in these Irish
sessions because the group provides a social outlet. For many musicians, playing in this
group is the only social activity they participate in. Several members are retired, so they do
not have their job as a social outlet and their friends and family, if extant, are distant. Many
times, these members are among the first to suggest continuing the evening in any way,
most often by going out for a meal or a beer together, and are also among the first to

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79 Koelsch, et al., 310
suggest gatherings of their sub-community. They support each other outside of the group, by carpooling, helping make copies of the music, and practicing together, among other activities.

Turino suggests that while listening can create imaginative experience as well as draw one deeply into one’s own life and history through indexical musical signs, music making “provides a special type of activity for directly connecting with other participants, for the intense concentration that leads to flow, and for an even deeper involvement with the sonic signs that create effects of feeling and physical reaction and thus personal integration.”

‘Flow’ is a term coined by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to describe his theory of an “optimal experience,” referring to a state of heightened concentration, when one is so intent on the activity at hand that all other thoughts, concerns, and distractions disappear and the actor is full in the present. People find the flow experience restful and liberating, because the problems that cause stress and conflict within us are released. “Sometimes,” relates Myra, “time just flies in the session. I love playing with other people, but the days that are really great are the days when I’m really ‘on’ and everything but the music just kind of fades away and I have two hours where I’m not thinking about what I’m going to cook for diner or projects I have to get done for work or how to deal with my son’s latest shenanigans. I love that we all are interested in the same thing, even if we have nothing else in common.”

K. Ann Renninger theorizes that both interest and identity comprise content as well as process, indicating that an underlying interest is necessary for participation in music.

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80 Turino, 21.
81 Turino, 4.
82 “Myra,” interview with author, June 2015.
Renninger defines interest as a predisposition to and the experience of reengaging in a particular content, and identity as the self-representation of oneself as a person who pursues a particular content. If one is interested in music, for example, one would be more inclined to pursue music and, as a result, define oneself as a musician. These definitions already point to the potential reciprocity between “being interested in” and “identifying with” certain subject-domains in school and elsewhere, which would directly relate to music participation.\(^{83}\) People with shared interests come together to form affinity communities, structured around their shared interest. The Irish music community in America is built of thousands of small, independent affinity communities embodied as sessions. In a session, one’s interest in Irish music is validated, celebrated and shared with others, increasing feelings of belonging and togetherness and creating opportunity for social interaction.

The participants who are socially motivated primarily identify as Irish musicians rather than as musicians who play Irish music. While the ethnicity may not play a large role in their identity, the ensemble aspect of Irish traditional instrumental music appeals, as they are establishing themselves as part of a community and as people who are accepted and belongs. Joseph says, “I’m a musician overall, I guess, but I’m really more of an Irish musician. I play with other people, in sessions, not by myself on a stage. Being part of a group is important because you get to share what you love with others who love it too. It brings all kinds of different people together, and that’s one of the things I really love about it.”\(^{84}\)


\(^{84}\) Interview with Joseph A., May 2015.
Over time, these musicians come to identify more strongly as an Irish musician. For those whose only social outlet is the session, being an Irish musician becomes a vital and important part of their identity. Keith explains, “Now that I’ve retired, it’s pretty much the only thing I do. It gives me something to look forward to during the weekdays when my wife is still at work, it gives me something to do on Thursdays and Saturdays, and it gives my wife some space since I’m home all the time now. I’m more dedicated now than I ever was, and it’s become much more important to me. I’ve become a much better musician, too, now that the music is pretty much my only real focus. And I’ve got an obligation to show up...people miss me when I’m gone.” The obligation that Keith feels, that he is a necessary part of the group, speaks to his sense of belonging and acceptance despite the fact that he is not of Irish descent. Other members feel similarly to Keith. “If I don’t go, I feel badly...there just aren’t enough flute players, and even if I’m not that good I still need to go and support my friends,” explains Carol. Carol is part of the ‘flute-players’ sub-community, and identifies more strongly as a flute player than an Irish flute player. “It’s not that I don’t like playing with the whole group—I love it—but I wish there was a regular time when just the flute players can get together. Some tunes we play in the session just don’t work as well on flute and so they’re not as fun to play.”

The musicians whose primary motivator is the social experience of the session tend toward two extremes of the dedication spectrum. Some are extremely devoted, helping with the extra-musical aspects of the session, such as emails, copying and distributing music, collecting donations for the venue, posting on Facebook, as well as being prompt and rarely missing a session, while others only sporadically appear at sessions and are not

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85 Interview with Keith C., August 2015.
86 Carol B., interview, April 2015.
routinely prompt or timely. This disparity may have to do with individual personality, largely whether the individual tends to be more extroverted or introverted, as extroverted musicians are generally more actively involved. Introverted musicians still desire the social outlet, but large groups can be overwhelming and the periods of ‘small talk’ before and after the session can be stressful to someone who is more private and not as talkative. Musicians motivated by socialization also tend to be the people who are the most distractible while the session is playing music and tend to be late returning from the break at the midpoint of the session. They are less interested in the historical and theoretical aspects of the music and in having the most expensive or quality equipment, but several members do, however, travel long distances to participate in the sessions and are always willing to carpool, tutor other players, and otherwise contribute to a successful social experience for all the members.

The primary motivating factor for the majority of the session participants is participation in a social activity. Their participation gives them a sense of belonging and both encourages and provides the opportunity for social interaction as well as deeper relationships, contributing to an overall sense of well-being and happiness, as does participating in Csikszentmihalyi’s flow experience. Social interaction can also have a profound effect on personal identity, as members strive to reflect and adapt to the community identity and ideals the community desires to project. Sub-communities also play a role in both identity development and belonging, providing a more nuanced outlet for personal integration and belonging, as members of these groups share multiple affinities. Music making in Albuquerque, in this case the Irish sessions, becomes a means by which Americans can find community and belonging within a larger socio-cultural sphere.
CHAPTER 5

IRISH MUSIC AS THERAPY

Music has been employed for medical and therapeutic means for thousands of years. The ancient world believed that music could influence the mind and body in a number of ways, including in a medical and curative manner. The ties between music and mood have been explored since Ancient Greece, and it is a common trope in the Western world that music has the power to soothe and to pacify the melancholic, the insane, and the violent. This trope is found in the Biblical story wherein Saul is soothed by David’s harp playing, in medieval literature depicting music pacifying the violently mad, and Boethius stated that music has the ability to either “ennoble or corrupt the character.” Music and dance were employed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in mental institutions and insane asylums as therapy, and the physician Richard Hale, the non-resident physician at Bethlem Hospital in London from 1708 to 1728, declared that suitable treatments for depression were “company being very beneficial to the patients as well as jollity and merriment, and even a band of music.”

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88 Dolly MacKinnon, “‘The Trustworthy Agency of the Eyes’: Reading Images of Music and Madness in Historical Context,” Health and History 5.2 (2003), 131.
Music as a vehicle for therapy has been formally recognized since World War II, when community musicians would gather and play at veteran’s hospitals for wounded and recovering soldiers. Doctors began requesting musicians be hired by hospitals when they realized the positive physical and emotional effects of the music, and the field of music therapy sprang from the need to train such musicians to more capably aid patients.\(^9\)

Currently, music therapy has been studied for its effectiveness in the treatment of physical maladies such as stroke recovery, pain management, and the rehabilitation of nerve and muscle damage as well as for mental and cognitive disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders, Williams Syndrome, and Alzheimer’s disease. Music therapy has been used to treat affective disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression and it has also been found effective in communication problems and in mitigating the effects of crisis and trauma. Patients suffering from these and other conditions are often referred to a music therapist, but many find their way to music therapy on their own and do not necessarily consider or recognize their musical participation as therapeutic. A detailed and clinical exploration of the specifics of music therapy is outside the scope of this dissertation, but the personal experiences of members of the Albuquerque Irish music community are highly individual and relevant. These participants have either been introduced to or found their own ways to mitigate their physical, emotional, or mental challenges with music and playing music within a musical community has impacted their identity, in some cases, to a profound degree.

When music is applied as therapy of any type, the impact of music on one’s identity depends largely on its efficacy, either real or perceived, when applied as a curative aid for a

variety of physical, emotional, and mental ailments. For example, when the motivation for playing music stems from the physical movement of musical performance applied as physical or occupational therapy, especially in the short term, music plays a much smaller role in the adoption, adaptation or expression of personal identity. However, when a stroke victim becomes involved in music as a way to rehabilitate mental structures and processes as well as physical movement, when music helps a person with Williams Syndrome develop and refine fine motor skills, or when music serves as a long-term therapeutic device for a person struggling with clinical depression, the influence of music and musical participation has a much more pronounced and permanent impact on self-identification. Additionally, when the participation in music is deemed an effective therapeutic device, the musician is more likely to continue and will often increase his or her participation, which, in turn, increases the importance of music in how he or she perceives themselves and in how he or she represents him or herself to others. It is my conclusion that if music was an important factor in a person’s identity before the onset of their illness or injury or if music impacts their lives in contexts other than therapy, then music will continue to impact their identity after the onset of said illness or injury, although the degree of impact and the manner in which it is expressed shifts, sometimes radically.

**Participation as Physical Therapy**

“I have some nerve damage in my left hand” relates Sandra, an autoharp player in the Second Saturday session. “Playing helps with that—although I do drop a lot of picks!”

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91 Doug B., interview with author, July 10, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
Doug is a concertina player in the Third Saturday Session, and, while he has been playing for a number of years, he recently suffered a stroke. “I had a stroke in June, and my right side is still a little numb. I’m supposed to be doing a lot of motor control type exercises with this hand, and playing my concertina is much more fun than sitting with the stupid hand exerciser they gave me--it’s just a bunch of springs to squeeze. I honestly probably wouldn’t do it at all if that was the only way I had to do my physical therapy.”

Both Sandra and Doug have been playing in the Third Saturday Session for a number of years, so physical therapy is manifestly not their sole motivator for participating in the session, although it has become an important one in their more recent history. Sandra played piano in her childhood and youth, but took a significant break from music until she suffered nerve damage and decided to return to music at the suggestion of her physical therapist as a way to reestablish fine motor skills. Doug is primarily a flute player, but, when he realized his physical therapy following his stroke required finger movements in all directions, not just vertically, he decided to take up concertina because the hand motion and technique was very similar to exercises his physical therapist had implemented to help regain his flexibility, reach, control, and strength.

Sandra doesn’t feel her identity has been significantly impacted either by her nerve damage or how she uses music as a way to exercise fine motor control. She has considered herself a musician for many years—even when she wasn’t actively participating in a group or playing on her own. “I’ve considered myself a musician since I began playing piano as a child. I never stopped. When anyone would ask, I’d say, ‘oh, yes, I’m a musician, but I haven’t played in a while.’ How often I played didn’t matter to me, and, honestly, it still

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92 Sandra S., interview with author, September 19, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
doesn’t.” Identifying herself as a musician was an important facet of Sandra’s identity before she turned to music as a therapeutic device, and continues to be so. While her nerve damage provided the initial push to resume her musical practices, to participate in the session and to learn a new instrument, therapy is one of the least important of Sandra’s motivations for music-making. Much more important to Sandra in the present is the social outlet of participating in a group, the enjoyment she gains from playing, and her feelings of achievement when she learns a new piece or masters a challenging tune.

Doug’s use of music as physical therapy has impacted his identity, although not to a large degree, and only in how others perceive him. When he first began playing whistle, Doug did not see himself as a musician. “It took a while before I was good enough to actually consider myself a musician. I don’t remember exactly when, but it was a year or so after I transitioned from whistle to flute—so it was about a year and half or thereabouts before I actually thought of myself as a musician. But I felt more and more like a musician over time, and now I see myself more as a musician than anything else. Especially since I retired—I’m more of a musician than an engineer, now." Therapy has not changed his fundamental self-identity as a musician: it has changed what kind of musician other people identify him as. “I still see myself as a flute player,” he says. “But since I’ve been playing concertina, most people refer to me as a concertina player—even people who have known me for years. People are more impressed by it, too. It’s not as common and it just looks more complicated. I guess people see me that way because I play concertina in the sessions now more than I do flute or whistle.” For Doug, playing concertina in the Irish session
hasn’t significantly altered how he sees himself: according to Doug, “it’s just added another dimension” to his own previously established self-identity as a musician.

Music therapy is not always prescribed by a professional, recognized as such by the musician, or approached as a specific treatment for a specific problem. Sometimes it functions as a sort of mental calisthenics, as a way to engage the mind and to keep it active. “Music keeps my mind sharp,” laughs Renée, an elderly fiddle player. “It makes me think about things and think fast before it’s gone. Everybody says the trick to getting old and staying sharp is to do things that make your brain work...and I despise crossword puzzles.” Renée is eighty-seven, and has been playing in the third Saturday session for about six years.

I played piano and sang as a girl, but I really only did it because that’s what girls then were expected to do back then. I never really enjoyed it that much, because I hated being forced to practice and I thought the songs my teacher gave me to play were just plain silly. I’ve always loved to listen to music, and boy did I love to dance, but playing it just never was that important to me. Several years ago, my late husband and I went to my granddaughter’s dance recital, and she was doing Irish step dancing. They had live musicians, and I fell in love with the music. I had never heard anything like that before. It was just so upbeat and cheerful, with this marvelous lilt. It was catchy and lively and fun. It made me want to dance. It stuck with me, and I started listening to recordings and eventually decided that learning something new would be good for my brain. I decided on fiddle because I figured it would go with anything, musically speaking, plus it was something I could afford and it’s easy to carry around. I don’t think I have the wind for flute or whistle. I started with the Irish music because I was already a little familiar with it from listening to it, and I could take lessons. And, really, my dear, it’s because that’s what I wanted to play. I’ll never be very good, and I make mistakes all the time, and I can’t play nearly as fast as most do, but I enjoy it nonetheless. It doesn’t matter that I’ll never be able to keep up. I like the people in the group too and it gives me the chance to socialize with someone besides my daughter and her family.94

93 Doug C., interview with author, June 6, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
94 Renée M., interview with author, June 6, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
When asked if music and being a musician was a part of her identity, Renée laughed. "You youngsters are so taken up with 'who am I' and identity, like you don’t have enough of it or something. I know who I am—it’s who I’ve been all my life. I’m a woman, I’m an American, I’m a mother and a grandmother. Isn’t that enough?"95

Renée is not defined by the music she plays: for her, it is enough that she enjoys it and sees it as a pleasurable way to continue to be mentally active. Renée also demonstrates that the motivation to play music and the motivation to participate in an ensemble can be different: her motivation for playing music is to keep her brain active, yet her motivation for participating in the session is for the social contact. The correlation between dedication to the group and the depth to which a participant identifies as a musician is not a perfect or a predictable correlation, as Renée is one of the most dedicated members, rarely misses a session, practices diligently on her own, is prompt, stays throughout the entire session, and remains focused on music-making throughout.

The self-identities of the musicians utilizing music as physical therapy for their motivation did not significantly change as they became more involved in music and the Irish traditional music community in Albuquerque. Sandra and Doug already identified themselves as musicians, and this did not change because their motivation shifted focus. Both Doug and Sandra use playing music as physical therapy, but their stroke and nerve damage, respectively, have not had a significant impact on their identity, and neither does their treatment, as participating in the session had already impacted their identity prior to their adding therapy as a motivating factor. They already self-identified as musicians and members of the Albuquerque Irish music community, and the specific instrument they play

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95 Renée M., interview with author, June 6, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
has not significantly impacted how they define themselves: they have simply added another motivation to a complex tapestry of motivational factors. Renée, even though maintaining mental acuity was the sole motivator for her learning a new instrument and joining an Irish music session, does not consider music to be an important aspect of her identity, as she does not place a lot of emphasis or regard on attempting to define herself. Renée was not driven specifically to play Irish music: playing Irish music was a matter of convenience and something for Renée and her granddaughter to share. Others may identify her as a musician, but Renée does not think of herself as such simply because she does not consider either being a musician or a preoccupation with identity as important. Renée is happy with exactly who she is and with playing music as a pleasurable pastime as well as a method of retaining mental acuity. Music making brings Renée joy.

**Participation as Emotional Therapy**

Scientists such as neurobiologists, neurologists, neurochemists, and psychologists, who specialize in fields devoted to the study of brain physiology, structure, and function, are beginning to delve more deeply into research on how the brain processes music and how brain functions are affected by music. Oliver Sacks, for example, a well-known neurologist and author, wrote *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, a series of case studies describing predicaments and abnormalities of how the brain functions with music. Other books describing how the brain processes music include Daniel J. Levitin’s *This Is Your Brain On Music* and *The World in Six Songs*, Carl E. Seashore’s *Psychology of Music*, and Phillip Ball’s *The Music Instinct: How Music Works and Why We Can’t Do Without It*. Music’s role in brain development has been intensively studied, especially in the context of
Music’s effects on the limbic system, the physical structures of the brain that modulate and regulate emotion, however, is a relatively unexplored field.

The limbic system comprises several different structures from both hemispheres, and supports a variety of functions, including long-term memory, olfaction, epinephrine flow, behavior, emotion, and motivation. The hippocampus is an important part of the limbic system of the brain, serving as the center for emotion, memory, and the autonomic nervous system. Depression can cause atrophy of the hippocampus, and is linked to a reduction in hippocampal function, through the loss of hippocampal neurons, lack of new hippocampal neurons being produced, as well as the atrophy. This occurs for a variety of reasons, most of which are not fully understood, although stress and trauma negatively impact hippocampal function in the same fashion, contributing to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Music listening has been shown to ameliorate the symptoms of affective disorders, such as all types of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, both physiologically and psychologically. Stefan Koelsch, Kristin Offermanns, and Peter Franzke, a group of German biological psychologists and neurobiologists, have published empirical findings exploring how music can affect emotion and how music can serve as a treatment for affective disorders, which include depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Koelsch and his team conducted a functional neuroimaging, or fMRI, study wherein a participant engages in an activity either concurrently or immediately before having an MRI, in this case, of the brain. This type of imaging shows levels of blood flow to specific areas, which indicate changes in activity. Increased blood flow indicates increased activity and vice versa. An MRI can also map soft tissue structures, which allow researchers to compare position, size, and
shape of a variety of brain architectures and organs, such as the amygdala and hippocampus.

Their study showed that music can modulate amygdalar activity, which supports the assumption that music “can evoke ‘real’ emotions and that, thus, emotions evoked by music are not mere illusions”\(^{96}\) because the activity of core structures of emotion processing, the limbic system, especially the amygdala, hippocampus, parahippocampal gyrus, and temporal poles, are modulated by music. Listening to music physically changes the blood chemistry in the brain as well as having measurable positive effects on hippocampal function. The emotions felt when listening to music are not imaginary: they are real, quantifiable, and the listener can manipulate his or her mood solely by the selection of music he or she is listening to. In addition to manipulating mood, music can alter the perception of the listener as well as his or her mood. In 2001, researchers Jacob Jolij and Maaike Meurs demonstrated that the music a person listens to can temporarily change a person’s visual perception and affect what he or she thinks he or she sees.\(^{97}\) Their study suggests that visual perception is influenced by the subject’s current mood or emotional state, which is affected by the music they are listening to.

Koelsch and his group, in addition to the physical affects music has on the brain, showed that music can activate brain structures associated with reward and pleasure, and music making is perceived as rewarding and pleasurable. The authors claim that, since music listening and making activates a multitude of brain structures, it is likely that music

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listening and making—at least the preferred music of the listener or music maker—has “beneficial effects on the psychological and physiological health of individuals.” Several other functional neuroimaging studies have shown involvement of the amygdala in emotional responses to music, and, when connected with the important role that hippocampal function and activity plays in the generation of tender and positive emotions, it follows that one of the “great powers” of music is to evoke hippocampal activity related to such positive emotions.

In addition to modulating emotion, music helps to reverse the loss of hippocampal function through increases in hippocampal neurogenesis, in preventing the death of hippocampal neurons, and in reanimating activity in the hippocampus. Musical participation has a measurably larger salubrious affect, with marked increases of hippocampal activity evidenced through functional MRI scans of the brain as well as participant reported increases in tender positive emotions, such as joy and happiness. This ameliorative effect has a profound impact on musicians suffering from these disorders, and is a major motivating factor in their musical participation.

Koelsch, Offermanns, and Franzke found that music is capable of modulating activity in virtually all limbic and paralimbic brain structures, that music a listener finds pleasant can modulate neural systems involved in reward and pleasure, and that music motivates individuals to engage in vital social functions that are an important source of pleasure (further discussed in the chapter on music as a social outlet). Given these observations, the effects of music making on mood have been studied by Koelsch and his

98 Koelsch, et al., 307.
99 Ibid, 308.
100 Ibid.
co-authors, who found that music making evoked positive emotions and improved the mood of individuals.\textsuperscript{101}

During their study, one of the musical samples the authors used was the Irish jig “The Luck Penny” (see example 1). The authors found that depression, anxiety and fatigue decreased in the music group as compared to the control group, while vigor increased and irritability did not change. During Koelsch, Offermanns, and Franzke’s experiment, music group participants felt more pleasant, more engaged, happier, less angry, less sad, and less anxious compared to the control group.\textsuperscript{102} The authors assume the mood elevating effects observed in their study are “at least partly due to the engagement in social functions”\textsuperscript{103} they discussed in their paper, which are outlined and discussed in the Social Outlet chapter of this dissertation. It remains that functional neuroimaging studies have shown that music can modulate activity of all major limbic and paralimbic brain structures; those structures involved in the initiation, detection, generation, maintenance, termination, and modulation of emotions.\textsuperscript{104} Since emotions are closely linked to peripheral-physiological effects (emotions have an effect on the autonomic nervous system, the endocrine system, and the immune system) it does not seem an illogical leap to surmise that participating in musical groups would help to reduce dysfunction and imbalance in those systems.

If we take into account Koelsch and other neuroscientists who have presented evidence concluding that positive emotions promote healthy hippocampal neurogenesis and negative emotions can engender loss of function or atrophy of the hippocampus. Since negative emotions are linked to this loss of hippocampal function, then the type of

\textsuperscript{101} Koelsch, et al. 310.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, 312.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 314.
\textsuperscript{104} Koelsch, et al. 314
emotions a person predominantly feels can actually cause those emotions to recur more and more frequently. There is a physiological explanation for the experience of many who suffer from affective disorders, that negative emotions lead to further feelings of increasingly negative emotions. Thus, the opposite would be arguably true: that positive emotions can lead to further feelings of increasingly positive emotions as the hippocampus is ‘repaired’ by positive feelings, such as are engendered by belonging, achievement, and acceptance.

Ethnic music ensembles, such as traditional Irish dance music, are commonly chosen by musicians or prospective musicians because they are frequently non-professional, easily accessed, and tend to be welcoming to new prospective members. These are important factors that have strong appeal to persons suffering from depression and/or anxiety, as starting a new activity, especially one as involved as music, can be extremely overwhelming. Meeting new people, especially in groups, can be stressful to persons with affective disorders. This, added to the time and energy demands of practicing, travel, and the session itself and the fiscal demands of purchasing a new instrument, accouterments, and lessons, can be a crushing weight to a person who already suffers from lack of energy, fatigue, difficulty in making decisions, and feelings of hopelessness.

A disability of any type or severity can have profound impact on identity, both in terms of self-perception and the manner in which a person presents him or herself to others. All too often, a person with a disability will see him or herself only in the light of his or her disability. In effect, a person suffering a disability is vulnerable to viewing him or herself as a one-dimensional representation of their disability, and often ignores or trivializes other factors that comprise his or her identity. A person suffering from
depression may see him or herself as “a depressed person” instead of a complete person
with multiple facets to his or her identity. Often, depression overwhelsms or “drowns out"
other aspects of identity. Paul felt this way. Koelsch’s team’s findings parallel and explain
why Paul found his mood and state of mind significantly improved when he participated in
the session. Paul was willing to speak with me at length about his experiences and was
candid in relating how he felt and how music impacted his life in a hugely significant way.
Paul’s participation in Irish music has been motivated both by music’s positive effects on
his depression and the impact that both the music and his motivation had on his self-
identity and self-representation.

Paul is a guitarist who plays in all the sessions discussed in this paper. He suffers
from severe clinical depression and plays guitar as one way to combat his symptoms. He
feels that there are many ways in which playing music helps him cope, but the most
important benefit for him is that music makes him feel “somehow more complete, like the
depression isn’t everything I am.”105 Being a musician, and specifically a guitarist who plays
Irish music, gives Paul a realized aspect or form of identity that he feels is valid and
genuine. When a person such as Paul is motivated to participate in a musical ensemble
because his or her depression symptoms are relieved by his or her participation, it impacts
his or her identity. In Paul’s experience, the impact is positive.

Paul sees himself very differently now as a result of playing music. He feels he has
something positive in his life and an aspect of his identity that he is proud of. Paul’s
participation in Irish music has not only given him another important facet of his identity,
but also changed that identity’s focus from external physical characteristics and his chosen

105 Paul G., interview with author, August 8, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
career to an internal focus. He began thinking of himself as a "real person with characteristics and thoughts and feelings other than depression, which I just wanted to hide." Paul says, “It’s like...Like I have something good in my life. And yeah, I know I have lots of good things in my life. But this is something I do well, and I do it well because I’ve worked hard at it. It’s one of the few things I can take honest pride in-- nobody gave it to me, I’m not good because I’m lucky, and people don’t have to like it. I’m an Irish musician, and it gives me something to be besides a statistic, besides being a person with depression. The music somehow shifted from something I did to something I was.”

Paul has spent most of his adult life attempting to hide his depression. He credits much of his current openness and his candor during our series of interviews to both music and the support of his wife. His wife is supportive and accepting, helping Paul to realize that depression is not a flaw, was not his fault, and that he was not "broken" because he had depression. It took an act of great courage for Paul to confide in her before their marriage, and he was relieved when she told him that she already knew about it, but appreciated his trusting her enough to tell her. Her matter-of-fact, calm acceptance demonstrated to Paul that depression was something he had, not something he was, that he was not alone, and that he could do something about it. Music gave Paul something to be unreservedly happy about, something positive he could take pride in, and helped him to “escape the negative.” Music also gave him a way to express himself without having to use words, to “bridge the gap between talking and not talking.”

When one is uncomfortable with expressing oneself through language, musical expression is often a more comfortable or accessible mode of expression. Paul frequently finds it significantly easier to express his emotions musically rather than verbally.
Expressing his feelings of pain, self-doubt, and self-loathing verbally was often too difficult, even when he was trying to verbalize his feelings to himself or his therapist, as he struggled with the social stigma of depression and being “allowed” to feel negative emotions. Playing music often gave Paul an outlet and a release for the feelings he could not express verbally. Over time, he realized that playing music that “matched” his emotions—either previously composed Irish music, music of his own composition, or improvisation—helped to relieve those emotions and then he could slowly transition through the emotional and musical spectrum until he was playing cheerful and upbeat dance tunes, which, although they may not always leave him feeling cheerful and upbeat, mitigated the sensations of tightness, difficulty breathing, and overwhelming despair and self-loathing. Paul prefers Irish dance tunes when he wants to play something cheerful for two reasons: he is accomplished enough at playing Irish dance tunes that playing through the ones he knows or learning new tunes is not frustrating, and because “it’s impossible to be sad when you play Irish music. It’s too cheerful.” Eventually, Paul began taking his instrument to his appointments with his therapist, and even holding it made it easier for him to express how he felt. “I know if I am feeling particularly awful I can pick up my guitar and play a few tunes and it’ll make me feel at least a little better. And learning a new tune gives me a sense of accomplishment, which also feels nice, and I know when people compliment my playing they mean it.”

Playing in the sessions greatly improved Paul’s confidence and self-esteem.

One of the feelings a person with depression experiences is a distrust of complimentary comments made by others, which can make it difficult for others, including therapists, friends, and family members, to support someone with depression. Low self-esteem is often present in people with depression, and positive compliments are difficult
for a person who does not see value in him or herself to accept. Paul says that, to him, most compliments or accolades “feel like a lie.” He calls it the ‘yes, but’ and explains that a ‘yes, but’ is when anyone says something complimentary or you think something complimentary about yourself, you immediately think “yes, but...” and counter that compliment with a negative qualifier. Compliments are not taken at face value, but rather “feel like lies” or the recipient believes the complimenter is “just being nice.” When he first began playing, Paul felt a “yes, but” virtually every time someone positively commented on his playing or musicality. That has decreased dramatically over time, because, as Paul improved, he was asked to play for special events, hired for paying gigs, and experienced other circumstances where he was singled out as a competent, accomplished guitarist. This has helped Paul’s self-esteem, reinforced his self-identity as a musician, and, as he slowly began to believe people wanted him in the sessions, he felt a much stronger sense of belonging.

Paul’s feelings support Baumeister’s findings that “a need to belong is a fundamental human motivation”106 and that “many of the strongest emotions people experience, both positive and negative, are linked to belongingness. Evidence suggests a general conclusion that being accepted, included, or welcomed leads to a variety of positive emotions...whereas being rejected, excluded, or ignored leads to potent negative feelings.”107 Paul’s feelings of belonging, of truly being a desired member of and welcome at sessions, of acceptance, has had a positive impact on both his self-perception and his depression. Paul says,

It’s nice to know you’re wanted, you know? Being with people who take me at face value and really only know me as a musician who loves the same music they do is

107 Baumeister, 508.
the most helpful, I think. It makes it easier to get motivated to go to a session than it does to do anything else. On days when going to the grocery store is exhausting and the thought of having to go to work is overwhelming, I can think “but there is a session tonight! I can go, and it will be fun.” Sometimes I still won’t want to go, but it’s easier to make myself because I know it’ll make me feel better.

Paul does not have an Irish ethnic heritage, but this has not made him feel like he does not belong or is not welcome. When he first began playing and coming to sessions, Paul was worried he would not be welcome not only because he was a beginner, but also because he is not Irish. Paul also felt he was appropriating the music and that if he “wanted to play ‘folk’ music or whatever that I should be playing flamenco or Mariachi or something.” He chose to play Irish music based on his personal preference and the accessibility of the session, and did not feel the need to invent an Irish ethnic heritage in order to belong. By the time Paul was confident enough in his own abilities as a musician, he had observed several sessions and had noticed that there were several members who were not Irish and correctly assumed that an Irish ethnic heritage was not demanded or expected of members of the Albuquerque Irish music community.

Therapy serves as a strong motivator for music listening, playing, and especially participation, although it is often not recognized as such by the musicians themselves. It is unlikely that a musician can find the same relief of physiological, psychological or neurological disorders through other means, especially as other therapeutic practices are generally not as accessible as music, for a variety of reasons, including access to care and financial constraints. Music serves multiple therapeutic functions simultaneously, including physical movement, emotional support, as an aid to communication, and through its positive physical effects on the brain. Music as therapy can often serve as the initial motivation to begin one’s musical practice, to resume it, or to join a musical ensemble, such
as an Irish session. The therapeutic uses of music combine easily with motivators of social interaction, affinity, and the desire to learn, with music participation fulfilling multiple purposes and human needs. People whose primary motivation is the therapeutic relief music participation grants them tend to be the most dedicated to the session, which manifests in the amount of time they dedicate to music and practicing outside of the session, in their interest in other aspects of the music they play, and in their focus and attention during the session itself.

The degree to which the identity of these musicians is affected by their music participation varies. It is largely dependent on how much benefit and positive healing both the music itself and participating in the sessions has had on the musician. In the limited context and sample size of this study, musicians who used music as physical therapy felt that music-as-therapy had little to no effect on their overall identity and saw little change in how they saw themselves after they began utilizing music as therapy. However, musicians who used music as psychological therapy experienced a dramatic and positive identity shift, with music adding depth and dimension to their self-identity and with marked improvement to their self-esteem.

This conclusion is supported by current studies in neuroscience showing that patients with affective disorders, such as depression and post traumatic-stress disorder, show a volume reduction of the hippocampal formation, which is associated with a loss of hippocampal neurons and a blockage of neurogenesis in the hippocampus. Koelsch, Offermanns, and Franzke, in their study of the use of music in the treatment of affective disorders, assert that music can help to reanimate activity in the hippocampus, prevent the
death of hippocampal neurons, and lift the blockage of hippocampal neurogenesis, thus ameliorating the symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Koelsch and his team demonstrate that music can also activate brain structures involved in reward and pleasure, and the more frequently one feels pleasure, the healthier those brain structures, such as the hippocampus, become. These participants have recognized that playing music and participating in the session elevates their mood and that the pleasure they find in music-making serves as both motivation and therapy.

The implications of this study could potentially impact the fields of psychology and music therapy, especially regarding affective disorders, as well as deepen understanding of the intrinsic link between music and the brain and ties between music participation, motivation, and identity. Since depression tends to have different effects on men and women, it is possible the impact of music may also differ between genders. Since music has a highly individual effect, determining this difference would require a very large-scale study.

108 Koelsch, et al. 308
The desire to learn and continue learning is a common trait found throughout humanity. There are many adults who currently have an active musical life, and the Irish session is an excellent venue for informal music learning as well as adult music learning. Adult music learners constitute a significant portion of adult learners, and the opportunities for adult music learning are growing. Some universities, community colleges, music schools and conservatories have instituted extension programs geared toward adult music learners. Several major cities have schools of music dedicated to adult music learners, including the Greenwich House Music School in New York and the Levine Music School in Washington, D.C. In the Albuquerque area, many of the musicians in the Irish music community have begun their music study and participation through adult music classes offered through the University of New Mexico’s Continuing Education programs, Central New Mexico Community College, and classes offered through Apple Mountain Music, Albuquerque’s folk instrument and music store. Interested adults can take organized group classes in music theory, singing, and a variety of instruments, including piano, harmonica, mandolin, harp, bodhrán, and hammered dulcimer, among many others.

Opportunities for music learning in traditional Irish dance music are plentiful, accepting, and accessible, with readily available, inexpensive instruments, learning opportunities, teachers, and “camps” open to all players of any proficiency, thousands of recordings, and easily accessed, free materials and tutorials available online. The Albuquerque session community has loosely organized a self-mediated system of ability or
comfort levels, with sessions structured specifically for absolute beginners, for intermediate players, and with what may be considered to be more typical sessions for advanced players or players comfortable with learning new tunes by ear, playing tunes faster, with more independence, and from memory.

The music lends itself to an adaptable, positive, and productive learning experience. The tunes themselves are easy to learn: they are catchy, easy to remember, and easy to follow with their predictable form and structure. The range of tunes lies well within the comfortable range of the instruments, dissonant intervals are rare, and, once the ear is more familiar with the modal sounds of many tunes, the melodies rarely contain notes outside the key that are “surprising” to the ear. Rhythms are predictable and rhythmic patterns are quickly established in the tune, with strong agogic accents and no variations in meter or tempo. A majority of the tunes also retain their musicality when played at drastically slower tempos than normal. These characteristics combine to create a musical genre that lends itself to friendliness, approachability, and ease for Irish music learners.

As easy as the skeleton, the main melodic line, of the tunes is to learn, the music also presents challenges to the advanced player. Each player is expected to “make the tune their own” by incorporating those ornaments specific to their instrument and altering the tune as needed for the advantages and limitations of each instrument. Tempos increase, demanding dexterity and consistently improving technique. Styles and performance practice can vary depending on the type of tune, the geographic region of the tune’s origin, the performer’s origin, or the performer’s present location. Many tunes can be played as different dances: a reel, for example, can be played as a hornpipe, and, since each dance has a particular performance practice, this can add complexity and another dimension to a
previously learned tune. Irish dance music is easy to learn and difficult to master, so it attracts new students through ease, accessibility, and rapid, obvious improvement and retains musicians by constantly offering new challenges, goals, and learning experiences.

**Learning Experience**

Many session members attend because they are interested in learning new music: a new style, a new instrument, new techniques, new ornamentations, new tunes, and so on. They come with a personal goal in mind for the session and are driven to achieve that goal—much more driven than musicians who are motivated to attend by the social interaction or for the therapeutic uses of music. “Today I want to learn how to play triples,”\(^\text{109}\) Brendan, a bodhrán player, announced to session members before one First Saturday session. “I’m not great at them, but I can show you the technique,” offers another bodhrán player. Brendan doesn’t expect to be able to integrate triples, an ornament technique, into his playing right away—but he wants to learn the technique so he can eventually include it in his playing. Brendan comes to the sessions so that he can learn from others who can demonstrate the techniques and correct any mistakes he is making before they become bad habits. He then practices on his own, until he feels ready to bring his newly acquired skill to the session and move to the next ornament, technique, or musical aspect he’d like to learn. Typically, the learning journey is self-guided for these musicians. They may seek a venue for formal learning, such as a teacher or a class, when they begin playing, especially if they have no prior musical experience, but then they break off on their own and seek to learn what they are interested in. Learners take control over their own learning, which often results in a dedicated, committed and enthusiastic member.

\(^{109}\) Brendan M., interview with author, February 21, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
Occasionally, however, this self-directed learning results in an uneven musical education and performance, as musicians who have concentrated only on learning what they 'liked' lack either the knowledge, self-awareness, or ability to integrate smoothly into a group. They may have difficulty in maintaining a steady tempo, playing a tune at a tempo other than the one they learned it at, playing in tune, or adjusting their volume to balance with other players. They may lack facility in playing by ear or in reading music, or be strong in certain techniques and weak in others. Perceptive and engaged players who truly wish to become competent, able musicians generally accept criticism well and accept offers of help or recognize shortcomings in themselves and seek out others to help address those shortcomings. Players who demonstrate inflexibility in what they learn and how they play frustrate the other members of the session, who will be patient to a point, but, if offers of help are consistently turned down and constructive criticism is met with resistance, the other members of the session will quietly begin to close off the offender. Session members may not be excluded based on obvious markers of ethnicity, but they will be ostracized for their unwillingness, apparent or actual, to contribute to the group in a meaningful and positive way. Players who lack experience or skill are welcomed, as long as they demonstrate a willingness to try and a desire to learn, improve, and participate.

Musicians who are motivated by the desire to learn are frequently the most willing to travel to camps and summer music schools, which are dedicated to music learning, as opposed to being focused on socialization or competition. At Willie Clancy Week, a summer school for traditional Irish music and dance held annually in Miltown Malby, County Clare, I met Clive. Clive is a retired police officer from England who, at that time, had been playing whistle for about a year. He began learning tin whistle when he retired, because he “needed
something to do and something to learn—something to keep the old noggin working, you know, and, really, the whistle is nice and light to carry.”

Clive and I attended some classes and many evening and late night pub sessions together, and he regularly joined sessions, led tunes, and asked other, more experienced, musicians to teach him new tunes and techniques. Clive, who is not of Irish descent, has not had any issues with acceptance in the Irish music community, either in Ireland or in England, despite what may be assumed to be the historical political tensions between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain.

During the same week, I met Rachel, a young woman who had just graduated with a bachelor’s of music education the previous May. Rachel played flute, and had decided to spend two weeks in Ireland learning some Irish music before she began her teaching career. Rachel wanted to experience music learning outside of the formal music education settings and contexts in the United States and had no prior experience learning in an informal setting, had never tried to play by ear, and, when she expressed an interest in flute musics other than Western Classical, she had been discouraged by her applied music teacher, who told her that learning such musics would not be “a good use of her time.” “My flute professor told me that while it was admirable that I wanted to learn the musics of other cultures, I didn’t have time to between what I needed to learn for Classical flute and all my other classes,” Rachel explained. “But I wanted to learn anyway, so here I am. I figure that if there are different learning styles, then there are different musical learning styles, so I should really learn in different ways so I can be a better teacher and help my students learn music the way they learn best, whether it’s by reading music or by ear.”

Rachel was interested in learning not only the music itself, but also the ways in which the music was

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transmitted, learned, and passed from person to person in a predominantly aural musical tradition.

Rob attends sessions because he learns better with others around. “Playing in company makes me a better player, and hearing other people play makes it easier to learn to play by ear than just listening to recordings. You learn a hundred times better when you’re sitting next to a good player than when you’re sitting at home practicing by yourself.” Rob has not been playing for very long, but he is enthusiastic about learning, and about achieving a new skill. “I wanted to learn uilleann pipes because they’re just so cool sounding,” he says, “plus, they’re a hard instrument to learn, and I really wanted a challenge. I didn’t want to take on something easy. I needed to really dig in and push myself.”

Music learners do not always succeed in their learning, and the amount they value music learning may diminish. According to “expectancy value theory” of education, a learner’s motivation is determined both by how much they value the goal of the lesson as well as by whether they expect to succeed. According to the psychologist Norman T. Feather, expectancy and value multiply, they do not add. Thus, if the learner has a high expectation of success as well as placing a high value on the activity or information, their motivation is a product, rather than a sum, of their expectation and value. However, if a learner does not expect to succeed, motivation will not exist, regardless of the value the learner attributes to the lesson. Similarly, a learner will not be motivated to learn when he or she perceives no value in the learning, regardless of his or her chances of successfully

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112 Rob V., interview with author, November 8, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
learning. Session members who are motivated by the opportunity to learn stop attending the session if they do not feel they have achieved their goals or if the value they place on the music or the learning opportunity diminishes. A lack of achievement and/or a lack of value result in a lack of motivation for continued participation. Individual perception is key in this situation: regardless of what others may think, an individual who perceives the music to be too challenging will have no expectation of success. Likewise, an individual may perceive a lack of value in attending sessions regardless of the value attributed by others.

Attending only one session may be enough to convince a potential participant that there is no value in further attendance or that there is little chance of success. A personal friend of mine, who is highly intelligent and musical, attended one of the First Saturday Beginner’s Session with me with the goal of learning bodhrán. She declined to participate beyond one session, feeling that she “wouldn’t be able” to learn bodhrán, despite her own musical experience and my encouragement.

The perception that any effort put into learning something new will result in failure can have a negative impact on both self-esteem and identity. A person who accepts lack of success as inevitable can, all too often, begin to see himself or herself as a “failure” or “stupid” because he or she did not succeed. They may also perceive themselves as “lazy” or a “slacker” because he or she did not try hard enough to satisfy him or herself. In my friend’s case, she saw herself as less of a musician because she “couldn’t” learn bodhrán, despite being an accomplished piano and harp player. The challenge of learning a new and unfamiliar instrument is overwhelming and off-putting to many people, though others seek out the challenge of learning a new instrument or musical form. Whether a person seeks or
eschews this type of challenge seems to be largely dependent on individual personality traits and the presence of additional factors motivating musical participation.

**Challenge**

Not all the people who are learning Irish music are learning music for the first time. Many members of the sessions took music classes or private lessons in formal education settings, and John is a professional trumpet player. He approaches Irish music as a challenge. “I get tired of playing the same kinds of music over and over. I’m formally trained—I have a Master’s in trumpet performance, and I’ve played professionally and I teach private lessons. I just get bored with the same things over and over. I started playing Irish music because it was totally out of my realm of experience and I wanted something new to do that I wouldn’t get to do in the Classical music world. I wanted something so different from my day to day life—teaching the same etudes and the same solo works and the same concertos and the same excerpts over and over and over—that I was so bored and burnt out with—that I decided I needed something new. I needed a new musical challenge. So I went with something completely out of my frame of reference—I started learning mandolin and Irish music. I’m a trumpet player with no string experience, so I couldn’t really think of anything more different.”

John needed a challenge and needed to learn something different in order to re-engage and re-interest himself in music. John’s attendance in the sessions is sporadic, primarily because he has professional obligations on many Saturdays, which often conflict with the sessions. He has learned mandolin very rapidly, due to his musical background prior experience. John already knows a great deal.

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114 John G., interview with author, August 15, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
more about music than the average beginner on any instrument and has been able to use his prior knowledge to great effect. John has self-identified as a musician since childhood, but learning mandolin has added depth and another aspect of musicianship to his identity. John is proud of being a mandolin player, and he has noticed a distinct difference in how others react when he presents himself as a trumpet player and when he presents himself as a mandolin player, especially in terms of their expectations:

It has made an impact on how I see myself. I mean, I have always been a musician, and represented myself as one since I started music in elementary school. But now it’s more...dimensional. Like there is more to my musicianship now, and I feel like it’s more meaningful. Maybe that’s because now I play multiple instruments, but I think it’s really more that I’m not bored anymore. Even with trumpet stuff and lessons—I can see patterns and links between musical styles and types that I didn’t before and I can look at trumpet stuff and think about playing it on mandolin and vice versa. And now that I think about it more, when strangers ask what I do, and I tell them I’m a musician, about half the time I tell them I’m an Irish musician and play mandolin. Like in some circumstances, playing mandolin is a more important part of who I am and what I do than playing trumpet, which is actually how I earn a living. I’ve never been paid to play mandolin. People’s reactions are different, too, mostly. When I tell people I’m a professional trumpet player, their reaction is “oh, that’s nice. So do you know how to play ‘Taps’?” and if I tell them I’m a mandolin player and play Irish music, they are much more excited about it and talk about how cool that is and ask how I got started and are generally more interested. I do get asked a lot if I started playing Irish music because I was Irish; if I’ve been playing Irish music since I was a kid; and if I play Irish music because my parents did. None of those things are true, but it makes me laugh every time because people are so predictable.\footnote{John G., interview with author, August 15, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.}

John is not the only session member to challenge himself with learning a new instrument. There are several musicians who play in multiple sessions, often on different instruments. Tom, for example, plays mandolin in the Thursday session and fiddle in the Third Saturday session. While he has been playing mandolin for several years, he only
began playing fiddle relatively recently, because he wanted a challenge and to have some flexibility in order to fill in if a particular instrument is lacking during a session. I learned harp and play it in the First Saturday sessions, the beginner session, because learning the tunes on a new instrument offers me a greater challenge.

Challenge is also an important component of Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of “flow” (introduced in Chapter Four), referring to a state of heightened concentration when one is so intent on the activity at hand that all other thoughts, concerns, and distractions disappear and the actor is fully in the present. The experience leads to a feeling of timelessness and feelings of transcending one’s normal self. Csikszentmihalyi’s interview research suggests that people find flow experience restful and liberating, because problems, concerns, and sources of stress are set aside during the flow experience of intense concentration and a clear, open state of mind is reached. According to Csikszentmihalyi, this open state of mind is fundamental for psychic growth and integration. Since flow is experienced as pleasurable, people tend to return again and again to activities that produce a flow state. The factors that contribute to a flow experience are also the factors that ensure a positive learning experience. A challenge must be present, otherwise the participant loses focus, concentration, and attention, yet the challenge must not be so difficult that the participant gets frustrated.

Sessions are excellent places for musicians to achieve a flow experience. Part of the suitability may be due to how playing music employs many areas of the brain, which ensures a greater focus. Although they may not describe it as “flow,” many participants in the Albuquerque sessions experienced the state of intense concentration described by Csikszentmihalyi, especially members of the Third Saturday session. At one point or
another in their history with the session, all the members whose main motivation was to
learn experienced flow. It is possible that those musicians achieved a flow state either more
easily or with greater regularity than members because they were motivated by a desire to
learn and thus willing to focus entirely on the music, instead of thinking about social plans
or how they were feeling while they were playing. This willingness and desire to focus may
also be a component in why flow is achieved in sessions.

Participants often comment that “time just flies by!” “Is it time to go already?” and “I
was so involved in that tune that I didn’t even hear you come in!” When I described
Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow to a small group, they agreed that it perfectly described
experiences they have had while participating in the session. No participant achieves a flow
state in every session or for the entire session, and a few participants have never achieved
a flow state while in the session. This is easily explained, as a delicate balance of challenge
and ability must be struck in order to achieve flow: the activity must be challenging enough
to hold the focus of the participant and yet be within the skill level of the participant in
order to not be frustrating. For some participants the difficulty level of the music and the
speed at which it is played is too challenging to achieve flow, but as their skill level
increases they have the potential to experience flow and the pleasure associated with it,
which motivates them to continue their participation. For some participants, the difficulty
level of the music itself does not challenge them. They look outside of technical ability for
their challenge: speed, for example, or the addition of ornamentation, memorization,
learning techniques (improving their aural learning ability or their proficiency at reading
music), expanding their repertoire, or picking up a new instrument are a few of the ways
participants increase the challenge. Turino, in his discussion of flow, states that one of the
conditions for achieving flow is that the activity has “a continually expanding ceiling for potential challenges.” While a particular session may not have this continuous expansion of potential challenge, the participation in Irish traditional dance music in a larger context does offer virtually unlimited challenge. Aside from international formal competitions, musicians have a vast repertoire that is constantly changing and growing, a wide variety of styles to learn and/or adapt, and new ways to integrate the individual personality that is so vital to a living tradition.

Since the sessions are loosely structured by ability level, which is self-mediated, players who are growing bored with the beginners’ session on the First Saturday move to the Third Saturday slow session, and then to the more advanced Thursday session. Likewise, players who are overwhelmed by the Third Saturday can attend the First Saturday session and have more help and move at a slower pace. This flexibility helps to ensure a correct balance of challenge and ease, as players can join any group they feel comfortable in. Players who feel they are in an appropriate group based on their ability level also feel a stronger sense of belonging. They are more willing to fully participate, asking questions, making suggestions, and playing every tune. Session members who feel they are not at the same ability level as the others in the group often feel like outsiders and as though they do not belong. They feel they are imposing. These musicians are less likely to ask questions, ask for help, or make suggestions. They are also much more likely to “sit out” tunes, often sitting out more tunes than they play. When the abilities of a musician are not matched by the abilities of others in the session, flow is not achieved: in fact, how the musician feels is almost the opposite of flow. A musician may feel self-conscious, on edge,

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and anxious because he or she is struggling to focus. Time is perceived as passing excruciatingly slowly, and these musicians often leave early and rapidly stop attending the session. If none of the sessions offered fits their ability level, these musicians are likely to completely stop participating in the Irish music scene except, occasionally, as an individual performer.

**Achievement**

Achievement is obviously an important component for continued participation and learning. The sense of accomplishment that is felt when a music learner achieves a musical goal or has his or her first success on a tune or technique he or she has been struggling with is a powerful and heady emotion. Accomplishment becomes its own reward, and the desire to achieve often inspires musicians to embrace challenges that are progressively more difficult. Adults learning music, especially those who are completely new to playing music and did not have musical experiences as children, have different expectations of themselves and learn music differently than children do. Many potential members come to one or two sessions, and are obviously uncomfortable with being expected to play with a group. One young woman, Marie, told me she “probably wouldn’t be back.” When asked her reasons for not wanting to return, she replied, “I’m not good enough and it’s too embarrassing to make mistakes where everyone can hear me. Forget it.” Many adults feel inadequate or awkward in new situations or circumstances where they are not confident in their skills. They feel out of control and inferior. Some, such as Marie, overcompensate for their

117 Marie T., interview with author, October 29, 2014, Albuquerque, NM.
insecurities by trying to do everything perfectly, and, when they cannot, they abandon their own desires for music.

One of the defining characteristics of Irish traditional music, and one of the aspects that is most attractive to prospective musicians, is that it is highly individual. There is no “right way” to play it. The music is heterophonic, with everyone playing the same melodic line, but adapting it to the strengths and weaknesses of their own instrument, their own interpretation, and their preferred aesthetic for ornamentation. Ornamentation is extremely important in Irish traditional music, and all of it is improvised. The majority of players use different ornaments not only every time they play a tune, but also on every repeat of the tune so that each repeat remains interesting. This independence and individualism is a difficult concept to grasp for learning musicians. In Western Classical music, a student is expected to copy what their teacher plays and there is a definitive interpretation of what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong.’ Those Irish musicians who began their musical education as children in public school music programs struggle to become comfortable with the concept that as long as a listener can tell what a tune is, there is no ‘wrong’ way—and there is no ‘right’ way, either.

Impatience is a common trait in many adult music learners. Learners are tolerant of errors in others but not themselves. They are unforgiving and often lack patience with themselves and must be reminded that musical skill comes only with consistent practice over a period of time. The encouragement and support of other session members helps many members who are learning an instrument for the first time, but some new adult musicians grow impatient with themselves and what they see as a lack of progress and cease attending sessions.
While a seeming lack of achievement can drive people away from the session, those musicians who see achievement in small improvements every day are among the most dedicated to the session and the most willing to attempt new challenges, from new tunes to new techniques to new instruments. They tend to have the most focus throughout the session, practice regularly on their own, travel to summer camps and festivals, watch online tutorials, read and work out of music books dedicated to their instrument, and, if they have the resources, take private lessons. Musicians motivated by a desire to learn are also the ones most concerned with the musical quality of the session, requesting that tunes be played again, pausing the group in order to work on a challenging musical passage, or suggesting changes in tempo or phrasing in order to improve the performance of the group as a whole.

A certain level of independence and affinity for autonomous action is necessary for achievement within the Irish music community. It is extremely rare for a participant in the Albuquerque Irish sessions to both participate in the session and have formal music lessons: the exceptions to this are one harp player and two hammered dulcimer players. For the most part, the members of the group direct their own learning, set their own goals, and either locate or develop exercises on their own. These musicians also desire to apply their newly acquired skills to the music played in the session, and will request or lead newly learned tunes and integrate new ornaments and techniques into tunes they have previously mastered. Musicians motivated by the desire to learn are also the most willing to attempt new techniques or tunes, and often have a healthy sense of humor in regards to mistakes and their own lack of experience. Those who do not have this sense of humor eventually leave the session, dissatisfied with their experience. Learning music provides an
inexhaustible opportunity for failure, and the students who achieve have learned to see past the immediate failure to the ultimate goal of achievement. When they do achieve their goals, it is with a heady sense of accomplishment, pride, and satisfaction. This satisfaction resonates with how they see themselves: when they feel accomplished because of their achievements in music, they feel an echo of that accomplishment anytime they think of themselves of musicians. Identifying themselves as musicians, as players of Irish traditional music, recalls their feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment.

**Substitution**

Participation in the Irish sessions can serve as a substitution for participating in a musical style or genre that is unavailable to the musicians. These musicians are interested in music and want to learn the basics, but are not interested in Irish music as a musical form. They are interested in what they can learn about music, instrumental technique, and how to integrate successfully into a musical group. Most of these musicians do not participate in the session beyond the achievement of their musical goals or if an opportunity to participate in their preferred type is offered to them. These musicians participate in the learners or slow sessions, primarily the First and Second Saturday sessions.

One guitarist, Peter, identified Irish music as the “only kind of open group I could really participate in and learn—I’d really like to play rock n roll, you know, but it’s not like there is anything the equivalent of an Irish session that plays rock.” Peter participated in the First Saturday session, wanting to learn basic guitar technique, common chords, and
how to read music. He also recognized that playing in a group required experience that he would never gain watching YouTube tutorials and practicing on his own. Peter was a regular and faithful participant for almost a full year, arriving early for sessions, practicing regularly, and contributing to the sessions. He left the session feeling that he had learned the basics, and he was ready to take his musicianship in the direction he was interested in. I spoke with him about a month after his last day. “I’m ready to move on,” he said. “It’s not that it wasn’t fun, but it’s not the direction I want to go. I’m just not an Irish musician.”

Peter’s identity was not affected by his participation in the session, largely because his motivation for participation could have been fulfilled in myriad other ways if other viable music learning opportunities had been available to him. Peter considered himself a guitarist before he considered himself a musician, and did not consider himself an Irish musician at all, despite his regular and dedicated participation at an Irish music session for an extended amount of time.

Kristina also substitutes Irish traditional music for another style: in her case, Western Classical. “My kids started learning violin in the Suzuki method, but their teacher moved away. So I’m learning some stuff here so I can keep teaching them myself until I can find another Suzuki teacher. I needed a place where I can learn music, and I just don’t know enough to keep moving forward with Suzuki on my own.”118 Like Peter, Kristina participated in the group until an opportunity for her children to resume learning Suzuki violin arose. Kristina was not participating through any personal desire to learn Irish music, and, while her motivation was to learn, she didn’t want to learn for herself. She wanted an accessible, regular method of music learning to keep her children active in their

118 Kristina W., interview with author, May 22, 2015, Albuquerque, NM.
music learning. Kristina did not identify herself as a musician at all, and her perception of herself did not change through her participation in the session.

By far, the greatest percentage of musicians who quit playing after a relatively short amount of time are those whose motivation is to learn, especially if they are not willing to make mistakes in public, if they do not achieve their goals as quickly as they would like to, or if they have concluded that further participation in the sessions is no longer necessary for their musical learning. Unlike those attending sessions for social interaction, learners have not established strong enough social ties to continue their participation, and, unlike those motivated by the therapeutic benefits of playing music in a group, they do not perceive a benefit for further participation. Once their music learning goals are met, these musicians have no reason to continue playing in the session. However, if their goals for learning are based particularly around learning Irish music or their goals continue to evolve, they are among the most dedicated members of the session.

It is these musicians, the ones continually expanding and extending their learning goals, whose identity is the most profoundly impacted by their musical participation among the group of music-learners. They experience vulnerability when they begin playing, and that vulnerability opens the way for a sincere and profound change. It takes courage to be vulnerable, to take the first steps to learning something new, and to make a change in their lives. When people choose to learn music that change can have a profound impact on identity. That willingness and vulnerability, in combination, work to allow for a shift in identity as well as to cement a new identity or aspect of identity as that vulnerability is gradually reduced through achievement, success, and learning.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The reciprocal relationships between motivated action and identity are embodied in musical cultures, which play important and complex roles in effecting this dynamic interaction. Identity, or the desire to perform or adopt a particular identity, frequently drives musical participation, although this is not the only factor motivating an involvement in Irish traditional dance music sessions. In the Albuquerque sessions, a variety of motivational factors inspire and drive participation, and that participation impacts identity. Those motivations are as individual, complex, and highly personal as identity, and the degree to which motivation, identity, and music interact and impact each other varies widely. While the motivations that inspire or lead musicians to embrace participation in an ethnic music ensemble, such as a traditional Irish music session, are as individual as the participants themselves, Americans of non-Irish descent who participate in Irish traditional music in the Albuquerque Irish music scene do so primarily for the social experience, a personal affinity for the music, the therapeutic benefit they gain from musical participation, and a desire for learning. The depth to which these motivations and musical participation affect personal identity varies according to how important those motivations are to an individual as well as the impact and reward music participation brings to the musician.

Those that derive the benefit of a social experience from the Irish session find that they thrive in an activity that gives them a sense of belonging and a feeling that they are working together with others and contributing to a greater product. The deeper
relationships that are formed within the group tend to be lasting and have expanded to include activities and social interactions outside the context of the session.

Social and cultural expectations provide motivation to conform to socio-cultural identities, as society pushes people towards identities that are desirable and away from those that are undesirable: people want to ‘fit in’ and express or develop those desirable identities. Those expectations profoundly effect the identity and motivation of a musician of any genre. Social interaction has a profound affect on personal identity, as members strive to reflect and adapt to the identity and ideals the community desires to project. Personal identity may either altered or subsumed, at least for the duration of the session, and it is a significant possibility that those alterations can become permanent if the musician participates for a significant amount of time or is sufficiently motivated by the desire to belong. Members wish to project attitudes and attributes they think the community wants to see, and, over time, those attitudes and attributes may become aspects of identity rather than projections. As musicians become more accepted by the community through the embodiment of community standards, their identity becomes more closely tied to belonging to that community and playing that music. When a musician’s personal identity is different from the group identity and neither identity adapts, the individual feels he or she does not ‘fit in’ or belong in the group and will eventually cease participating. Sub-communities also play a role in both identity development and belonging, providing a more nuanced outlet for personal integration and belonging, as members of these groups share multiple affinities.

Participating in the Albuquerque Irish sessions lends itself to therapy of multiple types. Physical benefits are expressed in greater strength, flexibility, and range of motion,
while the psychological benefits include the mental exercise of learning a new skill and using music as a sort of mental calisthenics to ensure an active and agile mind. The most profound and dramatic psychological benefits are those that ameliorate the detrimental effects of affective disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Music participation helps to reverse physical damage caused by depression and trauma in the paralimbic system. This physiological affect enables a person battling affective disorders to experience tender positive emotions as opposed to having their emotional spectrum limited by an under-functioning or damaged hippocampus. When music participation's positive effects on the brain are combined with the human needs met by social interaction, people with affective disorders have seen a significant increase in these tender positive emotions, self esteem, and general feelings of well-being along with a decrease in feelings of depression, isolation, and self-doubt. The identity of these musicians is profoundly affected by these changes. Even if they do not necessarily self-identify as a musician, they begin to see themselves as people with depth and dimension to their identity, rather than feeling defined or consumed by their disorder. Participating in a musical ensemble provides a sense of belonging, achievement, and success that may be absent in their extra-musical lives.

The degree to which the motivation of therapy affects an individual's identity depends largely on how much they believe the music and musical participation has helped them. In some cases, such as those of Sandra and Doug, while they believed using music as physical therapy has been beneficial, they do not feel their identity has been strongly affected or changed by their musical practices. In their cases, both Sandra and Doug saw
themselves as musicians before the advent of the disability that necessitated physical or occupational therapy. Music in this case is a tool rather than a goal in and of itself.

Paul feels very differently. Paul attends Irish sessions as a form of emotional or mental therapy to help combat his depression, and his identity has been profoundly impacted by his participation. Music making has provided Paul with a motivation to leave his house, to participate in a social event, and to try new things. Playing music has shifted Paul’s self-identity in a positive way, adding depth and dimensionality to how Paul sees himself. Music making has given Paul a more positive outlook on life and an activity he looks forward to and takes pride in. It has improved his self-esteem and given him a community he feels he belongs to. Paul’s experiences are corroborated by current studies in neuroscience that assert that music can help to reanimate activity in the hippocampus, prevent the death of hippocampal neurons, and lift the blockage of hippocampal neurogenesis, thus ameliorating the symptoms of patients with affective disorders.

Music can also activate brain structures involved in reward and pleasure, and the more frequently one feels pleasure, the healthier those brain structures, including the hippocampus, become. These participants have recognized that playing music and participating in the session elevates their mood and that the pleasure they find in music-making serves as both motivation and therapy.

Music as therapy can serve as the initial motivator to either begin one’s musical practice, to resume it, or to join a musical ensemble such as an Irish session, and participating in a musical practice shapes identity. Music participation fulfills multiple purposes and human needs, and, when motivated by the idea that playing music will help

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119 Koelsch, et al. 308
with an affliction, identity can be profoundly affected. When positive effects follow from musical participation, it is no surprise that positive changes can be perceived in self-identity. In some cases, as in Paul’s experience, music participation can help a musician to recognize and acknowledge depth in his or her own identities or it can construct new aspects of identity.

Playing music and participating in the session is a learning experience for many musicians and prospective musicians, and they enjoy that learning. The sense of accomplishment and success that accompanies learning new skills, techniques, and tunes is rewarding, as is the challenge of learning itself. Facing a challenge, rising to it, and succeeding has an impact on self identity, as a person is more likely to represent or view the activity as a part of him or herself if he or she succeeds in his or her venture. These participants are self-motivated: no one is participating in the sessions because he or she is feeling an expectation of music learning from an external source. That degree of self-motivation indicates a higher level of importance, and the more important an activity is to a person, the more likely that activity is to impact his or her identity. Session participation for these individuals is goal oriented, with those goals inspiring a great deal of dedication and effort, including travelling long distances for music learning opportunities, as Rachel and Clive did in their travels to Ireland. Such dedication, commitment to their goals and sacrifices made in order to further their musical studies has a definite and profound impact on identity.

A person who invests a high degree of effort into becoming a musician is likely to develop a self-identity as such and to represent him or herself thusly. Successfully completing a challenge, achievement, and/or succeeding in achieving a flow experience
contributes positive reinforcement to an aspect of identity, creating a desire to express and strengthen that aspect. The state of flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi—a state of heightened concentration that is restful and liberating—is frequently achieved in music performance, as music often provides the right balance between challenge and accessibility demanded for a flow experience. As achieving flow is rewarding, people return to the activity that produced flow, and continue to improve as they challenge themselves further. Personal identity is affected, sometimes to a profound degree, as the musicians motivated by the desire to learn grow, change, and come to identify more strongly as musicians. Occasionally, the Irish session serves as a substitute for a musical form that may not be available to a musician, and these musicians do not often remain active for an extended period of time in the session.

The degree to which a participant’s identity is impacted by the music he or she plays and the group he or she plays with varies. Generally, the more dedicated a person is to the session and the more he or she participates, the more his or her identity is affected by his or her musicianship. For some musicians, such as Paul, playing in the Irish music sessions has profoundly impacted how they see themselves. Paul identifies as an Irish musician and takes pride in his musicianship. His identity as a musician forms an anchor within himself, giving him something positive to grasp and helping to reaffirm his self-worth when his depression begins to gnaw at his self-confidence and self-perception. John’s participation has added another aspect to his identity: as a professional musician, his identity was already based on his musicianship, but playing Irish music has added another dimension to how he represents himself to others. While the relationship between motivation and identity is observed in the majority of participants who are not enacting a symbolic
ethnicity of Irishness, there are participants who do not feel their identity has been significantly affected by their participation. These participants either had a previously established, complex, and strong sense of self-identity or they had not been participating in the session culture for long enough to perceive either a shift in or a facet added to their identity. Kristina’s identity, for example, was unaffected by her participation: “I know more songs now, but that doesn’t change who I am.”

Rarely is only a single motivator present. Typically, participants are driven by a primary motivational factor, with other secondary factors present in different degrees. Paul is motivated to participate primarily because the symptoms and effects of his depression are ameliorated by his participation, while the social aspect of the session and his feelings of inclusion and belonging are a significant contributing factor to his therapy, as are the feelings of success, achievement, and flow he experiences when learning new tunes or techniques. It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to isolate a single motivating factor, uninfluenced by any others, for any given member of the session. It is far more likely that a musician or prospective musician will discontinue his or her participation unless he or she has a multiplicity of motivators: unless his or her desire to learn guitar expands to include the desire for social experience, for example. Motivators influence identity and vice versa, and the extent of this influence is highly individual, personal, and complex.

A motivator can be an expression of identity or at least a unifying factor in a community. For example, musicians motivated to participation in order to fulfill a social need are the most likely to gather after a session for a dinner out and are the most likely to organize social and/or musical events outside the session, while musicians who participate

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120 Kristina W., interview with author, May 2015.
as a form of physical therapy are more likely to encourage and support each other and to be understanding of the physical challenges of playing an instrument. Identity and motivation play a role in other factors of musical participation such as dedication to the group, time committed to individual practice and research, financial investment, interest in the historical and theoretical aspects of the music, tune and instrument preference, focus during sessions, timeliness, participation in musical or social events that may be organized by session members but are not part of the session itself, and overall dedication to Irish music in general and the session in particular.

The momentum of a particular motivation does not always continue. When an individual’s motivation wanes, he or she ceases their participation unless a different, new motivation develops. A musician who achieves the learning he or she desires, for example, will no longer play in the sessions unless that motivation to learn is replaced by a motivation for social participation. Once a motivation no longer exists, either because a particular goal was accomplished, the situation stimulating that motivation was resolved, the participant loses interest in the session or their particular motivation, other life events or extra-musical factors inhibit participation, or the session does not fulfill the needs or wants that inspired the motivation, the musician no longer feels the desire or the need to participate. In the case of members who have participated for an extended period of time before losing their motivation, they may continue their participation for some time because they feel an obligation to the session, but this obligation often does not persist beyond a given point, and their presence at the session begins to lessen before they quit entirely.

The Albuquerque Irish music sessions, and presumably other music ensembles, do not meet all the needs of all potential or current participants. There are personality
conflicts, even among established members, that result in musicians no longer participating in the session. Not everyone has the same outlook regarding the overall goals of the session or how the sessions function. New members may not learn what he or she expected or wanted to learn or he or she does not learn as quickly as he or she would prefer. Conversely, others feel the pace, even in the First Saturday beginners’ session, is too quick and they are overwhelmed, or they leave the session to seek more personal, direct instruction. Meeting a large group of strangers and feeling pressure to perform at a certain level, even if that pressure is felt only by the individual performer and not imposed by other session members, is often a barrier to continued participation. Musicians lose interest, they get bored, their job schedules change, the time commitment is too demanding, they move away—there are many reasons individuals discontinue their participation. There are likely vast numbers of potential musicians who never participate, because they are intimidated, lack the time, have schedule conflicts, or are not particularly driven to try playing in a session. Motivations change, are fulfilled elsewhere, or are less of a priority in a musician’s life than are other factors.

Learning more about individual motivations can help ensembles retain membership and attract new musicians. Understanding motivation and identity helps us understand why music is so attractive to millions of amateur musicians worldwide, and why they continue to participate in musical ensembles. It helps us to understand how music shapes peoples lives and identities, and how their lives and identities shape music. We can also explore, and hopefully mitigate, the negative affects caused by exclusion, mis-identification, and non-recognition within music groups and society at large. Music educators can target learning to a student’s specific needs, as well as understand some of the possible reasons
why a student may quit unexpectedly. Studying the relationships between music, motivation, and identity can help ethnomusicologists decipher the *why* of music participation. Current ethnomusicological scholarship tends to focus on the *how*, *what*, and *who* of music: how music functions or operates within a society or culture, how a music is constructed or structured, what musical participation looks like, who participates and how they participate. An examination of motivational factors, however, can explore *why* people participate in music beyond sociocultural expectations and pressures, especially why people, especially adults, participate in casual, informal music groups. While there are numerous scholarly works researching the history of Irish music in America as well as the role it plays and has played in American society and Irish-American identity, none of these works has discussed the experiences of American participants in Irish music who do not claim an Irish ethnic heritage, their motivations, or how their participation influences their identity, self-perception, and self-representation.

A deeper understanding of motivation and identity can impact music therapy’s many applications, and that understanding has the potential to increase the effectiveness of music therapy. The same applies to psychology and other medical fields, including physical therapy, geriatrics, and the treatment of strokes, neurological, and physiological disorders. Psychologists could potentially apply a deeper understanding of motivation and identity as well as music’s physical affects on the brain to helping patients with a variety of disorders, including William’s Syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, and affective disorders. The section of this dissertation dealing with the effects of music participation on depression and post-traumatic stress disorder has been shared with a committee working with the Air Force in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder and the prevention of suicides due
to affective disorders among Air Force service personnel and veterans. The possible applications of a greater understanding of motivation and identity are vast, as are the possible avenues for further study and exploration.

Age, geographic location, demographics, gender, profession, and musical experience are likely variables when considering motivation and identity. More in-depth research could be easily applied to each motivational factor described in this dissertation. Different musics from around the world, including musical forms that revolve around a single player rather than an ensemble, could be explored for these and other motivators, as can how solo instrumental traditions differ from group instrumental traditions in terms of motivation and identity. Vocal music and dance were not addressed at all in this dissertation, and both offer an excellent venue for further exploring topics of music, motivation, and identity. Motivation and identity are common threads that run through every musician and every musical form worldwide, and the possibilities for further study are vast.

Motivation drives every single action we take as human beings. Some motivations are straightforward, but most are infinitely complex. When we consider the impact identity has on one’s motivation and vice versa, that complexity is increased exponentially. Understanding motivation and identity helps us to understand why people do the things they do—why they choose certain careers, why they react to different situations in different ways, and why they play the music they do. It also helps us to understand not just the “why” of music participation, but how the music itself fits into individual identities, how people use and relate to music in their lives, and, by extension, the role music plays in communities and societies.


Talbot, Peter. The friar disciplined, or, Animadversions on Friar Peter Walsh his new remonstrant religion: the articles whereof are to be seen in the following page taken out of his History and vindication of the loyal fomulary. Dublin: Gant, 1674.


APPENDIX A

REPERTOIRE LISTS

First Saturday: Irish Learner’s Session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blarney Pilgrim</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterfly</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Slip Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliffs of Moher</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connaughtman’s Rambles</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooley’s Reel</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowsy Maggie</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Kelly’s</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher’s Hornpipe</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers of Edinburgh (Scottish)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest Home</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haste to the Wedding</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Delaney</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesh Jig</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kid on the Mountain</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Slip Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lark in the Morning</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Farr’s</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Barn Dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maid Behind the Bar</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maids of Ardagh</td>
<td>Amix</td>
<td>Polka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison’s Jig</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Darling Asleep</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Haired Boy</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road to Lisdoonvarna</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Anne’s Reel</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Armstrong’s</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scatter the Mud</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ships in Full Sail</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidhe Beag, Sidhe Mór</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Spear</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Spire</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwind</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The majority of these tunes have multiple titles and keys. For the sake of clarity, I have referred to the tune by the titles and keys used by the Albuquerque sessions throughout this paper. Tunes are also played as different types: e.g., a reel played as a hornpipe or vice versa. Again, in this instance, I have deferred to the style most commonly played in the sessions that constitute the focus of this paper.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<th>Type</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island Hornpipe (American)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tar Road to Sligo</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperance Reel</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobin’s Favorite</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top of Cork Road</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip to Sligo</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripping Up the Stairs</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind That Shakes the Barley</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
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**Third Saturday: Intermediate Celtic Session**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The 42 Pound Check</td>
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<td>Polka</td>
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<tr>
<td>All the Way to Galway</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arran Boat Song</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ash Grove (Welsh)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Atholl Highlanders (Scottish)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bag of Spuds</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banish Misfortune</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bank of Ireland</td>
<td>D Mixolydian</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Banshee</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the Haystack</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blackthorn Stick</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blarney Pilgrim</td>
<td>D Mixolydian</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys of Bluehill</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Breeches Full of Stitches</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Polka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bucks of Oranmore</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Butterfly</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Slip Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calliope House</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell’s Farewell to Red Gap (Scottish)</td>
<td>A Mixolydian</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanter’s Song</td>
<td>D Mixolydian</td>
<td>Polka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief O’Neill’s Favourite</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Polka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cliffs of Moher</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coleraine</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connaughtman’s Rambles</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooley’s Reel</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crested Hens (French)121</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cup of Tea</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Dark Island</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis Murphy’s Polka</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Polka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dick Gossip’s</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dingle Regatta</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Slide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowsy Maggie</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

121 Composed by Gilles Chabenat in 1983.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Tune</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Dunmore Lasses</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dusty Windowsill</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Earl's Chair</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egan's Polka</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Polka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Jenny's Jig (American)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fairies Hornpipe</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanny Poer</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fairy Dance (Scottish)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farewell to Whiskey (Scottish)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Polka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Kelly's</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig for A Kiss</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
<td>Slip Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher's Hornpipe</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers of Edinburgh (Scottish)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Foggy Dew</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Full-Rigged Ship</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garry Owen</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass Island Reel (American)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns of the Magnificent Seven</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hag at the Churn</td>
<td>D Mixolydian</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Harvest Home Hornpipe</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haste to the Wedding</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector the Hero (Scottish)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Ho the Rattlin' Bog (Scottish)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Polka</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Home Ruler</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Humours of Ballyloguhlin</td>
<td>D Mixolydian</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inisheer</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Slow Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Irish Mazurka</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Mazurka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Jig of Slurs (Scottish)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Brennan's Reel</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Ryan's Polka</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Polka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kesh Jig</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kid on the Mountain</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Slip Jig</td>
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<tr>
<td>The King of the Fairies</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitty Lie Over</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kitty's Fancy</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Waltz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanigan's Ball</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lark in the Morning</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lilies in the Field</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Reel</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Lilting Banshee</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>Jig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lonesome Road to Dingle</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Slide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Mayo</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>March</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

122 Composed by Peter Barnes in 1977.
124 Composed by Fintan McManus sometime in the 1960s, based on the title theme from the movie “The Magnificent Seven,” composed by Elmer Bernstein in 1960.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tune</th>
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<th>Tune</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maggie in the Woods</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>The Maid Behind the Bar</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Maids of Ardagh</td>
<td>A Mixolydian</td>
<td>Mairie’s Wedding (Scottish)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mason’s Apron</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Merrily Kiss the Quakers Wife</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Merry Blacksmith</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>The Minstrel Boy</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Thorton’s Reel</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Morgan Morgan</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison’s Jig</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
<td>Mrs. McLeod’s (Scottish)</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Musical Priest</td>
<td>Bm</td>
<td>Munster Bacon</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Cape Breton Home (Canadian)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>The Nine Points of Roguery</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Darling Asleep</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>O’Carolan’s Welcome</td>
<td>Am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Love is in America</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Off to California</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nine Points of Roguery</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>O’Gallagher’s Frolics</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Keefe’s Slide</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>Old Hag, You Have Killed Me</td>
<td>D Mixolydian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out On the Ocean</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Planxty Irwin</td>
<td>G</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over the Water to Charlie (Scottish)</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>The Rakes of Mallow</td>
<td>G</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paddy McFadden’s (Cis Ni Liathain)</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>The Rambling Pitchfork</td>
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<td>The Pipe on the Hob</td>
<td>A Dorian</td>
<td>The Red Haired Boy</td>
<td>A Mixolydian</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Rights of Man</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>The Silver Spear</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
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<td>The Road to Lisdoonvarna</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
<td>Scotland the Brave (Scottish)</td>
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<td>Saddle the Pony</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Ships are Sailing</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
</tr>
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<td>The Sailor’s Hornpipe</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>The Ships in Full Sail</td>
<td>G</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Sally Gardens</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Sidhe Beag, Sidhe Mór</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scholar</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>The Silver Spear</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scholair</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Sir Thomas Leixlip the Proud</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>Scotland the Brave (Scottish)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Sixpenny Money</td>
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<td>Ships are Sailing</td>
<td>E Dorian</td>
<td>The Skye Boat Song (Scottish)</td>
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<td>Em</td>
<td>Jig</td>
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<tr>
<td>Up Sligo</td>
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<td>Jig</td>
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<td>The Wedding Reel(^{125})</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Wind that Shakes the Barley</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Wise Maid</td>
<td>D</td>
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\(^{125}\) This tune was written by Scottish composer Donald Shaw in the late 1980s, and the correct name for this tune is “Macleod’s Farewell.”
APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPT OF PAUL G’S INTERVIEW

CS: Has playing Irish music changed how you see yourself?
PG: “Yes, definitely. It’s made me feel somehow like I’m now more than I was. Like all I used to be was defined externally- it was a physical description or the fact that I’m a physicist. If you were to ask me to describe myself before I started playing, I’d be telling you about how I’m 5’11” with brown eyes and hair and I’m a physicist- all physical descriptions or what I do, not who I am. All external stuff- the only internal thing I really identified as was a person with depression. And that wasn’t something I wanted to talk about— I didn’t want anyone to know and I wanted to keep that a secret, so I never talked about it. It felt like I was trying to hide everything internal about myself. Then I started playing, and over time, the music somehow shifted from something I did to something I was. It’s an important part of my life now, and now I tell people I’m a musician who does physics as a day job. It’s like...Like I have something good in my life. And yeah, I know I have lots of good things in my life. But this is something I do well, and I do it well because I’ve worked hard at it. It's one of the few things I can take honest pride in- nobody gave it to me, I’m not good because I’m lucky, and people don’t have to like it. I’m an Irish musician, and it gives me something to be besides a statistic, besides being a person with depression. It’s something I can have for myself that doesn’t come with a yes but”

CS: “what do you mean about a ‘yes but’?”
PG: “Um...this is going to sound stupid. The yes but is when somebody says something complementary, or even if you think something complementary about yourself, and you think “yes, but...” and then counter that compliment. Like if someone tells me I’m good at my job, I can’t just take it at face value. I’m always thinking “yes, but so-and-so is much better, and I didn’t do this particularly right, and they’re just being nice and don’t really mean it...and so on.”

CS: “That makes sense. Do you feel a yes but when you play? Or when others talk to you about playing?”
PG: “Sometimes. I used to a lot more, when I first started. I would think that people were inviting me to sessions and things because they were being nice, that they were just being friendly, doing it because that was what they’re supposed to do, you know? But after a while, when people would tell me they missed me if I had to miss a session and I got invited to sessions when others weren’t, it made it easier to believe. I mean, if they were just being nice, why didn’t they invite the beginners too? So I started to actually believe they really did actually want me there.”

CS: “Has that acceptance helped with your self-perception and your depression?”
PG: “Yeah, I guess. To a degree. It’s nice to know you’re wanted, you know? I know if I am feeling particularly awful I can pick up my guitar and play a few tunes and it’ll make me feel at least a little better. And learning a new tune gives me a sense of accomplishment, which also feels nice. Being with people who take me at face value and really only know me as a
musician who loves the same music they do is the most helpful, I think. It makes it easier to get motivated to go to a session than it does to do anything else. On days when going to the grocery store is exhausting and the thought of having to go to work is overwhelming, I can think “but there is a session tonight! I can go, and it will be fun.” Sometimes I still won’t want to go, but it’s easier to make myself because I know it’ll make me feel better.

CS: You said you like the sessions because people take you at face value. Do you ever feel like you don’t belong or aren’t welcome because you’re not of Irish heritage?

PG: “Not really. I was a little nervous about that at first, and, to confess, when I first started playing, I kinda felt like I was stealing the music, like I didn’t have a right to play it, and if I wanted to play “folk” music or whatever that I should be playing flamenco or Mariachi or something. (laughs). But I like Irish music so much better...and it seemed somehow more accessible, you know? But there are a lot of people here that play Irish music and aren’t Irish. If everyone who wasn’t Irish didn’t play Irish music there wouldn’t be enough musicians here to really make for a good session!”

CS: Did you ever pretend to be Irish? So that you’d feel like you fit in better?
PG: “Not really. By the time I was confident enough in my own abilities to actually try to join a session, I had seen enough people who obviously weren’t Irish playing, and I’d read about and heard recordings of people in places like Japan and Russia playing Irish music to know that it wouldn’t be a big deal that I wasn’t Irish. And here, at least, nobody really cares.”

CS: Do you think people in places where a higher percentage of the population is Irish would care more?
PG: “You mean like Boston or Chicago or something? Maybe. I don’t know. I can see places where the whole Irish Pride thing is much stronger being super protective of the music, but I’ve never seen it out here.” (in the American southwest)

CS: Has playing Irish music changed how you see yourself?
PG: “Yes, definitely. It’s made me feel somehow like I’m now more than I was. Like all I used to be was defined externally- it was a physical description or the fact that I’m a physicist. If you were to ask me to describe myself before I started playing, I’d be telling you about how I’m 5’11” with brown eyes and hair and I’m a physicist- all physical descriptions or what I do, not who I am. All external stuff- the only internal thing I really identified as was a person with depression. And that wasn’t something I wanted to talk about—I didn’t want anyone to know and I wanted to keep that a secret, so I never talked about it. It felt like I was trying to hide everything internal about myself. Then I started playing, and over time, the music somehow shifted from something I did to something I was. It’s an important part of my life now, and now I tell people I’m a musician who does physics as a day job. (laughs)"

CS: You mentioned that you previously wanted to hide your depression. You’re very upfront with me about it, so when did that change? Did the music help with being more open or is this openness due more to other influences?
PG: “A bit of both, I guess. It really started with my wife before we were married. She figured it out early, I think--both my depression and that I didn’t want to discuss it. So she started very casually bringing up articles she read about depression and talking about other people she knew that had depression, all in a really positive manner. Like she’d talk about her cousin and how much progress she’d made and how proud the family was of her, or that she’d read an article a friend recommended about environmental factors in depression and so on. Eventually, I told her—I wanted to marry her, and I knew I couldn’t ask her to marry me if I hadn’t disclosed what, at the time, I thought was a huge flaw. She was very matter of fact about it—I made this huge deal about it and made confessing—because that’s how I thought of it—into this big production and she just looked at me and said “I know, but thank you for finally telling me.” And that was it! It was not nearly the problem I thought it would be, and her acceptance helped me to accept it as well and to realize that it wasn’t somehow my fault, that I wasn’t somehow broken. I started doing research and talking to a professional about it, and it also helped to realize I wasn’t alone out there, that many people suffer from depression, and, mostly, people are fairly understanding. And even if they’re not, I have to get past what feels to me like rejection, because, in the end, the people that matter accept me for who I am. Music helped in that it gave me something to be besides “someone with depression” and it gave me a way to express myself without having to use words. I guess the music let me bridge the gap between talking and not talking. Even just holding my guitar helps, so I started taking it to therapy sessions. And it did, very definitely, give me something to be unreservedly happy about.”

CS: “Is there a particular type of music that you find helps you express how you feel more than other types do?”
PG: “It kinda depends on how I’m feeling. If I just want to get it out there, then I play whatever matches how I feel. That changes a lot. Like…if I’ve had a crappy day at work and I’m kind of angry at someone for dropping the ball, I might play some Rage Against the Machine. But the next time the exact same thing happens, it might be The Dead Kennedys “Take This Job and Shove It.” It all depends. And I’ve learned that I can match how I feel with music, which means that I can reverse that—use music to change how I feel. Not perfectly, of course, but it helps a lot. I can feel pretty down, and so I choose music that matches how I feel, and then I can ease my way into more upbeat or cheerful stuff. I like the Irish tunes for feeling happy, or at least not feeling sad. They’re easy enough for me at this point that I don’t get frustrated and feel like a failure or a loser because I can’t get it right when I’m learning a new tune. And, really, it’s impossible to be sad when you play Irish music. It’s too cheerful. I know if I am feeling particularly awful I can pick up my guitar and play a few tunes and it’ll make me feel at least a little better. And learning a new tune gives me a sense of accomplishment, which also feels nice, and I know when people compliment my playing they mean it.”

CS: “So would you say music helps you forget to be sad or does it actually change how you feel?”
PG: “Um, wow, I don’t think I’ve ever thought of that. I guess…it’s a little of both. It definitely changes how I feel, because I don’t go back to feeling the same way after I play. It’s not like I’m only happy when I’m playing- it lasts. Sometimes only for a little while, but
sometimes for the rest of the day. But it also helps me escape all the negative things in my life, so in a way it also helps me forget. When I'm learning a new tune or playing in the session, I have to concentrate on the music, not on how crappy I feel or how worthless I am. It breaks that downward spiral. It takes the negative stuff and pushes it aside. So I do forget.”
APPENDIX C

SESSION DEMOGRAPHICS

First Saturday Session: Beginner’s Session

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Self-Reported Ethnicity

- Hispanic: 5
- Asian American: 0
- Native American: 2
- African American: 1
- Non-Irish European: 3
- Irish American: 5
Third Saturday Session: Intermediate Celtic Session

Gender

- Male: 11
- Female: 9

Ages:
- <18: 0
- 18-25: 0
- 25-35: 2
- 35-45: 3
- 45-55: 2
- 55-65: 5
- >65: 8

Self-Reported Ethnicity:
- Hispanic: 7
- Asian American: 1
- Native American: 1
- African American: 2
- Non-Irish European: 3
- Irish American: 7
**Thursday Night Session at Joliesse Chocolates**

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**Self-Reported Ethnicity:**

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- Asian American: 1
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- African American: 0
- Non-Irish European: 1
- Irish American: 4